Issue 38 - December 2016

Wombat Forestcare Newsletter

Welcome to our December issue. Early summer has been wetter than usual and we expect a splendid display of wildflowers. Birds are breeding, and some young have already fledged, while others are yet to hatch. Migrating birds have arrived in the damp gullies of the Wombat Forest. Grab your binoculars and head into the forest. **Gayle Osborne** (editor) and **Angela Halpin** (design)

VEAC Investigation for the Central West Forests

By Gayle Osborne

Great excitement, we are a step closer to a Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC) investigation for the Wombat State Forest. Years of campaigning have been worthwhile. The importance of the Wombat Forest as a home and refuge for many species is apparent. As a state forest it is managed primarily for its resources for humans, which can include timber harvesting and mining. It is time that it was managed for its natural inhabitants.

The Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change will ask VEAC to carry out an investigation into the values of forests in the central west of Victoria, including the Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Range forests. The terms of reference have been released for comment, and along with any changes, will then need to be approved by the Minister for the Environment.

1. *Identify and evaluate the condition, natural and cultural values and the current uses of public land in the specified area, and*
2. *Make recommendations for the balanced use and appropriate management arrangements to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural assets.*

VEAC's role is to 'conduct investigations that are requested by the Victorian Government relating to the protection and ecologically sustainable management of the environment and natural resources of public land.'

The Council is an independent statutory body, with an important record in conservation. VEAC investigations have led to the creation of a number of National Parks,

Mount Cole State Forest contains beautiful natural features.

including the Great Otway National Park. VEAC also recommended the creation of Forest Parks 'to provide for the protection of extensive areas of forest for recreation, conservation and minor resource utilisation'.[1] This allowed for areas of lower conservation value to be used by the public without some of the restrictions of a National or State Park.

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We understand community concerns regarding the restrictions imposed when public land is managed by Parks Victoria, however, without the protections afforded by a park structure we are likely to see the re-introduction of timber harvesting. VicForests have just marked a coupe for logging in the Strathbogie State Forest, an area that is habitat for Long-nosed Bandicoots, Powerful Owls and Greater Gliders, and considered to be in the middle of some of the last remaining ecologically important forest in the Strathbogies. We don't want to see this happen in the Wombat.

The VEAC process is thorough; the protection of areas of high conservation value will be examined. Public consultation and submissions are part of an investigation.

The Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Range forests all have significant conservation values including threatened vegetation types and a range of declining and threatened flora and fauna species.

We launched our campaign in 2010 and we need to thank all those who have assisted our group. The list is long, but Matt Ruchel, Gavan McFadzean, Hedley Thomson, Ian Magee, Nick Roberts and Stuart Fraser were pivotal in reaching this point.

Wombat Forestcare would like to thank the State Labor Government and the Environment Minister, the Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio, for their decision to instigate this VEAC investigation.

Hopefully the terms of reference will be finalised swiftly and the investigation will commence early next year. ■

1. VEAC 2004, *Angahook-Otway Investigation Final Report*, Victorian Environment Assessment Council, Melbourne

"A Robin Redbreast in a Cage, Puts all Heaven in a Rage".

- William Blake (1757 - 1827)

By Trevor Speirs

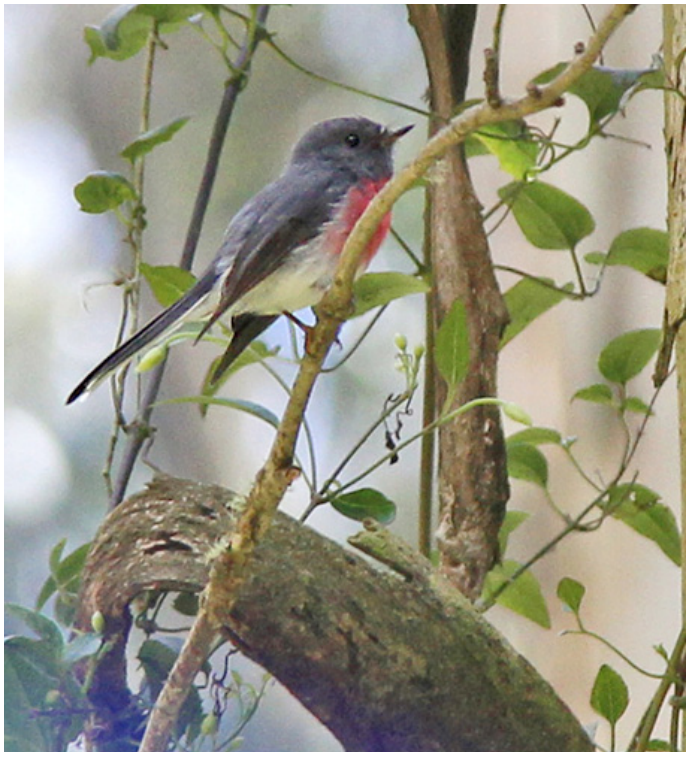
If William Blake was around today, there are a couple of excellent spots in the Wombat where he could observe and enjoy unfettered robins and other migratory birds, as they return from up north to commence their breeding season.

One sure-fire place is at Allen's Creek, where the road of the same name crosses the small creek. Easily accessed from Amblers Lane, and rich with vegetation such as Musk and Snowy Daisy Bushes, it is a real haven for local birdlife. The tiny Rose Robin, more arboreal than other robins, can be found chasing insects around the tree canopy. Blackwoods, which abound upstream and downstream of the road, are a particular favourite.

The lichen and moss on the branches of the Musk Daisy Bushes provides much of the nest building material for the robins. They build their intricate, well-camouflaged nest in established breeding territories, which are apparently defended every season. After raising several broods, usually three, these delightful birds head north in autumn to warmer, more open habitats.

Flame and Scarlet Robins are more generally seen at the gully's edge, and on the Peppermint/Messmate ridges. The Golden and Rufous Whistlers will be here, and the dense vegetation along the creek is good habitat for the less common and secretive Olive Whistler, more likely to be heard than seen.

Rufous Fantails will almost certainly be seen flitting over the water and the plaintive trill of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo is a constant sound throughout the day. With so many small



Male Rose Robin *Petroica rosea* with distinctive rose-pink breast. Photography © Gayle Osborne

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birds breeding here, there are many opportunities for this parasitic cuckoo to deposit her egg in the small, domed nest of an unsuspecting thornbill or scrubwren.

Top: Migratory birds are summer visitors to this lush gully on Allen's Creek.
Below: Female Rose Robin *Petroica rosea*
Photography © Gayle Osborne

If you are an early riser this is a great spot to hear a spectacular dawn chorus during the warmer months. The level of noise generated by small birds such as Eastern Yellow Robin, Crescent Honeyeater, and the fantails and whistlers is quite remarkable.

Another terrific area, one close to Trentham, is a wide riparian gully, a few hundred metres behind (east) the tip. Travel approx. 700 metres along Countess Road (from the Blackwood Road), go past a water point on the right and take the track down to the gully.

With an abundance of Swamp Gums and Blackwoods, this is a guaranteed spot for Satin Flycatchers, and the stags and tree hollows are well used by breeding Red–browed Treecreepers. Blue-winged Parrots are regularly seen foraging beside the tracks. The Sacred Kingfisher, possibly all the way from New Guinea, is found here, particularly early in the season, while the beautifully marked, sedentary Bassian Thrush will often be found sitting quietly on a branch.

As the small passerines' breeding season ramps up, look for a Square–tailed Kite cruising over the treetops searching for prey. Latest estimates have no more than 50 pairs in Victoria, so it's always (with a bit of luck) a big thrill to see one of these graceful raptors hunting over the Wombat. ■

Reconsidering Commonness

Words and images by Alison Pouliot

Some of the Wombat Forest's most noted inhabitants are the Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua*), the Wombat Leafless Bossiaea (*Bossiaea vombata*) and *Sarcodon* fungus. There's good reason for our familiarity with these names, if not the organisms themselves. All are rare. Such species are key in conservation efforts that attempt to protect the Wombat from destructive activities such as logging, mining and inappropriate use of fire as a management tool. Rare species also underpin global conservation based on the concept of Rarity and Endangerment Distribution Data. Also known as Red Lists, these are compilations of species assessed for extinction risk.

Red Lists are often among the few ecological tools available for scientific and political decision-making on species protection. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is recognised as the authoritative voice of scientists who work to address biodiversity issues. It publishes Red Lists of Threatened Species as a means to document their conservation status and prioritise conservation actions. However, both the IUCN Red List and more localised lists such as those of Victoria's *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1998* are not systematic evaluations of different groups of organisms. Rather, they have been nominated by conservation groups and individuals who are concerned about the conservation of particular species of interest. This rather ad hoc approach is unlikely to reflect the true extent of threatened species.

Common species build webs of connections and greatly contribute to the structure and dynamics of the forest.

Red Lists and the IUCN's campaigns have raised public awareness of extinction threats and improved the conservation status of some species. However, since the IUCN's first list over half a century ago, some folk are questioning whether they have proved effective *enough* in conserving biodiversity. Lists serve a purpose of prioritising species for conservation but also have their limitations. Some critics claim they perpetuate the very hierarchies recognised as problematic in the way nature is understood and treated: they create economies of death. Others dispute the effectiveness of lists because sometimes they are inappropriately used in decision-making, for example, in resource allocation for conservation projects or in reserve design. Others still warn against their potential for exploitation when rarity inflates the economic value of a species and subsequently increases the threat of poaching (known as the Anthropogenic Allee Effect). Meanwhile, list-less lifeforms that are unlikely to ever receive a name yet alone appear on a list, go unnoticed.

In recent decades, biodiversity conservation has shifted to broader habitat, ecosystem or landscape scales. However, the lagtime in government and conservation agencies in catching up with this changed thinking means that many conservation funding applications still focus on endangered species. In the race to list species and slow the extinction of rare ones, another group – common species – are often overlooked.

One might ask why a common species would be considered for conservation when another might be on the brink of extinction. Surely the rare one should be prioritised? The extinction of a species reverberates much further than the shocking reality that individuals of that species no longer exist. Society places a high value on the conservation of rare species and many

of us consider species extinction to be a great moral wrong and a deep tragedy. The recognition of rare species on lists often offers the best chance for their survival. However, common species are declining too, some at a radical rate. Common species often represent the more hardy or adaptable species in an ecosystem so when they start to dramatically decline, it might indicate that something is seriously wrong. While common species often comprise a relatively small proportion of overall species richness, they usually contribute greatly to the structure, biomass and dynamics of ecosystems. Moreover, when habitats are burnt, fragmented, degraded or otherwise damaged or lost, it is common species that often suffer most. Much knowledge is needed to better understand the roles of organisms within the Wombat Forest. Ideally, conservation should take into account the dynamics and interactions of all species, both rare and common.

Biodiversity losses are seldom tallied at an individual level. For example, think of how fires are reported. We hear of the number of hectares burnt, along with countable human property, but rarely the actual number, for example, of Candlebark (*Eucalyptus rubida*) trees destroyed. This way of accounting for loss diminishes perceptions of the impact of losing important individual trees, particularly old ones with hollows that support wildlife and perform other important functions not provided by younger trees. These same species suffer further pressures as they are also often targeted for exploitation through logging and firewood provision.

The tangled relationships between notions of rarity, commonness, ecosystem dynamics and vulnerability might need careful reconsideration. Common names that include the word 'common', for example, the forest's namesake, the Common Wombat (*Vombatus ursinus*), or the Common Bent-wing Bat (*Miniopterus schreibersii*) or the Common Beard-heath (*Leucopogon virgatus*), can be misleading. Species thought to be common, reinforced by the word 'common' in their common name, are less likely to be considered for conservation and perpetuate the perception that commonness equates with not being important or at risk. These species play their role in shaping and characterising the forest and are pivotal to a great range of biotic interactions and ecosystems processes, often more so than rare species. They too need to be part of conservation.

Focusing on listed rare species in conservation initiatives is often based on the assumption that if a rare species is protected, then common ones get swept along by default. This is often the case, but not always. Individual species have particular needs that might not always correlate with those of surrogates. It also maintains the misconception that species operate in isolation rather than as being intrinsically interactive. For example, every eucalypt in the Wombat Forest forms mycorrhizal (symbiotic) relationships with fungi that in turn provide a vital food source for a great suite of mammals and invertebrates. The oversight behind listing a species without also listing its symbiotic partners reflects flawed understanding of forest interrelationships. While lists supposedly provide equality among species, lean conservation budgets usually favour charismatic or 'grievable' species (i.e. predominantly mammals and birds) over more obscure organisms. Marginalised organisms such as less-appreciated invertebrates (ticks and leeches, for example, rather than butterflies) risk slipping even further into obscurity by a listing process that prioritises the chosen few.

Encountering a rare species is enthralling and precious beyond words. The alluring possibility of a rendezvous with a rare species entices us into the forest. However, what might we unintentionally overlook in our well-meaning but limited focus on rarity? Could an understanding of the overall dynamics of the 'local patch' make for better conservation science? Might it be worth pausing just for a moment to ask whether listing rare species is the best investment of conservation efforts?

I'm not suggesting we abandon listing rare species. Such species need every last skerrick of support. I simply prompt a reconsideration of the effectiveness of current conservation approaches in keeping with growing knowledge and understanding of the Wombat's ecology. We might also want to consider species that are common but declining, or are geographically restricted. Focusing on rarity only addresses part of larger biodiversity conservation issues. Preventing the *extinction of commonness* matters too. A more affirmative biopolitics that focuses on survival rather than extinction, founded on science but premised on human care and action, could offer the best possibility for the survival of all of the Wombat's precious inhabitants and not just the listed few. ■

A Beginner's Guide to Egg and Bacon

Words and images by John Walter

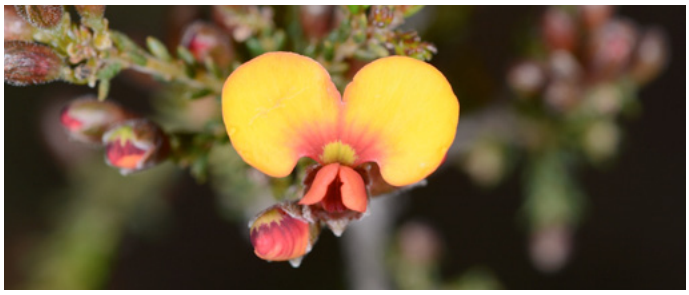
I should say right up front that I am not a big fan of egg and bacon!

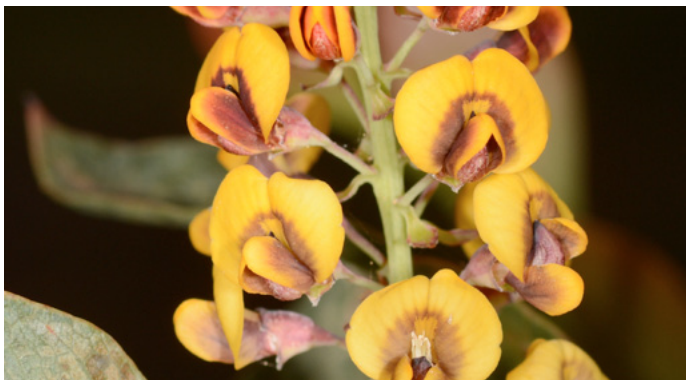
I don't mean the food, as I have been known to relish an occasional egg and bacon roll prepared by a certain rural store when on my way out to the bush. I am sure you all realise I am referring to the extensive range of yellow and reddish-brown pea flowers that are commonly grouped together under this label. The problem is that this casual grouping is just too convenient.

It invites us to classify a plant as just another "egg and bacon" as we walk past it. We do not need to stop. We do not need to examine the leaves or look for the presence of stipules or check the shape of bracteoles (whatever they are). We do not even have to look closely at the flower to determine subtle differences in shape. Once we see the colour combination in conjunction with the pea flowers, we all know it is egg and bacon and that is enough. But when I ask which of the thirty-three locally recorded species it was, I often get a look that says "Is there more than one?".

The first to flower in late August is one of the Parrot Peas (*Dillwynia*) and following close behind is a succession of Bush Peas (*Pultenaea*) along with the Bitter Peas (*Daviesia*), the Flat Peas (*Platylobium*) and the Bossiaeas. I am not exactly sure why the members of the *Bossiaea* have never managed to attract a group name, I would call them the Small-leaf Peas. Of course, some, like the Wombat Leafless Bossiaea, do not have any leaves at all. Then again, not all the Flat Peas are flat and the local parrots are clearly attracted to more than just the Parrot Peas.

The greatest diversity of species is in the *Pultenaea* and I am planning a series of articles to introduce the local species to readers of this newsletter. In this article, however, I want to help you tell a Bush Pea from a Parrot Pea and a Bitter Pea and there is no better place to start than with the flowers. Many readers will know that the large upright petal of the pea flowers is called the standard. The lower landing platforms for the insects are the wings or wing petals and these generally hide the two keel petals which in turn shelter the male and female organs. I am interested in the shape of the standard and the keel as they can often provide us with an important clue as to the genus of the plant.





Top: The early morning dew adds to the beautiful clean shape of *Pultenaea weindorferi*, Swamp Bush-pea.

Center: The broad standard of *Dillwynia phylicoides*, Small-leaf Parrot -pea, is typical for this genus.

Bottom: The dark point of the keel can just be seen protruding through the wings on this *Daviesia latifolia*, Hop Bitter-pea. The wings have opened on the centre right flower providing an opportunity to see the upturned point of the dark coloured keel while the anthers and style have pushed their way through the keel of the lower flower. This lower flower shows the faded colour typical of the older *Daviesia* flowers.

The standard on a *Pultenaea* is generally taller than it is wide and it often has a peak giving the partly opened flowers a hooded appearance. In the *Dillwynia*, the standard is obviously very wide when compared to its height and it frequently has a deep notch in the centre top like something has taken a bite out. The *Daviesia* flowers are much smaller than the others and the standard is sometimes taller and sometimes wider, appearing near circular or perhaps slightly oval and always with a small v-shaped notch at the top. The key to identifying the *Daviesia* however, is the keel, which is described as "beaked". This means it has an upright point which clearly pushes through the wings just in front of the standard.

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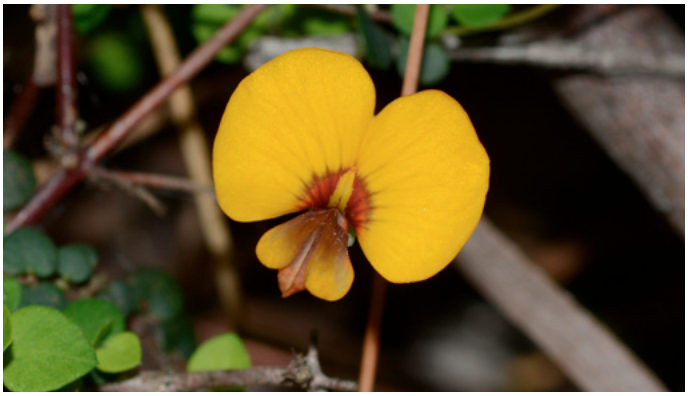

The wings on this *Bossiaea cordigera*, Wiry Bossiaea (left) have the greenish muddy discolouration typical of many *Bossiaea* species while the wings on the large flowers on the *Platylobium montanum* ssp *montanum* Mountain Flat-pea, (right) have clean colours.

The flowers on the *Platylobium* and *Bossiaea* are similar in shape and the standard in the local species of both genera is usually very large when compared to the wings. Despite this, you can readily identify the different genera and species by the habit of the plant and the leaf size and shape. There is one characteristic found on the flowers of the leafy Bossiaea, however, that might help with identification. Many of the flowers develop a greenish muddy discolouration on the wings that I have not seen on the flowers of any other genus. The *Platylobium* flowers are the largest of all the Egg and Bacon flowers although two of the local species are "shy" in flowering.

The thirty-three local Egg and Bacon I referred to includes the species found in the Upper Loddon State Forest to the north of Glenlyon, an area that is an extension of the Wombat Forest. The vegetation in this dryer forest is similar to the dryer parts of the Wombat Forest around Hepburn and contains some rare *Pultenaea* species. I also include the three local *Almalea*, *Goodia* and *Podolobium* species in the Egg and Bacon total. While I have referenced the flowers to provide a guide to different genera in this article, in future articles we will see that the leaves provide us with an important guide to the identification of the different species. ■

White-winged Choughs

Words and image by Gayle Osborne

Despite the rain and wind in spring, these White-winged Choughs *Corcorax melanorhamphos* managed to successfully build a nest and breed in October. The mud nest is a work of art. The choughs mix the clay with pieces of fibre in a watery puddle before flying back to the nest site with the mixture in their beaks. This mixture must be quite amazing to have withstood the heavy rains.

Living in close proximity to a family of choughs is a great delight. What are they actually doing? One day the group mobbed a chough that lay on the ground with a short stick in its claws, and then they just moved off to scratch for food. The chough remained lying on his side, still grasping the stick. Another time I watched a chough constantly pulling the tail of another chough. The more I watch some of their strange behaviour, the more I think that they are playing.

Scientists recognise that birds are cleverer than was previously thought. Whether play is a sign of their greater intelligence, or whether we think they are intelligent because they play, is yet to be decided. Perhaps play is a form of group bonding. ■

Choughs feed their young.
Photography © Gayle Osborne

Hunting for Waterbugs

By Lois Blackhirst

The sun was hot, the trees and grass already drying out and the waterhole in the Loddon River was full and inviting. On Sunday the sixth of November I joined a small group on the banks of the Loddon at Baringhup. We were learning to catch and identify waterbugs with the 'Agreed Level Taxonomy' (ALT) keys. The session was organised by Cass Davis of North Central Catchment Authority. Her guest instructor was John Gooderham, the co-author of 'The Waterbug Book.'

I attended a talk by John the day before run by Wombat Forestcare and NCCMA so I was inspired. He showed pictures of animals that could star in an old horror movie, rearing dragons that seize their prey with pincers or inject them with digestive fluid before sucking their innards back for lunch. These fierce beasts are pale and fleshy and only a few millimetres long.

On arrival at the river John explained the basics of scientific classification. We had a large key card for identifying the different groups such as beetles, bugs and the larvae of various other insects, along with molluscs and worms. From this card we could move on to the ALT key booklet to differentiate, for instance, between families of water beetle (Coleoptera) or Caddisfly larvae (Trichoptera).

Backswimmer.
© The Waterbug Book 2002

Hairy Sprawler.
© The Waterbug Book 2002

Log cabin larvae construct an intricate case.
© The Waterbug Book 2002

Dragonfly larva (Pointy Bum).
© The Waterbug Book 2002

Theory is essential but first we had to catch the bugs. We donned huge waders, took a net and bucket and slid down the banks into the river. Holding a net in the water and gently dislodging the stones upstream is a way to release stone-clinging creatures while those living under the banks are drawn out by creating a current with the net, then scooping them up. Dragonfly nymphs can be almost invisible in cracks of sodden wood, while Caddisfly larvae may be clothed by a straw, a leaf or a casing of sand grains.

I found it impossible to see invertebrates in the river and even the mixture in my net seemed to only have a few waving or wriggling things. However, when we emptied the buckets into trays and the water cleared there were scores of different animals. Lifting the subject into an ice-cube tray gave us time to study it with a magnifying glass and practice identification.

Swimming, darting dots turned out to be beetles with exquisite coloured markings (identifiers). Bugs and beetles are distinguishable by the width of their heads and position of eyes, the nature of their mouthparts, among other things. The Boatmen and Backswimmers beetles have a bubble vest. There are various types of Mudeye or Dragonfly larvae. Mine was Family Telephlebiidae as shown by its central bum spine being pointed - possibly important when using the bum jet to make a quick getaway.

Thinking of the time I would describe the workshop to others I asked why we were doing it. I felt as if I had committed a heresy. When you love bugs, why wouldn't you? Apart from the pleasure of finding and identifying these animals, knowledge of what is where and when is an indicator of stream health and ecosystem structure. The populations vary over time but for stream health and life there must be a population. As volunteers are trained in ALT classification more can be learned and recorded about the complex net of our waterways, which are the veins and life blood of our beautiful forests and land.

My favourite waterbugs this time were the pretty Damselfly Larvae (Zygoptera) and the Caddisfly larvae. The Stick Caddis looked like a moving straw with tentacles and the Sleeping Bag Caddis was for ages just a moving leaf on the bottom of the tub. I love the descriptive common names, which help alongside the classification key. I wish we had found someone from the Family Gripopterygidae: a Hairy Sprawler, Blonde Sprawler or Fluffy Bum – maybe next time.

All water beasts were carefully returned to the river. ■

Who was Cliff Beauglehole?

By John Walter

Regular readers of this newsletter will recall the name Beauglehole from earlier editions. I have often referenced his collection of this or that species as have other writers; but who was this collector and why is his name listed on so many records of plant species found in the Wombat Forest?

Alexander Clifford Beauglehole (1920-2002), known as Cliff, was a farmer at Gorae West near Portland. While his formal education was limited to just six years at the local bush primary school eight kilometres from the farm, he spent a lifetime in the study of natural history. He was encouraged in this pursuit by his parents and nature loving family friends and Cliff could name sixty local orchid species by the age of ten. He began corresponding with one of the leading orchid specialists of the time (W H Nicholls) and sent specimens off in the post for identification, discovering three undescribed species in the process.

Soon after leaving school, Cliff began his first systematic botanical survey and listed over 750 species for the Portland area; almost doubling the number of species previously recorded for the district. This survey, however, was just the first of many and Cliff went on to survey virtually every park and substantial bush remnant within the state. He made well over 90,000 botanical collections, most of which are lodged in National Herbarium of Victoria in Melbourne. This incredible feat makes him the largest single contributor of specimens to the herbarium by a large margin; an achievement that is unlikely to be surpassed.

This achievement would be more than enough for most of us, however, Cliff also excelled in the study and collection of native bees and birds and was a prolific collector of ants, wasps, fungi, lichen, algae, mosses and liverworts. He was also involved in the excavation of bone deposits from the many limestone caves of his home district, and among the remains of 2000 animals found at the McEachern's Death Trap Cave was a Tasmanian Tiger. Cliff also visited the Kimberley and made several trips into Central Australia. While he made large collections on these trips, the focus of his collecting activities was in Victoria.

As far as I can make out, Cliff Beauglehole collected almost 540 different plant species (and a great many more individual plants) in the region of the Wombat Forest. In many instances, the only record we have for a species occurring in the forest, is a collection made by Cliff. He was renowned for his ability to spot a difference or variation between individual plants and it was this ability that led to his discovery of so many previously undescribed species. In all, there are ten species of plant named after Cliff Beauglehole plus three native bees, a lichen, a moss and a marine alga. He was a recipient of the Australian Natural History Medallion in 1971 and received the Medal of the Order of Australia in 1984 for his services to botany, conservation and ornithology. Well done Cliff! We are forever grateful that you came to our forest and provided such a solid baseline for subsequent professional and amateur botanists to build on. ■

Cliff Beauglehole in the field during the 1950s. This image is available online but is not credited to a photographer there. Fortunately, it also appears alongside Cliff's obituary in the *Victorian Naturalist*, and here the photographer is listed as L.G. Chandler.

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Ross, J. H. (2002) Alexander Clifford Beauglehole OAM (26 August 1920 – 19 January 2002) *Muelleria* 16, 71-79

Embracing the Unexpected

Words and images by Alison Pouliot

Marasmioid mushrooms (such as species of the genera *Marasmius* and *Marasmiellus*) are super tough and are known for their ability to revive after desiccation.
Photography © Alison Pouliot

At last the Wombat has had a good long drink. Orchids and other botanical delights emerge from the softened earth. What other surprises await us and how might fungi respond this coming autumn?

The only thing for sure is that nothing is certain. Some fungi we've not seen for a good while might well reveal themselves. Others could remain concealed. The unpredictable and unexpected characterise the forest and the peculiarities of its inhabitants. Australia's variable climate, myriad habitats and geographical isolation have shaped its mycota (fungi) into one of the most diverse in the world. Many of those species exist right here in the Wombat.

As well as delighting or perhaps perplexing *Homo sapiens* with their curious and colourful forms, fungi can also help us appreciate the unpredictable nature of life. Tolerating uncertainty underpins the resilience and persistence of fungi and the forest. Although early ecological thinking popularised notions of equilibrium, recognising flux as the norm rather than the exception helps us shift away from ideas about balance and certainty in nature. This can inspire more imaginative and dynamic ways to think about the forest, and perhaps increase our willingness to accommodate change.

Appreciating environmental extremes fosters this particularly Australian way of thinking about nature. However, such distinctive qualities of being highly adaptive seldom figure in the thinking of global conservation initiatives. Accepting unpredictability and working work with it – *caring* rather than defaulting to a 'management mentality' – could be our foremost contribution to global conservation. Such thinking starts locally, at the scale of the Wombat, from the daily observations of those who wander within.

Environmental unpredictability sits at the heart of human relationships with nature. Not knowing what fungal treasures might reveal themselves this autumn adds an alluring emotional potency to every forest stroll. If you'd like to discover some of the Wombat's fungal secrets you might like to join an Easter autumn foray. There's a free spot up for grabs for a Wombat Forestcare member at the foray, *Wild Desires* on Easter Monday for the first to register their interest at **alison@alisonpouliot.com** . There's more information about the autumn 2017 forays at: **www.alisonpouliot.com** ■