Issue 56 - July 2021

Wombat Forestcare Newsletter

Welcome to the winter edition of our newsletter. June was a busy month; an immense storm and wind event early in the month followed later in the month by the announcement that the State Government would create a new Wombat-Lerderderg National Park. In this edition we discuss the 'pros and cons' of these events. **Gayle Osborne** (editor) and **Angela Halpin** (design)

A new Wombat-Lerderderg National Park

By Gayle Osborne

On 24th June the Victorian Government formally tabled their response to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's (VEAC) Central West investigation report. Three new National Parks will be created: Wombat-Lerderderg National Park, Mount Buangor National Park and Pyrenees National Park.

It has been a long journey. The campaign for the protection of the Wombat, Mt Cole and Pyrenees State Forests began in 2010 joining with the already established Wellsford Forest campaign. In 2017, the Minister for the Environment, the Hon Lily D'Ambrosio, requested that the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council undertake an investigation into these central west forests. The final report was released in June 2019.

Making the future: Marg Rowell with her grandson and grandniece standing up for the forest. Photography © Sandy Scheltema.

Are we there yet?

This is a great result for the Wombat Forest region. Areas with high conservation values are to be included in the new National Park, conservation parks and nature reserves. Areas around townships will be designated regional parks, which will allow for activities such as dog walking, horse riding and fossicking. Domestic firewood collection will be available until June 2029.

However, the legislation needs to be promptly enacted to ensure that these forests are permanently protected.

It is very concerning that the government's response for the Wombat Forest permits VicForests to continue harvesting commercial firewood and chop log coupes until 2030 and raises a number of questions about how the government intends to deal with legislating the parks and the continued access by VicForests.

In November 2019 the government announced a transition from native forest harvesting to plantations by 2030, yet in December 2020 VicForests were able to release an approved Timber Utilisation Plan that greatly increased the number of commercial firewood coupes to be harvested in the Wombat Forest. The government should have been overseeing the phasing out of timber harvesting rather than allowing this increase of coupes after the announcement of the transition. We believe a moratorium should have been placed on any future commercial timber coupes in the central west area once the VEAC investigation had begun.

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In the Glenlyon-Lyonville block of the Wombat Forest, VicForests will have access to commercial firewood coupes until 2025. This is an area that due to its high conservation values is part of the proposed National Park. Some of the coupes straddle Greater Glider habitat, and should not be allowed to proceed. There is another small section of the proposed National Park, south of Daylesford, also available for harvesting until 2030.

Most of the listed commercial firewood coupes are in the proposed regional parks. Does this mean that the government will not introduce legislation for these parks until after 2030?

There do not seem to be any impediments to immediate legislation for the two proposed conservation parks; the Cobaw Conservation Park and Hepburn Conservation Park, and a number of nature reserves.

Wombat Forestcare is waiting for clarification from Minister D'Ambrosio regarding the implementation of the government's response to the report.

To legislate these commitments, the boundaries of the proposed National Parks will have to be surveyed, bureaucrats will have to draft the legislation, which will then have to be passed by both houses of State Parliament. This will then need to be gazetted.

Although the Wellsford State Forest will be protected as a regional park (not part National and part regional as recommended by VEAC) there are concerns regarding the allowed activities in the park. There is a proposal for underground mining beneath the park that would need some surface access. Domestic firewood coupes would be allowed until June 2029. The proposed regional park will fail to properly protect the important habitat for the threatened wildlife of the Wellsford Forest: Brush-tailed Phascogale, Diamond Firetail, Grey-crowned Babbler, Speckled Warbler and the nationally endangered Swift Parrot.

The situation for the Mt Cole, Mt Lonarch and Pyrenees forests is very disturbing. These forests will continue to be logged for sawlogs and firewood until 2030, and only then will the proposed Mount Buangor and Pyrenees National Parks and regional parks be legislated. Changes to the composition of either houses of the Victorian Parliament during this time could affect this outcome.

At a time when the government has announced a transition from native forest logging to plantations, instead of phasing out logging in the Mt Cole area, more coupes have been added since the transition was announced.

Under the Bracks Labor government it was established that there was so little harvestable timber left in these forests that timber harvesting ceased and it is understood that an exit package was accepted by the licence holder. How is it possible that there are now 46 coupes listed on the VicForests' approved Timber Utilisation Plan for the Mt Cole and Pyrenees forests?

These forests have high conservation values that make them worthy of protection in parks, yet the government plans to allow a major loss of habitat, including clear-felling of coupes, prior to legislation.

This is at odds with *Victoria's Climate Change Framework* that states "Our natural environment will be healthy, valued, actively cared for and recognised as fundamental to our economy and liveability. Native plants and trees will be providing carbon storage, biodiversity and broader catchment benefits while also helping protect us from the impacts of climate change.'[1]

We entreat the Andrews government to prioritise the protection of these forests and promptly introduce legislation to implement the creation of these parks. ■

Note

1. https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/55254/DELWPClimateChange_Framework.pdf

Resilience of the Wombat Forest

Changes in climate are affecting forest ecosystems worldwide. Research shows that trees in the Wombat Forest are generally very resilient to seasonal changes in climate.

Watch this informative talk delivered by Prof Stefan Arndt
School of Ecosystem and Forest Sciences
The University of Melbourne

Click the link below:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Py0p42_ZNho

Australian Owlet-nightjar

Words and image by Trevor Speirs

The Australian Owlet-nightjar *Aegotheles cristatus* is one of our most widespread nocturnal birds, found throughout the country in a range of treed habitats, except rainforest. However, trying to see one, especially at night, is no easy feat. Unlike many other arboreal animals of the night, Australian Owlet-nightjars have very little reflective eye shine making them extremely difficult to pick up by torchlight. Not what you'd expect from a bird with such large prominent eyes. Daytime is spent tucked away in tree stumps or small hollows, often low to the ground, but they have been observed roosting in all sorts of man-made structures; open metal piping on sheds and gates, for example.

Australian Owlet-nightjars can be found throughout the Wombat Forest, but I have a feeling their numbers would be denser in the drier parts to the north and west of Daylesford. While they can be hard to see, luckily they are reasonably vocal with a main call that is fairly recognisable. This is a high-pitched, sharp but somewhat sad chirr, emitted at regular intervals, often 3 - 4 seconds apart. Occasionally this can slowly rise in volume and become a little intense although not as maniacal as the White-throated Nightjar, a rare visitor to our region. Cackles and shrieks are also sometimes heard. David Fleay, of Healesville Sanctuary fame, in his inimitable way, described it as "Floating through the bush by night, this gentle unearthly cry has the quality of lament one would expect from a lost soul doomed to a hopeless and eternal quest for it knows not what."[1] Probably a bit over the top, although I'm sure we could all associate that description with the odd politician.

Australian Owlet-nightjar flushed from a hideaway. Photography © Trevor Speirs.

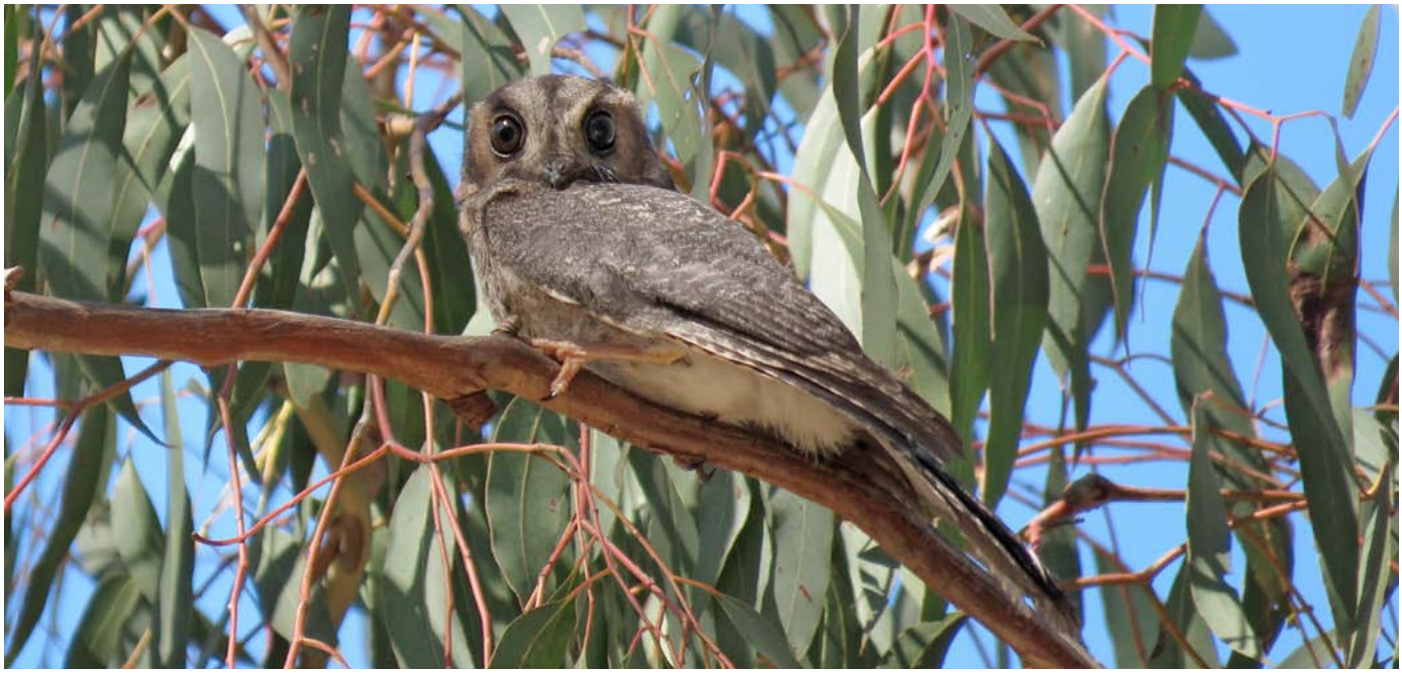
The Australian Owlet-nightjar has been called some wonderful names since first being recorded here; Crested Goatsucker, New Holland or Bristled Goatsucker and the more becoming names of Fairy or Moth Owl. The goat sucker reference is from the family name Aegothelidae, Greek for goat sucker, evidently from an ancient European, probably Greek, folk belief whereby nightjars sucked the blood of goats at night rendering them blind. Australian Owlet-nightjars, as it happens, are now considered more closely related to swifts than nightjars.

The bird in the photo was inadvertently flushed from its hollow in a tree I was standing next to while trying to get a picture of a nearby breeding Sacred Kingfisher. Bird guides will often remark on the Australian Owlet-nightjar's ability to fly rapidly from one hollow or spout directly into another. This shows a thorough awareness of its immediate surroundings, although this particular bird stayed exposed on a branch for several minutes. If you're fortunate they can occasionally be seen at their hollow entrance catching the winter sun. Australian Owlet-nightjars are believed to be sedentary, territorial and faithful to their particular sites and feed on a variety of insects from moths and beetles to spiders and ants.

Australian Owlet-nightjars are often flushed from their hideaway, which suggests it's a somewhat anxious, nervous creature. There is probably good reason for this, as some studies have shown a high predation rate of breeding adults and eggs. Three to four eggs are laid, often in a low stump, which doesn't seem the best idea when nest robbers like goannas, monitors and possums aren't too far away. Foxes and cats would also be a threat, of course, but thankfully these seemingly delicate and defenceless birds are still reasonably abundant, not featuring on any threatened species lists as yet. ■

Note

1. Fleay, D. 1968. *Night Watchmen of Bush and Plain*. Jacaranda Press, Brisbane.



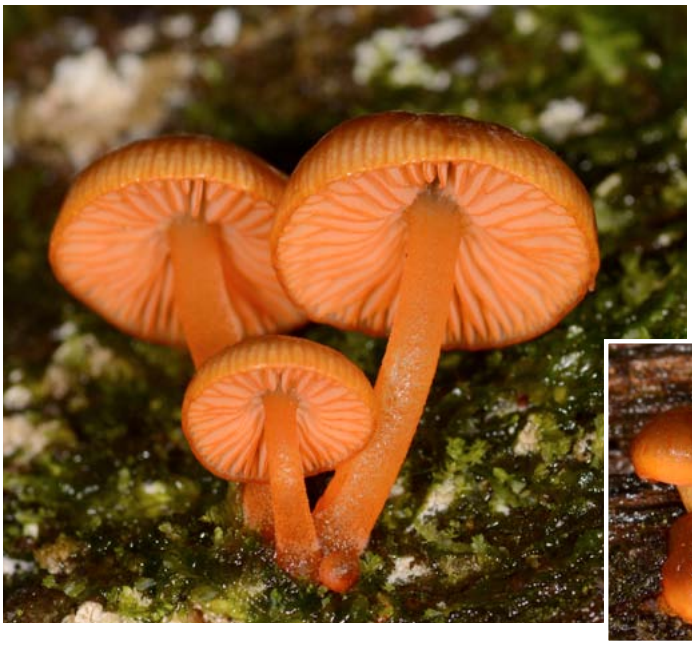
New finds and other *Mycena* species from the forest

Words and images by John Walter

I was surprised to discover that it is now four years since I last wrote about our Wombat Forest *Mycena* species. In 2016 and 2017 we looked at blue ones, red ones, pretty pink ones, white ones on wood and brown ones with latex or spots or gloop. In this article we will feature a species recently found in the Wombat for the first time by Gayle Osborne, and also take a look at some of the many other *Mycena* species that you might see out there.

In late May, Gayle showed me some images of a *Mycena* species she had found near Babbington which she believed to be *Mycena leaiana*. This is an uncommon species that is found in the wet forests of eastern Australia. There are several records for this species in the Otways, mostly from the area around Lorne, and one from Mt Macedon but there are no other records west of Melbourne. I have often looked for this colourful mushroom in the Wombat Forest without success, but I have photographed it in several areas near Lorne.

The general appearance in Gayle's images seemed right but there were some features relating to the stem and gills that I could not see which would help to confirm the species identity. Armed with some excellent directions, I went to the site to see if the specimens were still there even though a week had passed since Gayle had made the discovery. I quickly located them, a little taller and with the caps more expanded, but they were still in good condition. I could still see the orange bloom on the upper parts of the stem on the younger specimens and the orange gills had a definite dark orange edge to them, which provided me with the confirmation I was seeking.



Mycena leaiana: Top, middle and bottom right are all from the Babbington group and the bottom left and centre were located near Kalimna Falls at Lorne. Note the use of a mirror to see the gills in the middle shot and the orange bloom on the stems of the bottom centre and bottom right images.

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The only troublesome aspect regarding this identification is that this group appeared to be attached to litter on the forest floor whereas the expected attachment is on the wood of large fallen logs. It may be that there was some underground wood that I did not see, and I now wish I had tested the substrate with my knife to confirm or deny this possibility. There is one post on iNaturalist from Mt Macedon and this specimen also appears to be attached to the forest floor amongst litter. Now I have a location I can check next season and hopefully make a collection for the Herbarium, although I wonder if it is only going to appear in the wetter years.

I first saw the next species in Lauriston Nature Conservation Reserve in 2012 and later found a cluster on a tree on my own property in Drummond in 2016 and made a collection. Then, in 2018, I found another group in the Wombat Forest near the Garden of St Erth and was able to make a second collection for the Herbarium. This as yet unnamed species is very distinctive due to the squamulose or scaly coating on the cap and stem. I now refer to this species as *Mycena* sp. 'Greyscale' in reference to its scaly nature and the somewhat similar appearance of a skin disorder depicted in the Game of Thrones phenomenon.

I searched the Tasmanian Fungi Facebook page in mid-2018 in an effort to locate a name for this intriguing species and found matching posts from 2015 and 2018, but unfortunately no name. It seems we will have to wait until further study is undertaken in Australian *Mycena* species and hope that these two collections (and one apparently made by Genevieve Gates in Tasmania in 2018) are examined and we get an official title for this scaly find.

There are many common *Mycena* species we have not covered so far in this series, so I have included a few images here for your enjoyment. ■

Top and middle: *Mycena* sp. 'Greyscale' at St Erth and Drummond respectively.

Bottom left: *M. epipterygia* group. The large cluster of this yellow-stem species makes quite a show with spore bodies in all stages of development including old and mouldy in the top right of the image.

Centre bottom: Upper is *M. vinacea* (wine-coloured) often seen on litter, its colour can vary but it should always have the white margin to the cap. I suspect there are several other species that are confused with this one. Lower is an unidentified species whose stem is like *M. vinacea* and it also grows in litter but the cap margin is fawn, not white. It could be *M. nullawarrensis* but it needs to be collected and examined to confirm that.

Bottom right: *M. cystidos*a, our tallest *Mycena* species. While this one appears solitary, it often grows in large groups in litter. Note the pseudostipe twisting around the main stem. This species can produce large tangles of pseudostipes, greatly outnumbering the real thing.

The Big Storm

By Gayle Osborne

On Wednesday evening, 9th June, a storm of never-remembered ferocity ripped through the Wombat State Forest, as well as the Dandenong Ranges and parts of Gippsland. By Thursday morning the Wombat Forest landscape had been dramatically altered, large trees uprooted, other snapped off and swathes of forest flattened.

In an effort to put this event into perspective I turned to Ron Hateley's book *"The Victorian Bush: its 'original and natural' condition"*. Ron researched the observations of our early explorers and settlers and documented the extreme wind events they experienced.

He provides references for a number of tornadoes in the 1800s and these describe events that are similar to the wind event west of Daylesford in 2015. These events were extreme but localised.

From these early records there is only one description of an extensive storm/wind event, which occurred in November 1897. Ron describes it as "when a series of strong tornadoes swept across the colony from near the South Australian border to Warragul, east of Melbourne."[1]

At North Yannac "huge trees were torn up by the roots like straw, or were stripped of their branches, only the trunks or main branches remaining. Hundreds of acres of what was standing now presents the appearance of pulled down timber so thickly are shattered trees and branches strewn."[2]

"… between Carisbrook and Moolort the storm raged with great violence, causing great devastation for a width of two or three miles (three to five kilometres). Hundreds of trees were uprooted and the 3-chain (sixty metre) wide road to Eddington was obstructed for a great distance with large trees."[3]

We need to consider that the Wombat Forest is a regrowth forest, having been cleared for timber and gold mining in the 1800s and then over-harvested for timber in the late 1900s. Where there were once forest giants that were at least 200 years old, there are now much younger eucalypts growing closer together.

Swathes of trees that were probably 80 to 100 years old have been uprooted and lie on the ground like 'pick up sticks'. It is distressing to all of us that these trees that have been growing for so long, that were habitat, that provided blossom for birds and insects, are no longer standing.

There are massive areas of destruction around Bullarto and other parts of the forest, but there are also sections of the forest barely touched by the devastating winds. We should look in awe at the large old trees that have withstood this wind event. The branches they have dropped will allow for the creation of hollows.

Landscape devastation.
Top: Photography © Trevor Speirs.
Below: courtesy ABC (supplied by Steven Fiume).

How do we respond to this event? For far too long *Homo sapiens* has attempted to conquer nature. We need to think before we act. Do we perceive the large areas of forest with fallen timber as a problem to be cleaned up as soon as possible? These fallen trees will provide habitat for ground mammals and shade and shelter for emerging plants. As they decay they will be a food source for fungi and insects. The insects are in turn, a food source for birds and small mammals.

The logging and gold mining of the 1800s displaced the existing soil layer, exposing the substrata of clay. This wind event creates the opportunity for a new layer of soil to be created by allowing the trees to decay, a process that could take a century.

The Wombat Forest has shown itself to be resilient, the forest has grown back after the widespread clearing of the 1800s. Greater Gliders have re-established their populations, Powerful Owls are reproducing and migratory birds come to the lush gullies to breed in spring.

This is a natural event, possibly made more extreme by climate change, but one that our forests have evolved with. We should not rush in with heavy machinery, compacting the soil, crushing emerging plants and introducing weed species. We are not here to conquer nature. We need to learn to live with nature and its complexities. ■

1. Hateley, R. (2010) *The Victorian Bush: its 'original and natural' condition*. Polybractea Press, Melbourne p 152

2 & 3. Ibid p 155

Citizen Science

By Gayle Osborne

Citizen Science is the new 'in thing', but is it really science? All around the world, people are collecting data and collaborating with scientists. There are many examples of very successful projects in Australia such as the FrogID project, Birdlife Australia surveys and FungiMap, however, the citizen's involvement generally only comprises of the lodging of sightings.

Littler's Masked Bee submitted to iNaturalist. Photography © Gayle Osborne.

Of course, we have had citizen scientists for a long time, amateur naturalists of past centuries who kept notebooks, published their findings and lodged specimens with museums and herbariums. They identified new species. This continues today, members of Field Naturalist Clubs record species, submit specimens to herbariums and author articles and books. Many become recognised experts in their field.

What is Citizen Science? Defined by the Oxford Dictionary in 2014 as 'scientific work undertaken by members of the general public, often in collaboration with or under the direction of professional scientists and scientific institutions.'

Is it appropriate to call members of the public who submit sightings, however valuable, to a project, Citizen Scientists? Where is the science component?

According to The Science Council (UK) "A scientist is someone who systematically gathers and uses research and evidence, making a hypothesis and testing it, to gain and share understanding and knowledge."[1]

I cannot find any projects that involve community members in scientific research. MYCOmmunity and the Wild Fungi Project have gone a step further than just collecting sightings; volunteers are being trained to process eDNA samples in the lab and in the field, in order to search for rare and endangered fungi.[2]

Despite being finicky about terminology, there have been an enormous number of records of fungi, flora and fauna submitted to various projects. iNaturalist Australia has over 2 million observations, with over 38,000 identified species. The FrogID app has captured over 50,000 records in Australia, covering 172 species. Apps like FeralScan and Deerscan help model the distribution of invasive species.

These records can provide scientists with large and diverse data sets that would otherwise have been unavailable and can greatly reduce the cost of research projects.

The ability to contribute to Citizen Science projects has been made accessible to many with the availability of the Internet, digital photography, smart phones with GPS receivers and data collection apps.

A possible advantage of participation in Citizen Science projects is the increase of the participant's environmental knowledge, scientific literacy and connection to nature.

Monash University Biological Sciences students instigated a Citizen Science project, called 'Where's Lori?' aimed at determining where Rainbow Lorikeets and their nest hollows were around Victoria. Not only did they gather sightings, including nest hollows, they established that many people increased their knowledge and appreciation of nature.

Community members often establish Citizen Science projects. Wombat Forestcare developed a project using motion-sensing cameras to document the faunal species within the Wombat Forest. The data from this project populated the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas with the locations of common and feral fauna species as well as establishing new records for threatened species such as the Brush-tailed Phascogale and Spotted Quail-thrush.

This project also had the benefit of involving some Wombat Forestcare members and greatly increasing their understanding of the natural environment.

Data from Citizen Science projects can be used to lobby for environmental protections and in some cases has been used to take legal action for species and habitat protection.

Wombat Forestcare used the data from its many projects to establish that sections of the Wombat Forest were of conservation value worthy of being protected in a National Park.

While Citizen Science projects can provide advantages to both citizen scientists and scientists, science involves much more than the collection of data.

The Science Council (UK) states "Science is the pursuit and application of knowledge and understanding of the natural and social world following a systematic methodology based on evidence." [3]

Citizen Science is not a substitute for scientific research that can only be carried out by scientists.

We don't have 'citizen doctors' but highly qualified people who are trained to understand the complexities of their field. We need to continually rally governments to properly recognise the need for high quality, well-funded and ongoing scientific research by qualified scientists if we are to best understand and protect Australia's unique biodiversity. ■

Notes

1. https://sciencecouncil.org/about-science/our-definition-of-a-scientist/
2. https://myco.org.au/wild-dna-project/
3. https://sciencecouncil.org/about-science/our-definition-of-a-scientist/

Vegetation of the Wombat Forest - Sedgy Riparian Woodland

By Murray Ralph

The Wombat forest contains a very diverse range of native plant species that occur in over 30 distinct plant communities. Plant communities are groups of plants that grow together sharing similar environmental conditions such as climate, geology, soil type, aspect, altitude and position in the landscape.

Each plant community in the Wombat forest provides different types of habitat and resources for native fauna to varying degrees.

In Victoria, most plant communities have been formally described and mapped and are called Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs).

Typical Sedgy Riparian Woodland with a dense sward of Red-fruited Saw Sedge *Gahnia sieberiana* growing under Swamp Gum *Eucalyptus ovata*. Photography Murray Ralph.

Sedgy Riparian Woodland is a relatively common but scattered EVC in the Wombat Forest that occurs along rivers, creeks and drainage lines in flatter or gently undulating areas of the forest.

Areas of Sedgy Riparian Woodland play a critical role in maintaining overall water quality in the forest and downstream catchment areas by slowing water flow, and trapping sediments and nutrients. These swampy sediment accumulation areas were once very common in the broader landscape, but are now relatively rare.

In the Wombat Forest, a feature of Sedgy Riparian Woodland is the beds of Sphagnum Moss that absorb large amounts of water during rainfall that they slowly release; filtering and purifying the water as well as halting erosion.

Along drainage lines, Sedgy Riparian Woodland tends to occur in very narrow strips. It also occurs on broader, flat areas adjacent to creeks that become waterlogged or seasonally inundated, and in the upper reaches of the Loddon, Coliban, Campaspe and Moorabool Rivers.

Soils are usually alluvial of varying depths and moderately fertile.

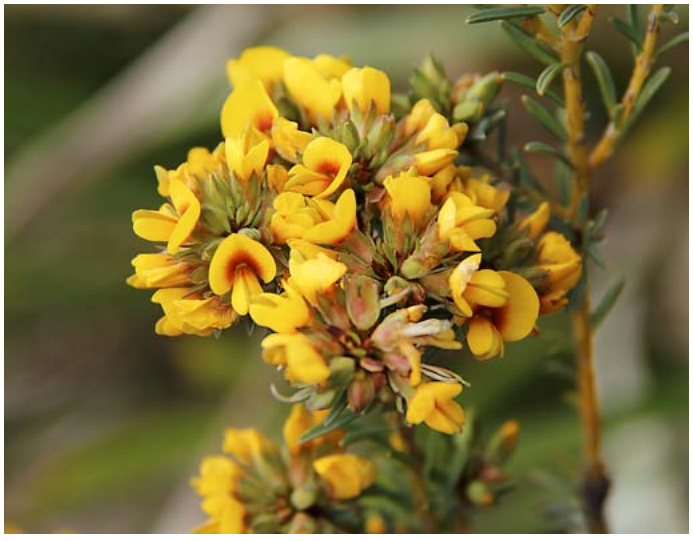
The overstorey, to 15m tall, is usually dominated by Swamp Gum *Eucalyptus ovata* with the occasional Messmate *Eucalyptus obliqua*, Manna Gum *Eucalyptus viminalis* and Narrow-leaf Peppermint *Eucalyptus radiata*. On some sites the 'near threatened' species Brookers Gum *Eucalyptus brookeriana* or Yarra Gum *Eucalyptus yarraensis* may also be present. Blackwood *Acacia melanoxylon* usually occurs as an understorey tree.

A key characteristic of Sedgy Riparian Woodland is the dense sward of Red-fruited Saw Sedge *Gahnia sieberiana* to 1.5m tall that dominates the ground layer. A number of other sedges and rushes are also present including Tall Sword Sedge *Lepidosperma elatius*, Spiny-headed Mat-rush *Lomandra longifolia* ssp. *longifolia*, Spreading Rope-rush *Empodisma minus*, Club-sedges *Isolepis* spp. and Rushes *Juncus* spp.

The shrub layer is usually sparse. Taller shrubs include Prickly Tea-tree *Leptospermum continentale*, Prickly Moses *Acacia verticillata* and Prickly Currant-Bush *Coprosma quadrifida*. Smaller shrubs include Wiry Bossiaea *Bossiaea cordigera*, Dusky Scurf-pea *Cullen microcephalum*, Swamp Bush-pea *Pultenaea weindorferi* and Wiry Bush-pea *Almaleea subumbellata* formerly *Pultenaea subumbellata*.

In the Wombat forest, two of the bush-peas are of considerable interest due to their rarity. The Swamp Bush-pea, listed as rare in Victoria, is only found in a few

Swamp Bush-pea *Pultenaea weindorferi*.
Photography © Gayle Osborne.



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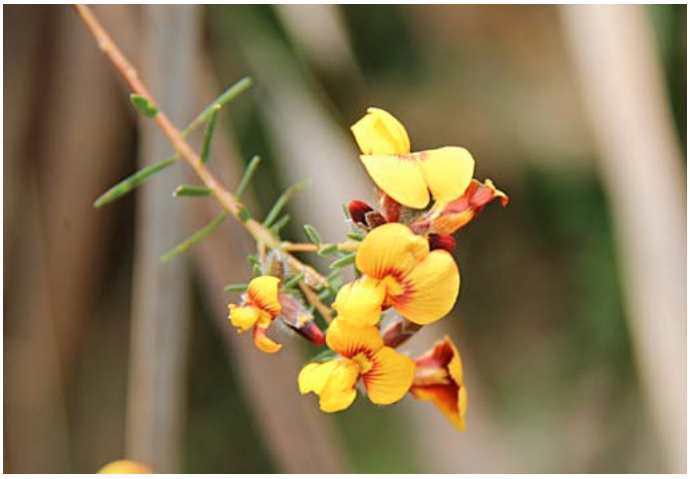
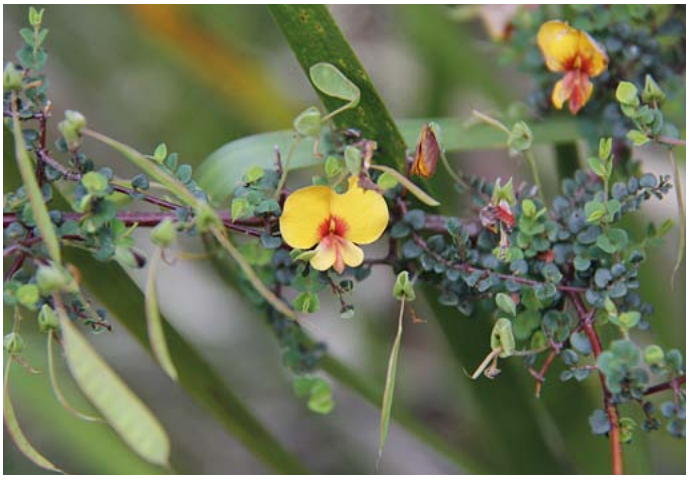


Wiry Bush-pea *Almaleea subumbellata.*
Photography © Gayle Osborne.



Wiry Bossiaea *Bossiaea cordigera.*
Photography © Gayle Osborne.

locations in the Wombat forest, including the headwaters of the Campaspe River. The main population is in a creekline within a pine plantation and is gradually being over-shaded. The Wiry Bush-pea is only found in four locations; two of which are within proposed planned burns.

Wiry Bossiaea, although listed as 'near threatened' in Victoria, is very common throughout the damper areas of the Wombat forest.

In between the sedges a range of ground flora plants can also be found. These include Austral Bracken *Pteridium esculentum*,

Running Marsh Flower *Ornduffia reniformis.*
Photography © Gayle Osborne.

native grasses such as Slender Tussock Grass *Poa tenera* and Weeping Grass *Microlaena stipoides* and native herb species such as Kidney Weed *Dichondra repens*, Cinquefoil Cranesbill *Geranium potentilloides* and Hairy Pennywort *Hydrocotyle hirta*. Austral Brooklime *Gratiola peruviana*, Running Marsh Flower *Ornduffia reniformis* and Swamp Daisy *Allittia cardiocarpa* inhabit the damper areas.

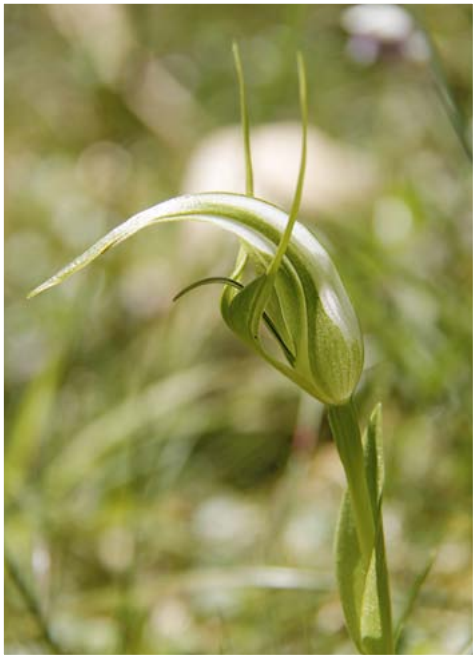
The Large Sickle Orchid *Pterostylis falcata* is only found in a few locations growing mainly in Sphagnum moss beds in the headwaters of the Coliban and Campaspe Rivers.

Sedgy Riparian Woodland provides habitat for a wide range of native mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibious species. Motion-sensing cameras placed by Wombat Forestcare members in these sedgy areas have detected a number of mammal species including Swamp Wallabies, Bush Rats, Agile Antechinus, Mountain Brush-tailed Possums and Eastern Ring-tailed Possums. Dusky Antechinus have been occasionally recorded.

Powerful Owls have also been seen roosting in Blackwoods, sometimes holding ring-tailed possum prey in their talons. Large numbers of regurgitated pellets of bone and hair are found below their regular roosts.

Planned burns are a major threat to the function of this vegetation class. Although there are prescriptions to keep fire out of the sedgy riparian areas, this has not always been achieved resulting in the loss of Blackwoods and faunal habitat. Tracks have been graded through sedgy areas, disrupting the critical role of this EVC in filtering water. Tracks were also graded through populations of the Large Sickle Orchid.

All EVCs are assigned a conservation significance based on the extent to which they have been cleared from their former range. Sedgy Riparian Woodland is classified as being 'depleted', due to the loss of 50% to 70% of its extent since European settlement.



The Large Sickle Orchid *Pterostylis falcata*.
Photography © Gayle Osborne.

The Barkers are back

By Trevor Speirs

While everything in the human world seems more chaotic than usual these days, the world of the Barking Owl looks to be going along pretty much to script. After spending a large part of the warmer months roosting in woodland several hundred metres away, our pair has returned to roost in close proximity to their nesting tree. It was about this time last year, mid-July, that the female entered the nest hollow to lay her eggs, which resulted in two chicks. The amount of whitewash below the breeding tree now, suggests the male has been busy preparing the nest hollow, which hopefully heralds another productive breeding season.

The two juvenile owls were last seen with their parents around mid-February. This would be about the time, three to four months after fledging, that the juveniles are considered to be independent. They seemed healthy, but obviously once dispersed by the parents their fate is unknown. An observant nature enthusiast, who lives three kilometres away, heard a Barking Owl call strongly one night in autumn and maybe it was one of the juveniles making its way into the wider world. ■

Female and male Barking Owls *Ninox connivens*. The male is the heavier bird on the right. Photography © Gayle Osborne.

Listen to the Forest – A short film by Alison Pouliot

The recent announcement of the three new National Parks was the result of a long battle to have the conservation values of central Victorian forests recognised.

While this represents an enormous step, much uncertainty remains as to when and how park status will be implemented.

VicForests has been given permission to log Mt Cole and the Pyrenees and to extract commercial firewood from parts of the Wombat until 2030.

What will be left to protect by then?

These forests have conservation values worthy of protection in National Parks, and yet the government is prepared to let VicForests plunder them for the next nine years.

We need to keep pressure on government to legislate these parks NOW.

View the video https://vimeo.com/574510250