Welcome to the December 2015 edition of the UHLMG newsletter

Editor: Una Allender

Welcome to Watgania Landcare members.

At a meeting with the Watgania Landcare Group members in October it was decided to merge with Upper Hopkins Land Management Group. We trust that this decision will prove to be a positive one for Watgania area landcarers and we look forward to working with these new members on various natural resource management projects.

In light of the very early harvest, a decision was made to defer the annual Upper Hopkins LMG Christmas function to February. This will be a good opportunity for a post-harvest get together and a chance to welcome our new members from Watgania. An invitation will be sent to all members closer to the date.

We look forward to seeing everyone then and wish you a profitable harvest, a very joyous Christmas and some RAIN to welcome the New Year.

Grant funding received….

Upper Hopkins LMG has been successful in obtaining funding through the Victorian Landcare Grant 2015_16 for three on-ground projects. Bruce McKay will have some extra assistance with rabbit control at Langi Logan; Jayne and Craig Drum will work with Tim and Sally Philip to fence and revegetate a wetland on their shared boundary near Rossbridge; Rob McKay will add a new corridor of trees and shrubs to connect existing plantings and remnants in the Cornhill Road area.

…and applied for.

We have applied for money from the Federal 20 Million Trees project. If successful this funding will support planting of 6,500 trees and understory species across 8 sites, including 3 sites where trees were lost in 2014 Moyston fires. New plantings will link to existing planted and remnant native vegetation and to the Hopkins River. We have also applied for some money from the Volunteer Small Equipment Grant for some Hamilton tree planters and a remote sensing camera.

Gorse control

We have some funding for gorse control work available on a $ for $ basis. The Upper Hopkins LMG now has a new boomspray as well as a smaller spray unit suitable for mounting on an ATV or ute. These spray units can be borrowed by financial members of UHLMG for weed control work. Please contact Bruce McKay (0417 512 189) to borrow a spray unit and Celia Tucker (0409 138 581) if you would like to access the $ for $ funding.

Please help us to cut costs and reduce our impact on the environment.

Nominate to receive your next newsletter via email rather than on paper.

Simply send an email with your name and a request to add your details to our distribution list.

Address your email to: uallender@bigpond.com

Wyvern Cam

The Upper Hopkins Land Management Group is grateful to the Glenelg Hopkins CMA and ODELTR for their support of group activities and the production of this newsletter.

Upper Hopkins Land Management Group is now on Facebook at www.facebook.com/UHLMG

Glenelg Hopkins CMA

Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport & Resources

Glenelg Hopkins CMA

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Image of Swag Santa resting up before his big night on December 24th.
Woodland Bird Monitoring

By David Nichols, Glenelg Hopkins CMA

Pardalotes and wild flowers were out in force during the 3rd round of Woodland Bird Monitoring which was run on the weekend of the 10th and 11th of October with the Panyyabyr and Upper Hopkins Landcare groups.

Highlights in the Panyyabyr area included the sighting of 24 species in the Oliver’s regenerating and remnant redgum patch. This is a fantastic result for a good size patch within a grazing farm and shows that while one patch cannot be all things to all bird species, it can be many things. The value of the site was evidenced through the variety of bird types observed, including nectar feeders (Purple Crowned Lorikeets), seed eaters (Crimson Rosellas and Red-rumped Parrots), leaf gleaners (Brown Thornbills, Striated Pardalote and White Plumed Honeyeaters), bark gleaners (White Throated and Brown Treecreepers) and predators (Whistling Kites and Wedge-tailed Eagles).

It was also pleasing to have the local Federal Member for Wannon, Dan Tehan and his family, join us to learn about woodland birds and what local farmers and landcarers are doing to maintain habitat on their properties. Dan said, “It was a great opportunity to join with local land managers and see this fabulous project being implemented. To be able to identify bird species will provide us with useful indicators of our woodland health and in turn measure the benefits of environmental works or tree planting.”

On the Sunday in the Ararat Hills area we also had good results highlighted by the sighting of a female Red-Capped Robin on the Forster’s Wills Hill Road revegetation site. This again shows the value of well established native revegetation for habitat, and was further emphasized by the presence of a resident family of White Browed Babblers. Other pleasing sightings included Spotted Pardalotes, Rufous Whistlers and Red-browed Finches on a number of sites.

Conducting surveys a couple of weeks earlier than last year seemed to pay dividends in another dry spring.

Thank you again to our Birdlife members from the Birdlife Hamilton and Horsham branches for their support. And thank you to the landholders who host us on their properties. Our next round of monitoring will be in early April 2016.

The Woodland Birds Project is funded by the Glenelg Hopkins CMA through support from the Australian Government.

Full list of birds seen on the Spring Upper Hopkins round

- Crimson Rosella
- Red-rumped Parrot
- Sulphur Crested Cockatoo
- Hobby
- Nakeen Kestrel
- Laughing Kookaburra
- White-throated Treecreeper
- Superb Fairy-wren
- Striated Pardalote
- Spotted Pardalote
- Yellow-rumped Thornbill
- Brown Thornbill
- Yellow Thornbill
- Buffed rumped Thornbill
- Weebill
- Red Wattlebird
- Yellow-faced Honeyeater

Bird notes

Don Rowe took these photos of a baby eagle at “Sidlaw”

Hannah Nichols captured this Thornbill feeding her young

Bird monitoring, Upper Hopkins. Photo: David Nichols
Ararat Landcare Group

By Una Allender, Facilitator, UHLMG

The group celebrated a busy and pro-active year with a most enjoyable Christmas Dinner at The Blue Duck on Tuesday December 8th.

Ararat LG has been working on several projects in the Ararat urban area as well as taking an active role in efforts to reduce the environmental impact of the Western Highway duplication. Losses of old and very old trees and whole ecological communities have been catastrophic on the section between Beaufort and Buangor. Ararat LG is working with other groups to reduce the impact of future works. (See PS ‘Value of Old Growth Trees’)

Trees are also under threat on a section of the Ararat Moyston Road near Cathcart. Ararat LG has requested that Ararat Rural City Council rescind the motion allowing a planning permit to remove 35 remnant trees from this road. Ararat LG applauds Council and VicRoads for their concern with improving road safety but members fail to see how removing these 35 trees will actually improve safety. Members have suggested improvements to the road shoulder, reducing speed limits and installation of wire rope barriers where necessary.

Back in town the group is working with Council to develop the McNeill Street Reserve into a pleasant park for the benefit of local residents. Ararat LG is also working with Parks Vic on developing environmentally sensitive dirt bike trails in the Ararat Hills. With Parks Vic and Rotary the group is looking at future planning to improve the amenity of One Tree Hill and Blackie Reserve.

Plantings of native trees and shrubs are being maintained at several sites around Ararat, with the Stawell Road site now marked by a small sign courtesy of Ararat RCC. Several members are working to collect local provenance seed to use for future plantings.

The Community Garden is being maintained by a small group of keen volunteers. There are some spare plots available at present. Anyone who may be interested in taking up a plot and growing their own vegetables can contact Jenni Stanck on 0438 361 294.

Ararat Landcare Group members enjoy Xmas Dinner at the Blue Duck. Photo: Una Allender

Birds of Prey Visit Maroona PS

By Una Allender, Facilitator, UHLMG

In November Upper Hopkins LMG arranged for Martin Scuffins of Leigh Valley Hawk and Owl Sanctuary to visit Maroona Primary School. This was a way of thanking the students for their ideas and input into our new logo.

Martin visited on a “group day” so students from Moyston and Buangor also enjoyed his talk and were able to see three birds of prey at close quarters. The Maroona PS students wrote a lovely letter of thanks telling us how much they enjoyed meeting Cleo a Peregrine Falcon, Kevi a Nankeen Kestrel and Min Min a Barn Owl.

Martin Scuffins with Cleo . Photo Maroona PS

Upper Hopkins LMG Strategic Plan ….Your ideas please

Early in 2016 Upper Hopkins LMG will develop a new strategic plan. We plan to have a facilitated gathering to work on this but in the meantime we would appreciate any ideas and suggestions members may wish to make about the aims, purpose and operations of Upper Hopkins Land Management Group.

At present we work on control of weeds and pest animals, revegetation, protection of remnant vegetation, salinity issues, erosion control, enhancement of waterways and wetlands, soil health, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and woodland bird monitoring. We have had some recent experience with bioscans and hope to do more monitoring of wildlife and pest activity. We would like to know from members what else they think the group should be doing?

In preparation for our 2016 planning session, please think about where you would like the group to be in 10 years time, what we may be working on in 2025, and how best we can achieve long term sustainability. Celia or Una will be delighted to receive any input.

DIARY DATE: Lake Bolac Eel Festival April 8 to 10 2016. Bill Gammage and Bruce Pascoe are keynote speakers for a forum on Indigenous Land Management
Revegetation in a Dry Spring

By David Nichols, Glenelg Hopkins CMA

After two very tough springs in a row it is very interesting to see which revegetation sites are failing, and which sites are going ahead in leaps and bounds. A number of factors appear to be common to the sites that are succeeding, while there are also factors common to those whose plants are struggling.

Plant Guards; Guards can protect plants from browsing animals and are necessary for ease of subsequent chemical sprays. In recent seasons there has been an increased use of sturdy and long life corflute guards. While more expensive than some alternatives, when firmly secured, these guards will withstand strong winds without moving and tend not to damage the plant it is designed to protect. Corflute guards have the benefit that they can be used multiple times. Some prickly species tend not to be targeted by browsing animals and may not require a guard.

While many large scale sites (> 2 hectares) should be considered for direct seeding due to cost and plant vigour factors, most sites in the Glenelg Hopkins region are planted with seedlings. Of these the ones doing best in the Upper Hopkins region are those that appear to have had the better preparation and were planted earliest in the season (June/July).

Significant aspects of ground preparation and planting to consider include the following:

Ripping; A deep rip of planting lines can fracture compact soil layers making it easier for new plant roots to penetrate to access nutrients and water. They can also make it much easier for surface water to penetrate the soil to the root area. Sites in the Ararat Hills with rip lines that received the thunderstorm in mid November were still damp three weeks later in early December.

Ripping should be conducted in summer or early autumn when the soil is dry to encourage fracturing rather than glazing. Ripping to a depth of 50cm is adequate. Ripping greater than 60cm may have cultural heritage implications that will need to be considered.

Weed Control; Effective weed control is essential for successful plant establishment. Poor weed control (including pasture grass) is the major reason for revegetation failure, as plants must compete for moisture and nutrient resources. Effective weed control generally consists of 2 chemical applications in the first year of planting. Often this may consist of an application of a 'knockdown' following the autumn break, followed by the application of a 'pre-emergent' several weeks later on bare ground. Alternatively, a knockdown application before planting can be followed by a knockdown post planting, if conducted carefully with a backpack around plants that are guarded.

One metre strips or spots of 1metre diameter will provide an effective area of reduced competition. Broadacre spraying of sites may open up unnecessarily large amounts of area for weed establishment and remove pasture grass that pest animals (eg rabbits) may preferentially target.

A revegetation project that was well prepared for planting but did not get a second herbicide application and has since struggled. Photo: David Nichols

Seedlings; Seedlings purchased from local nurseries should be grown from seed of local provenance plants. The seed sourced from local species has evolved to suit local soils and conditions. Seedlings should be grown out to a reasonable size (10-30cm) and be 'hardened off'. Mature stock from previous seasons should not be used as there may be development issues associated with root structure.

Plants should be ordered from nurseries prior to summer of the season before planting to allow the nursery enough time to source seed from the appropriate area.

Planting; Seedlings need to be planted while soils are quite moist to allow for sufficient growth ahead of summer conditions. In recent years this means planting before August.

Seedlings should be planted to a depth that allows for a thin layer of soil to be placed on top of the seedling root ball of potting mix. This prevents drying out of the root ball on the first warm spring day.

While not an exhaustive list, these are some of the factors that appear to be contributing to the successful establishment of revegetation projects. Effort put into the establishment of plants in the first season is often rewarded by a high plant survival rate, high growth rates and less requirement for maintenance in subsequent years.

For further information the Glenelg Hopkins CMA Revegetation Standards brochure covers the issues in more detail and can be obtained from the CMA office, Una Allender or your local CMA staff member.
Peter O’Rorke Native Grassland Plantation at Lake Bolac

By Nolene Fraser, Beyond Bolac CAG

Hard work by volunteers has brought about the recovery of the Peter O’Rorke Memorial Native Grass and Wildflower Plantation on the foreshore at Lake Bolac. Twelve months ago, a 2 metre wide strip of flowering plants and grasses, including Running Postmen, Blue Devils and Kangaroo Grass, was killed by chemical sprayed from a vehicle travelling along the road at the lower edge of the plantation. Investigations by police failed to find out who was responsible.

Project Co-ordinator, Nolene Fraser, is delighted by the restoration of the site achieved by volunteer groups throughout the year. Lake Bolac CFA carried out a hot burn on two thirds of the site last December to reduce biomass and weed as part of its management plan for the foreshore. Since then many of the natives have recovered and become well established including Flax Lilies, Burr Daisies and Lemon Beauty Heads.

On two cold, wet days in July, enthusiastic students from the Gnrud Gunditj Leadership School, Noorat, joined Lake Bolac College students to plant new tube-stock and spread mulch. The plants, sourced from David Franklin’s Grasslands Flora Nursery, Chatsworth, have been propagated from locally collected seed. After working hard, and expending lots of energy to keep warm, students were rewarded with a BBQ lunch.

The Green Army, Co-ordinated by John Melling, Hamilton, visited the site three times in September and October to plant tube-stock; weed; and spread mulch. The help of these young adults who are developing skills in conservation and caring for the environment has been invaluable to the project.

A small team of dedicated locals meets each Monday morning from 10.00am – noon to weed, converse, and appreciate the native flowers and the beautiful setting beside the lake. Please come along if you can help, bring gardening gloves and strong shoes. For more information phone Lake Bolac Business Information Centre 5350 2204

By Una Allender, Upper Hopkins LMG Facilitator

Highly regarded ecologist Matt Mooney has produced the diagram below which clearly & simply sets out the value of old growth trees. Matt has been appointed as Environmental and Heritage Advisor with VicRoads. He has been working with VicRoads to examine how much environmental damage has resulted from work on the Western Highway duplication between Beaufort & Buangor and on the Buangor Bypass. Matt has presented an excellent version in powerpoint with each of the six main values clearly set out. For this newsletter format I have simply listed all the sub-headings.

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<th>Cultural Heritage</th>
<th>Climate Change</th>
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<td>Erosion control, salinity management, local provenance seed stock, shelter belts</td>
<td>Social values, visual amenity, landscape character and amenity, recreational amenity, tourism</td>
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The Green Army team hard at work weeding and spreading mulch. Photo: Nolene Fraser

Peter O’Rorke Native Grassland Plantation at Lake Bolac

Value of Old Growth Trees

By Una Allender, Upper Hopkins LMG Facilitator

Highly regarded ecologist Matt Mooney has produced the diagram below which clearly & simple sets out the value of old growth trees. Matt has been appointed as Environmental and Heritage Advisor with VicRoads. He has been working with VicRoads to examine how much environmental damage has resulted from work on the Western Highway duplication between Beaufort & Buangor and on the Buangor By-pass. Matt has presented an excellent version in powerpoint with each of the six main values clearly set out. For this newsletter format I have simply listed all the sub-headings.

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Last Call for G2P Funding

By David Nichols, Glenelg Hopkins CMA

Project works for the second year of the Grampians to Pyrenees (G2P) project are now largely completed. Fences are nearly all completed on remnant protection sites, while all revegetation has been established despite the very dry spring. Some of these projects are growing very well, while in other places seedlings – especially those planted later or on under-prepared sites, have struggled with the season.

With two very dry springs in a row efforts will be made to replant any G2P sites that require it next winter. Recently CMA project staff have conducted survival counts on all revegetation sites from the last 2 years to establish the extent of the infill planting required.

This year 13 separate landholder projects resulted in the planting of 32,000 indigenous plants across our part (Upper Hopkins) of the wider G2P project area. While twenty kilometres of fencing was established as part of the revegetation and remnant protection projects. This is a fantastic result that will have significant benefits for farm sustainability and flow on effects of creating significant flora and fauna habitat.

Work is now underway to allocate the remainder of the year three G2P funding, which will be the last of the funding under this current project. So if you are interested in applying for G2P funding for revegetation or remnant protection projects now is the time. Please contact Dave Nichols on 0407 321 747 or email d.nichols@gboma.vic.gov.au.

Successful G2P Project at Maroona

By Tania Parker, Glenelg Hopkins CMA

With an open landscape and frontage to the Hopkins River, Rob McKay at Maroona, had a major revegetation program establishing 3000 native plants with assistance from Glenelg Hopkins CMA supported by Grampians to Pyrenees funding.

Planting was undertaken over two weeks with assistance from Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) and St Mary’s PS students. A team of eight international volunteers from Germany, China and Korea assisted in planting 2500 plants along the Hopkins River and in corridors linking to the waterway, while grade 3 and 4 students from St Mary’s Primary School in Ararat planted nearly 400 plants in another linking corridor. (Below—St Mary’s PS at work. Photo: Tania Parker)

Rob said ‘the school kids were fantastic! They were so excited and enthusiastic to come out tree planting. It would be nice for them to come back in a few years once the trees start to grow and see what they helped create.’

Tania Parker from Glenelg Hopkins CMA worked with Rob to develop the project and assisted with the revegetation works.

Book Review

“Land of Sweeping Plains - Managing and restoring the native grasslands of south-eastern Australia”

Edited by Nicholas S.G. Williams, Adrian Marshall and John W. Morgan

Review by Debbie Shea, board Glenelg Hopkins CMA

Native grassland is one of the most rare and precious ecosystems in Australia and once covered over a third of Victoria an area of around 7 million ha. I have a special interest in the Victorian Volcanic Plains (VPP) bioregion of which has now less than 1% of native grasses remaining. Unfortunately, many of the plants and animals dependent on this type of flora for their survival are either extinct or threatened with extinction. This book opens the mind of the reader to appreciate this type of environment and just how threatened it is, what that means to all of us and what we can do to protect what remains.

This is a detailed and beautifully presented book with stunning photographs of plants, animals and landscapes. The contributions from fifteen authors throughout the fourteen chapters of this invaluable document result in a comprehensive portrayal of the history, ecology, social context and best practice management of this lowland temperate grasslands.

The book begins with the relationship between grassland environments and Aboriginal peoples. In their livelihood and culture providing food, such as various tubers and bulbs, as well as a wide range of animals, to provide meat. Aboriginal cultural practices have strong ties to these areas recognising their reliance on this important and dynamic ecosystem.

The book beautifully describes the rich abundance of flora and fauna in what was a very dynamic and resilient ecosystem. Although Western Victoria is now recognised as providing the highest agriculture production in Victoria it has come at a price. It is well documented that the early travellers through these wide, open grasslands recorded the conditions as ideal for agriculture pursuits such as grazing. European habitation over time has led to urbanisation, weed invasion and decline of Aboriginal peoples and the grassland habitat, flora and fauna.

That makes the remaining remnants of these ‘sweeping plains’ all the more valuable. By enhancing and/or protecting remnant vegetation the opportunity is created for native plants and native animals to co-exist in the farming landscape to improve and enrich both human and animal life.

If Josh Dorrugh is typical of the other fourteen authors, if just a small proportion of their enthusiasm, commitment and knowledge, is absorbed and extended to the people that read this book the chances of holding onto and extending this critically endangered grassland habitat can only improve.

I first met Josh when he was undertaking research for Land, Water and Wool back in 2002. This project was investigating farm businesses, wool production and biodiversity through integrating farm and native biodiversity management. I was encouraged by his ability to have affinity with our aims and desires as farmers to both provide a comfortable income and to protect/enhance the native environment in which we operate. The mutual respect we formed grew from the recognition of the skills, knowledge and experience we each had.

Who should read this book, the easy answer is everyone, but if you have an interest in farming, or native biodiversity, or even our history this is the book for you. I would like to see it as part of the reading requirements in natural resource management and agriculture courses alike.
IPM update

Thank you to both UHLMG IPM coordinator Jayne Drum, and entomologist Neil Hives for the excellent IPM program that has been running in the Upper Hopkins area. This program has been funded by the Glenelg Hopkins CMA through the Australian Government’s Regional Landcare Facilitator Project.

2016 planning. We are working with Dion Borg, GHCMA, to further develop the IPM program in 2016. If you would like to make any suggestions for 2016 or have any comments about the IPM project so far, please contact Jayne on 0429 416 592.

Neil Hives has written the article below to get you thinking about what may be happening in your paddocks.

Cockchafers in pastures and cropped ground. By Neil Hives

Summary.
1. Two species of cockchafers are commonly found – black headed cockchafers & red headed cockchafers.
2. Given the seasonal conditions we have had in the last two years, it is likely that black headed cockchafers will be more commonly found in 2016.
3. Black headed cockchafer grubs may be found in April – June period, surface feeding activity is indicated by small mounds of soil next to holes in the ground.
4. Sampling is easy – dig soil in suspect areas and if grubs are at levels where control is required, every shovel sample will easily yield several grubs.
5. A cultural control option that reduces the likelihood of infestation is maintaining pasture cover.
6. Only broad spectrum insecticides are available so being certain about the presence and abundance levels of the grubs is important to minimise the impact on resident beneficial invertebrate fauna.

2015 – Commonly encountered pests.
One of the more common pests encountered during the 2015 season was the black headed cockchafer. This was likely the result of the drier spring of 2014 and may be attributed to two main factors.
1. Drier conditions generally correlate with soils that have not been saturated for any period. Survival of grubs is reduced in water logged/prolonged wet conditions. As 2014 generally drier as a whole, a greater proportion of the black headed cockchafer population had survived to become adults in Jan – Feb 2015.
2. With poor spring growing conditions in 2014 leading to reduced pasture growth, it meant that there was less ground cover in pastures during the period adult beetles were active. This scenario provides more suitable habitat for adult beetles to lay their eggs.

‘At risk’ scenarios.
It is understandable that when there is poor spring growth, grazed pastures become bare relative earlier than in seasons where spring provides average or better pastures growth. 2015 spring is the second season in a row for poor spring growth in many pastures. Where pasture paddocks provide suitable habitat as early as January and February they then become ‘at risk’ paddock as far as black headed cockchafers go. This also applies to cropped ground in a poor growing season where:
- there are lighter stubble loads on particular soil types
- stubbles are grazed
- crops are cut for hay
All these scenarios provide paddocks that become unseasonably barer early and so ’at risk’ to black headed cockchafers. Another paddock type ‘at risk’ are those with a fodder crop grazed out by the end of February, which once again is more likely when spring has been poor, and the pressure is on to utilize any fodder earlier than might normally occur.

2016
We have seen more black headed cockchafer grubs in paddocks during 2015 than in recent years. 2016 therefore shapes up as a ‘good year for black headed cockchafers’. It is likely that there will be increased levels of adult beetles in January and February 2016 as a flow on from the 2014-15 seasons, once again in part because soils did not become waterlogged for any period. Coupled this with another poor spring for growth in 2015, the door opens for more ground to be suitable habitat overlapping with more adults across districts. It makes sense that black headed cockchafer grubs will potentially be even more common in 2016 than in 2015.

Cultural control options.
For graziers, from here on it may be an option to not over graze some of your better producing pastures to reduce the likelihood of cockchafers. At the same time perhaps think about ‘sacrificing’ some paddocks which may be in need of renovating anyway. Restrict livestock to particular areas when the need for hand feeding arises. Set up feed lots. Just what is feasible may vary from property to property.

Evidence of black headed cockchafers.
The first indicator of things to come will be in January/February when you may see many adult beetles coming to lights on warm nights. Autumn will be the time when signs of cockchafer grubs first become evident. From April through to June mounds of soil next to exit holes will show up as grubs come to the surface to feed. Any digging of the soil will yield grubs quite easily if they are present.

Chemical control.
Treatments – only broad spectrum insecticides are available for black headed cockchafer grubs. With some sampling effort you may be able to identify that only particular parts of some paddocks are in need of chemical control thus restricting the application of broad spectrums to minimise the impact on your resident beneficial fauna. Red headed cockchafers do not come to the surface to feed and any amount of chemicals applied to control these will fail every time.

Glenelg Hopkins CMA Works Crew

By Chris Wilson, Glenelg Hopkins CMA

Glenelg Hopkins CMA is pleased to announce that it has secured funding to continue a small two person works crew until December 2016.

The crew has been assisting community groups, local government and private landholders throughout the Glenelg Hopkins catchment on a variety of environmental works including woody and herbaceous weed control, stock fencing, revegetation and environmental maintenance works.

The works crew is funded via the State Government to help with works on priority waterways throughout our region, re-engage landholders with past riparian projects and assist along urban waterways in townships such as Beaufort and Skipton.

Over the past 6 months the crew has achieved over 10km of stock fencing, 50ha of weed control and 2ha of revegetation. This is quite a significant achievement for a two person crew.

The crew continues to be a great resource for achieving environmental outcomes that may not be funded through other sources, whilst maintaining natural resource management skills within our district.

If you would like to express interest in the use of our Works Crew please contact Chris Wilson on 0571 2526 or c.wilson@ghcma.vic.gov.au
The Perennial Pasture Systems (PPS) group recently completed their 7th Annual Study Tour which took thirty five members for a week long visit to leading farms in New Zealand. PPS conducted its first study tour in 2009 and tours since have ranged from one day visits to leading enterprises in Victoria, to multi-day interstate visits to South Australia and Tasmania. This year was the group’s first overseas tour. PPS President Wayne Burton commented “The annual study tour is an important part of the PPS calendar. It is a great learning experience as well as adding to the social fabric of the group. It was great to have such a large group go to NZ, we all learnt a lot and will be producing a full report for the rest of our members”.

PPS was fortunate to obtain assistance from Charlie de Fegely (a group member) who has great knowledge of and many contacts in NZ. Charlie’s assistance was invaluable in assisting PPS Project Manager Rob Shea in planning the tour.

The first farm was the Warren family’s Turanganui Romney Stud in South Wairarapa where they operate a large lamb, cattle trading and dairy cow enterprise. The group heard about the business including the comprehensive pedigree measurement in the stud and the impressive 170% lambing compared with the NZ average of 110%. A farm tour was then held with the magnificent views over Palliser Bay complimenting the productive pastures.

By Rob Shea, PPS Project Manager

It was then on to Pahautae Partnership, an equity partnership dairy farm with partners Matt & Tracey Honeysett also being the farm managers. The business structure created a lot of interest as did the dairy system.

A big first day was completed with some jet boating on the Ruamahanga River before the PPS group were guests of the “Shepherds Group”, a mix of farmers and professionals servicing the farming sector, for dinner.

An early start was needed on day two with the group’s first stop the hill country farm of Wairere Romney Stud. A tour was taken along the ridges of the farm while observing the high level of management accompanied by views of snow-capped mountains not far away from Wairere. A drive down from the hill country led to the village of Wairere, where Will Beetham spoke about his highly productive plantain based pasture system and his extensive record keeping vital to the profitability of Beetham Pastoral.

The final stop for PPS on day two was the “Spring Valley” farm of Matt and Lynley Wyeth, where lunch and a presentation by Matt was followed by a presentation from Brian Eccles of Cash Manager Rural and a farm tour which rounded out the day. “Spring Valley” has an 1800 mm average yearly rainfall and has an intensive grazing system producing 10,000 lambs annually. A feature of the Wyeth’s system was the indoor lambing of triplet bearing ewes and the large scale rearing of orphan lambs using colostrum from a nearby dairy farm.

After sailing to the South Island on Wednesday, Thursday started with a visit to the Dawkins family property “The Pyramid” near the wine growing region of Blenheim. Chris Dawkins gave an entertaining talk before leading a farm tour around the property which includes a recently acquired section which showed the country in a rundown state prior to weed control and pasture renovation. It was good to see the contrast so that the group could understand what is needed to bring the country into full production.

After travelling a bit further south the Avery farm “Bonavaree” was reached. Doug Avery had presented at the PPS conference in August so everyone was keen to see their operation. Fraser Avery gave a comprehensive overview of the farm before the group toured the lamb and trading operation conducted on lucerne pastures in hill country. The land type and rainfall was similar to that of many of the tour participants land in the upper Wimmera, so the “Bonavaree” visit created a lot of interest. After leaving the Avery’s it was a long but spectacular drive along the East Coast to Christchurch, a highlight of the tour especially for those of the group on their first overseas trip.

Friday was targeted for pasture research and the first stop was Lincoln University where Dr Derrick Moot held the group’s attention with his presentation on lucerne systems. PPS was so impressed that they have started discussions to bring Derrick to their annual conference next year.

It was the onto the PGG Wrightson research facility where there was an inspection of individual grass plantings which were being field tested as one of the initial stages of new cultivar testing. A visit to a hybrid fodder crop testing trial was next before travelling to Marshdale where new pasture mixes are trialled under paddock conditions. A dinner and review session completed the day as tour participants started to come to terms with the amount of information that was gleaned during the week. The group had a chance to walk around Christchurch on the Saturday morning before the flight home and it became clear just how much devastation was caused by the 2012 earthquake.

Although the tour was funded by the tour participants, PPS did receive support from Rural Finance, PGG Wrightson, Allflex, Quality Wool and the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority through the Federal Govt. National Landcare Program which helped offset some of the costs.

PPS President Wayne Burton summed up the study tour by saying “It was a huge learning experience for us and the hospitality of the New Zealanders allowed us to visits farms at the highest end of the scale, we will take many lessons from them as well as being inspired by their dedication and pride in the agriculture”. 

PPS members and Kiwi hosts at Turanganui, North island. Photo: Rob Shea

Avery’s farm—South Island. Photo: Rob Shea
No-Till Experience yields results

By Richard Murphy, Glenelg Hopkins CMA

Record low rainfall is increasing the risk of crop failure for growers in the Glenelg Hopkins CMA region. No-till cropping has demonstrated profitable yields under low rainfall conditions. Glenelg Hopkins CMA is working with Victorian No-Till Farmers Association to provide opportunities for farmers to learn more about no-till cropping practices from experienced no-till operators in Victoria and interstate.

The ‘No-Till Experience’ project, co-funded by Vic No-Till, enabled 20 growers from the Glenelg Hopkins CMA region to visit no-till farms in northern Victoria and NSW in June 2015. The tour gave farmers the chance to see, learn and discuss the challenges and benefits of a no-till cropping system with experienced no-till growers. Topics of controlled traffic farming and managing retained stubble were also discussed. After the tour, 8 of the 20 farmers, made the decision to change to a no-till system. The story of project participants, Troy and Grant Keating, who farm in both the Glenelg Hopkins and Corangamite CMA can be found at http://www.stockland.com.au/story/3428985/spring-when-no-till-farms-in-northern-victoria-and-nsw-in-june-2015.

The CMA / Vic No-Till partnership has increased opportunities for farmers of the Upper Hopkins and surrounding regions to learn about no-till cropping. The ‘Controlled Traffic Farming Expo’ was held at Willsaura on 5 November, with great attendance. The up-coming demonstration of the Sheelbourne Header Front, is a ‘must see’ for growers. By stripping grain from the head, the Sheelbourne Header leaves tall, standing stubble that will shade and protect soil after harvest. No lying stubble is expected to reduce risk of slugs at sowing – a concern preventing some farmers from keeping stubble. Demonstration dates will soon be finalised. Check out these links to see more of the Sheelbourne Header Front:

http://www.shelbourne.com/3/products/1/stripster-header
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LiKcfykzBUE

To learn more about the Vic No-Till / Glenelg Hopkins CMA No-Till Experiences project and opportunities call Richard Murphy at the CMA on 5551 3351 or Kerry Grigg at Vic No-Till on 5382 0422.

Learn more about Aqua-Till:
general-news/cutting-water-to-soil-3036846.aspx

Beyond Bolac Update

By Bill Sharp, Facilitator, Beyond Bolac Catchment Action Group (BBCAG)

Environmental flows for the Fiery Creek.
Our Resource Managers Group met again for further discussions in an attempt to gain summer flows from entitlements of Central Highlands Water’s diversions from the Upper Fiery Creek. Unfortunately CHW, key to discussions, could not be represented at the meeting. Their water resource manager has, however, offered to continue dialogue with our group. The position stands that the Bulk Entitlement held by CHW is at present non-negotiable to allow a greater summer flow to the creek. The Glenelg Hopkins CMA is very supportive of our discussions attempting to address stream health and the environment, a process that was not a major issue when Bulk Entitlements were granted some time ago. The Managers Group will look at the whole catchment, to assess possible flow improvement including changes to the entitlement, storage infrastructure, redirection of storm water and climate change impacts.

Soil moisture is very low. We are fortunate to be receiving results from Southern Farming Systems soil moisture probes, for which we thank them. The figures relate very much to the dryness of the catchment, not to mention crops. Readings at the end of November for probes in our immediate catchment - at Lake Bolac, Mininera, and Westmore, and two at Tatyoon were below 20%, with Westmore and Tatyoon 1 below 15%, and Mininera less than 5%. By contrast, another probe near Lake Bolac was at 65%. (Readings are recorded at depths between 30cm and 90cm). These very low soil moisture readings help to give an understanding as to ‘where has all the water gone’, or how much has to soak into the catchment before any run off can be expected.

Membership subscriptions. As the group tackles more catchment issues which directly affect the community it is important that member numbers stay strong to provide community support for actions. This also assists BBCAG to be in a strong financial position to tackle these issues. Subs are $16.50 for single units and $22 for partnerships/companies. Thanks to those who have paid this year.

Our project worker, Jileena, is working on the group’s history and the biodiversity maps in preparation for producing a blueprint document and strategic plan. The plan will be used for future projects and sourcing funding for large landscape size projects - eg. wetland restoration and management.

The group’s projects assessment and review is underway. The Facilitator is currently inspecting and photographing BBCAG projects completed since the group’s formation. The review will assess project outcomes and assist in developing guide lines and conditions for future projects. Critical for projects is the fact that a grant for works is actually a contract between the fund provider, BBCAG and the landholder.

Grants. Funding has been received for work in the Armstrong Creek catchment to fence and plant indigenous trees for wetland enhancement of the creek flats. The group has also been notified of a wetlands restoration grant.

The native grasses project at the Boat shed is coming along well, attracting attention from outside the catchment. It may lead to a plant survey of the lake perimeter. (See P5)

If you have any issues that you believe BBCAG should be involved in, with any matters discussed above, or becoming a member, please contact Bill Sharp on 0418 542 687.
December photo board

Clockwise from above: Ducks and seagulls cluster together on a rapidly receding Lake Bolac. (Photo: Una Allender); Baby Ringtail Possum—Pseudocheirus peregrinus (Hannah Nichols); Blue Devil—Eryngium ovinum (Tania Parker); Bulbine Lily—Bulbine bulbosa (David Nichols); Some of the thousands of ducks flocking to Lake Bolac (Una Allender); Cereal hay is plentiful everywhere-harvest 2015 (Una Allender).
Water testing results

Not surprisingly there were many sampling sites that were dry when visited over the last week. The Hopkins is very low and the Fiery is a series of disconnected waterholes. Waterholes on both the Hopkins and the Fiery are a haven for birds and other wildlife, as is Lake Bolac, which although very low is attracting thousands of birds. Lake Buninjon and Greenhill Lake are dry. Redgums are flowering prolifically everywhere. The photo (R) was taken on Porters Bridge Road beside the Fiery Creek.

I spotted a battle between a wedge tailed eagle and two crows over some disputed road-kill. The crows harassed the wedgie until they forced him to fly off with his breakfast, which he then dropped in the paddock and chased the crows away. As soon as the wedgie returned to his meal, the crows came back to haras him. The wedgie took off again, dropped the food, chased the crows, and returned to his meal. Undeterred the crows attacked once more & the whole performance was repeated—again and again....

EC levels for livestock water supplies: Value given in brackets for each type of livestock is the EC level at which production decline begins: Beef cattle (6,200 EC μS/cm), lactating ewes and weaners (6,000 EC μS/cm), dry sheep (9,300 EC μS/cm), horses (6,200 EC μS/cm), Pigs (3,100 EC μS/cm), poultry (3,100 EC μS/cm).

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Featherhead, Ptilotus macrocephalus
Photo Una Allender

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