

Latrobe Valley Naturalist

BON AND OLLIE THOMPSON A TRIBUTE



Birthday Celebration January 2011

Many club members felt a great sense of loss when Bon Thompson passed away at the age of 92 years on 12th June and then Ollie followed her just thirteen days later, also in his ninety-third year. It was fitting that a good many members of the LVFNC came together in Traralgon on 19th June and then again on 4th July for the celebrations of their lives during which their son Max offered moving family eulogies.

Bon was born Guinevere Rosa Ellen to Alma and Frederick Hawley in Footscray on Australia Day, 1921. The family moved to Traralgon in 1937, although Bon was soon to begin teacher training back in Melbourne. Ollie, born on 7th August 1920, grew up in the Traralgon South/ Koornalla farming district, himself becoming a dairy farmer. They met in 1948 and wed in 1951, the beginning of over sixty years of married life together.

Bon and Ollie joined our club back in, I think, 1964. Bon was to go on to serve as Conservation Coordinator for some 30 years from 1969, and Ollie served as club vice-president for several terms. They were made Life Members at the March AGM in 1993. Bon and Ollie received the Latrobe City Citizens of the Year award for 2002 – recognised for their shared commitment to conserving the flora and fauna of the Latrobe Valley over more than 40 years. The Mayor at that time noted that they worked tirelessly not only to document the flora and fauna, but used all that work as a basis for increasing industry and government

awareness of the importance of conserving our natural environment.

As an early example, from the 1960's, Bon and Ollie persuaded the APM to create a reserve on a portion of its land at Traralgon South that was to become a pine plantation. It was then that they met the celebrated naturalist and writer Jean Galbraith, who introduced them to the art and science of plant identification – a skill they needed to support their case to the APM. Miss Galbraith was the guiding spirit of the club from its inception, and in many ways Bon was to later assume that role. Then, in the 1970's, Bon spearheaded the club's efforts that resulted in the creation of Holey Plains State Park.

Many other examples could be given, including the couple's research to support the case for the establishment of the Crinigan Road Reserve in Morwell. Ollie served on a number of environment consultative groups and project management groups over the years; he was particularly active in the establishment of Wirilda Environment Park near Tyers – where one of the walking tracks is named in his honour.

Bon and Ollie authored a huge number of articles in the LV Naturalist over 40 years from the mid-sixties. Bon frequently gave talks on natural history, not just for our club, but also for many other community organisations and groups. In this she was aided by the fruits of Ollie's skills as a nature photographer. With their combination of talents, they greatly assisted Jean Galbraith in the preparation of her monumental *Field Guide to the Wildflowers of South-East Australia*, published in 1977.

The extent of Bon and Ollie's fieldwork is illustrated by the fact that by 1994, when the club started up a Botany Group, they held 74 regional plant lists, on which the group has built to create the club's extensive plant database.

In Ellen Lyndon's history of the club's first 25 years published in 1985, Jean Galbraith was quoted thus:

"It is largely through their work that our club has a reputation for well researched, well balanced submissions which are listened to

by the Land Conservation Council” (and, one might add, many other bodies).

Bon is one of the eight naturalists profiled in Terri Allen’s beautiful book *Gippsland Lady Botanists*, published in 2007. In her introduction, Terri wrote that her lady botanists ‘grew’ well past their sixties. “Their keen minds, enthusiasm, joie de vivre kept them bubbling and young in spirit.” Regarding Bon herself Terri wrote: “Her city upbringing was to bless Bon with her silver tongue, but it was country living which painted her world green.”

So at this time we honour a remarkable couple’s “generosity of spirit” – the enthusiasm and joy which they brought to club activities and to sharing their knowledge with the rest of us, who are the richer for having known them.

Philip Rayment

PRE & POST FIRE MONITORING AT WILSONS PROM

(Continued from last issue)

Results ARI have finally produced a report on the analysis of the results from the 35 quadrats surveyed in years 1, 2 and 4.

In answer to our monitoring questions:

What is the vegetation species composition, abundance and condition and how does it change over time?

Species richness In CBW the mean number of species in unburnt was generally lower than in the burnt areas. In CDSM the mean number of species was higher than in CBW, less influence of fire intensity.

Cover data - % cover increased in the second year and then remained the same for both EVCs.

The cover of Coast Tea-tree was interesting, showing a response to fire intensity. Very few small plants occurred in unburnt sites suggesting a very low level of recruitment between fires. The mean number of stems in burnt quadrats ranged from 50 to 203 reflecting the role of fire intensity in stimulating germination of seeds. The mean number of stems reduced slightly over the next two surveys reflecting post fire mortality.

The mean cover of Coast Banksia was variable, but highest in moderate or unburnt sites. This reflects a differential survival of mature plants, very few small plants were found anywhere. Cover apparently reduced substantially in the second survey suggesting high mortality of mature plants.

This quote is from ARI’s report. It confirms that what was measured was already known – that Coast Tea-tree is not recruited in unburnt sites and that Coast Banksia is not doing well.

What introduced species are present and do they have an impact on the EVC condition?

Sixteen weed species were detected across all sites. Mostly cover values were low and only Fleabane had high cover in the first two surveys, but the 3rd survey showed the cover was reduced to 0.5%. This suggested that post-fire stimulation of weeds in the sites was only temporary. It is likely that the site soil seed store contains many viable seed of these weedy ephemerals, unlikely to germinate en masse unless there is another fire.

What rare species are present?

Only one plant on the Rare of Threatened list was detected, that was *Xanthosia tasmanica*. Fire is not expected to have an adverse impact on this species. In wet heathy habitats this species acts as a fire ephemeral (i.e. fires promote germination and growth).

How does fire severity influence vegetation?

Fire, particularly of higher intensity, stimulated the germination of seeds from species such as *Acacia verticillata* and *Leptospermum laevigatum*. Few individuals of the former and few juveniles of the latter were found in unburnt quadrats, suggesting that occasional fire is required for the above-ground persistence of such species. However, given that the previous large fire in the park was in 1951 (PV 2002), 54 years earlier, it is clear that seeds can remain in the soil for many years in the absence of above-ground persistence. Therefore, fire is not crucial for the survival of these re-seeding species unless the inter-fire interval approaches the storage time for seed in the local communities (including soil storage)

and unless it is a management goal to retain above-ground populations of these species in these sites.

However, we urge care when considering active management, as another fire prior to the development of a viable seed store by re-seeding species might lead to local extinction of those species (Tolsma *et al.* 2011). Minimum tolerable fire intervals must be carefully considered. In the absence of active management, the number of individual plants is expected to reduce over the coming years through natural attrition, but compositional and structural differences may persist for many years depending on the longevity of each species.

Coast Banksia Woodland lower strata appeared to be recovering in a floristic sense after the 2005 fire, with overall species composition in burnt sites at five years after fire becoming more similar to unburnt sites. In contrast, the overall species composition in burnt Coastal Dune Scrub Mosaic remained substantially different to the unburnt composition at five years after fire. More surveys are required over the coming years to determine if this is a real effect of fire or an artefact of the original species composition at the sites.

Temporal data are important for the future management by fire of relevant EVCs, and are most valuable when they are both long-term and robust. We currently have data from only three ground cover surveys and two canopy surveys, and this is not yet sufficient to make recommendations on something as potentially complex or controversial as fire management. To facilitate long-term data, surveys should continue into the future, although times between surveys can be longer. We understand that surveys were planned for 2012, so we recommend a follow-up survey three to five years later.

Robust data come from robust techniques that minimise variation between observers. We have identified various limitations of the techniques currently being used, and present some recommendations for change in the following section.

What active management techniques (burning, slashing, grazing control) best

restore or maintain the Coastal Grassy Woodland conditions? This is still unanswered.

A couple of trials are being conducted at present. Herbicide treatment before a fire to knock back the Coast Tea-tree and make it easier to set fire, has been used. A cool late spring burn has been suggested. Seed capsules from Coast Tea-tree have been collected around the burn site and from the herbicide treated area and the Nursery are testing seed viability. Seed capsules are stored in pillow cases hanging from the roof of the shed to try to replicate natural conditions and the seed will be retested at six and twelve months post collection.

The other trial is to test the genetic differences between Coast Banksia plants from four different sites: Wilsons Prom, Sandy Point, Mouth of Powlett River and Point Nepean. The Nursery is growing 50 plants from each site grown from seed collected. The plants will be planted out in groups of 4 on the Isthmus to see whether the Coast Banksia from the Prom is genetically less viable.

Some of the work the Prom'n'aides have done at Wonthaggi has provided a possible hypothesis to work with. In 2000, a trial program of management of the Wonthaggi Heathland Nature Conservation Reserve was implemented to use slashing and burning the vegetation in small areas with three aims: to assess the invasion of Coast Tea-tree to determine the effect of each treatment on species richness and Coast Tea-tree establishment and to observe the response of weeds and orchids. Post-treatment monitoring was carried out in 2008, 2009 and 2012. The results from this trial give a reasonable hypothesis to test: that these management strategies reduce the invasion of Heathland by Coast Tea-tree and enhance species diversity.

Conclusions:

The seven years post the 2005 fire and only 4 years post the 2009 fire has lead ARI think this long- term project should continue.

Some of the benefits of this work: Parks Victoria has some workable hypotheses for adaptive management. The group has

Latrobe Valley Naturalist

learned a lot about ecological assessment of vegetation.

Mary has put an enormous amount of work in running this project. She complimented the other volunteers, but personally I believe that we have gained far more - the pleasure of meeting and working with like-minded people, the spectacular backdrop of the Prom, rain, hail or shine and the feeling that we are doing something worthwhile while learning about plants and their relationship to their surroundings.

Jackie Tims

REPORT ON BUSINESS MEETING HELD 28.6.2013

General Meetings & Excursions

Friday 26 July: Winter Members' Night - Presentations from members

Saturday 27 July: Moe Town Reserves - Ollerton Ave and Edward Hunter. Meet 10am Matlock St off Ollerton Ave.

Friday 23 August: Birds, Dams & Conservation in China - Wendy Wright & Steb Fisher (changed from original program)

Saturday 24 August: Morwell NP - Billys Creek. Meet 10am Junction Rd carpark.

Botany Group: Saturday 3 August. Kurth Kiln SP (north of Gembrook, adjoining Bunyip SP). Meet 10am picnic ground on Beenak Rd. Car pool Yarragon Rly Stn 8.30am. Contact: Jackie Tims ☎ 5634 2628.

Bird Group: Tuesday 6 August - Heyfield Wetlands. Meet by 9.30 at Centre. EA Wetlands survey Thursday 15 August: Meet by 9.30 Morwell Bridge Gate. Contact: Alix Williams ☎ 5127 3393, alixw@spin.net.au

Finance - Not available as Treasurer away.

Business Arising, Correspondence & General Business

Motion-sensitive camera - Postpone discussion to a later BM.

Changes to Incorporation and rules for club - see notice of motion below.

Bird identification guide for Latrobe Valley request from Kevin Roberts - will discuss at a later meeting.

SEANA camp hosted by LVFNC (possibly with Sale FNC) - Phil has emailed Sale Club; awaiting feedback.

RHSV Affiliated Club membership and insurance for 2013-14 \$209.

Bon's funeral 19 June - well attended by club members.

Ollie's funeral 4 July also well attended by club members.

Victorian Nature Photography Group - mention at GM, circulate flyer.

Edward Hunter HB Reserve - bird lists completed; Owl Survey; Consultancy Workshop - a day in Sept for Botany group? Latrobe City \$10,000 for weed control.

Rob Gully unable to lead Bird Group at Neerim South on October 1 but could on Oct 15, 22 or 29. Ask at GM.

Possible to leave screen in Church. Follow up on possible cupboard space.

Plant survey at Morwell River Falls - David S to ask for 2 November.

Conservation Matters

Nothing to report.

GUEST SPEAKERS FOR AUGUST

Dr Wendy Wright is a senior lecturer in ecology at Monash University with research interests in conservation biology. She is working, with her partner Steb Fisher, and colleagues from Sichuan University in landscapes threatened by the rapid development of dams for hydro power in China.

Steb Fisher is a professional photographer with an interest in wildlife photography. He has wide experience in sustainability work in Gippsland and his skills have been a key part of this research. The talk will deal with both the ecology of the Lower Jinsha Valley (the lower Jinsha is a reach of the Yangtze River) in remote Southern Sichuan in China, and the photographic techniques employed in the study.

FOR THE DIARY

2013-14 Subscriptions are now overdue - see inside back cover for full details

Club Spring Camp Friday 13-Monday 16 September at Lady Northcote Camp, Rowsley (18km from Bacchus Marsh). Angliss lodge has 12 bedrooms with 2 bunks to sleep up to 4 people. BYO bedding and pillows. There are 2 bathrooms, kitchen and eating/sitting area, and we can use the nearby hall. Camping is possible. Evening meals will be arranged for Saturday and Sunday nights at \$12 per head. List at GM. Full payment required by August meeting.

SEANA Spring Camp at Numurkah, hosted by the Broken Creek FNC Inc.

“Riverine Flood Plains, Red Gum Forests, the Mighty Murray River”

Friday 11-Monday 14 October, based in Numurkah, in the Goulburn Valley.

NOTICE OF MOTION AT SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING 23.8.2013

The August GM will be suspended briefly in order to put the following motion at a special general meeting:

That the club resolves to operate under the new model rules as contained in the Associations Incorporation Act 2012.

That the committee will consist of the four specified positions – a President, a Vice-President, a Secretary, and a Treasurer – and five ordinary members elected annually.

Our financial year will be from the first day of March to the last day of February.

Our statement of purposes shall remain the same as that originally adopted.

Statement of Purposes:

1. To study, enjoy and conserve nature.
2. To encourage an interest in the various aspects of natural history.
3. To hold regular meetings and arrange for suitable speakers.
4. To organize excursions or field days at times to be determined by the Executive Committee.

SEANA AUTUMN CAMP 2013 Jacks Beach Excursion

The day's activities encompassed many more areas of interest than we expected. We were led from our first stop beside The Esplanade along tracks through bushland to Golden Beach, on the western coast of

Westernport Bay, south of Hastings. Despite the lack of rain, the bush looked healthy but there was little time to stop and study it as we made our way down onto a healthy saltmarsh fringed by a forest of White mangroves *Avicennia marina* var, though the saltmarsh plants were somewhat battered by the time we had walked over them to the rocks at the far end at Golden Point.

During the meeting the previous evening, Leon Costermans had described the formation of the rocks on which we were standing. During the Silurian period, some 410 to 443 million years ago, while Australia was still part of Gondwanaland, these rocks formed from turbidites deposited at the foot of a shallow slope beneath the sea on the edge of the land mass. They formed Sandstone Island off Jacks Beach and underlie much of Westernport Bay. The rocks at Golden Point are the best exposure on the foreshore of Westernport Bay and are listed as being of State significance. A smaller outcrop occurs at Jacks Beach, closer to Hastings. Tilted onto their sides, the layers, thicknesses and composition of each deposit laid down over time could be easily studied. Also found was one of the concretions or ‘cannonballs’, which Leon had described – rounded, resistant formations which, over time, develop within the layers through chemical processes.

Turbidites formed a sedimentary rock, composed of layered particles that grade upwards from coarser to finer sizes, which resulted from ancient turbidity currents in the oceans. Turbidity currents occur when sediment is locally churned up, here by material sliding down the continental slope, thus raising the density of the water above that of the surrounding clear water. Under the influence of gravity, the heavier water flows very swiftly down any available slope, spreading out when it reaches a horizontal floor. Turbulence due to the flow tends to keep the sediment in suspension until the flow ceases; the sediment is then deposited. Turbidites also occurred in lakes, and turbidite sequences (a thick succession of turbidites) can be of economic value as hosts for gold deposits such as those at Bendigo and Ballarat, and liquefied accumulations of turbidite deposits can become hydrocarbon

reservoirs which are sought after by the petroleum industry.

Closer to Crib Point jetty, rocks about 350 million years younger, Red Bluff Sandstone (the Tertiary Baxter Formation) overlay the Silurian rocks. These dark red rocks are soft enough for the surface to be scratched off by a fingernail but are protected by an ironstone 'skin', this harder surface resulting from continual wetting and drying. Just offshore was Victoria's submarine, originally planned as a tourist attraction and now a rusting hulk. An unusual sight was of three black swans waddling in file for some distance through the shallows to reach the deeper water; once there they sailed majestically away.

Our second stop was at Jacks Beach, named after a family who settled there just over a hundred years ago, making a living from farming, fishing, general labouring, and rabbiting on Sandstone Island. The vast seagrass beds in the bay provided a nursery for fish, crustaceans and molluscs, so fish stocks were plentiful then. Much of that habitat has now been lost due to coastal development, dredging and increased sediment loads from water run-off but we briefly visited the remnant seagrass meadow at the start of the Warringinee Park boardwalk which stretches over that Ramsar listed wetland closer to Hastings. If Hastings becomes a major port, one wonders what further damage might be done to the bay, its coast and vegetation. Also on the beach were the remains of a tanning pit in which wattle bark was used to preserve the Jack family's fishing nets and ropes. Mangroves, cleared to build their jetty (stumps can still be seen), have begun to recolonise the shoreline. We could see out on the mud flats swans, cormorants, ibis, Little and Great Egrets and, overhead, a Whistling Kite. A large stingray swam nearby, its flukes just breaking the water. As we returned to the car, a black beetle dotted with small white spots decided that my black hat was a good refuge. Later we found others. Over 2cms in length, they had amazing black antennae with long curling 'eyelashes', the width of the antennae more than half the length of the beetles' bodies.

Our final stop was the Balbierooroo Wetland, almost opposite the Balnarring shopping

centre. We waited until the downpour of rain eased and walked through the bush in drizzle. The predominant birds there were Grey Fantails and Fairy Wrens, also a Spotted Pardalote and Red-browed Finch. There were a number of large ponds, though it was mostly dry around the extensive boardwalks meandering through a forest of Swamp Paperbarks *Melaleuca ericifolia*. Amongst the birds seen were Freckled ducks, a Royal Spoonbill, Shelducks, Red-kneed Dotterels and a White-necked Heron. Also taking refuge in a wetlands tree was a young koala, taking as much interest in us as we were in it.

Both Jacks Beach and Balbierooroo Wetlands had signage which explained the history of the area and gave information on other features. At the Wetlands there were detailed accounts on how the Bunurong people used the land and their food sources, the animals and birds that might be found in the area, and the insect and invertebrate life in and around the ponds. On a sign at the Warringinee Park boardwalk there was information about saltmarshes. Those added even more interest to the day.

Estelle Adams

WHERE ON EARTH IS GOGO?

In the article on ANN in Canberra 2012 in the May issue of *The Naturalist*, it was mentioned that Dr Gavin Young had referred to Gogo in WA during his address on invertebrate fossils, but we had been unable to locate it on any of our maps. Thanks to Heather Green, we now have its approximate location. Heather worked in the hospital at Fitzroy Crossing in the early 1970s, and knew of Gogo and its whereabouts from her time there. Gogo is a property off the road between Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek. Once owned and operated by white Australians, the land was returned to the control of the local indigenous people. Our more detailed touring maps have marked on them the locations and names of many of the properties, but Gogo is not one of the ones shown. However, intriguingly, there is a property close to Fitzroy Crossing called "Fossil Downs".

Estelle Adams