

# Friends of Sassafras Creek

Newsletter Edition No. 4

April 2023



Batwing Fern (*Histiopteris incisa*) - photo by Meghan Lindsay

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## Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation, the Friends of Sassafras Creek acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve, the Wurundjeri People, and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

## A note from our President

Welcome to 2023! Great to be getting together this year for working bees. Unfortunately, most of the Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation reserve remains closed, with no date given for reopening. The bridges damaged in the storm, June 2021 remain damaged. There is significant weed regrowth now, and areas where we had worked are now overgrown with weeds – it is very disappointing. Working bees are mainly at the Secret Garden. The wet weather in December caused flooding in Kallista with significant stormwater running into the creek at Beagleys Bridge.

The sewer works by Yarra Valley Water continue with works beginning now in Sassafras. Yarra Valley Water have connected sewer to Lyrebird Falls. This is significant! The tanks needed for the sewer works will be placed within the footprint of the Reception Centre and not in the reserve. A big thankyou to Yarra Valley Water.



*Some of our wonderful volunteers captured in the beautiful morning light of the Perrins Creek Valley*

We started the year by completing our 'Community Volunteer Action Grant', with a \$47,990 grant for works in the Secret Garden. Big thankyou to Alex for his work. Our Melbourne Water grant (in area below hairpin bend on The Crescent) has also now been completed. The main working bees for January and February have been in the Secret Garden. In February we had another clean-up of rubbish which amounted to two more trailer loads to the tip. Maybe it will now be our annual February working bee! Wednesday's working bee group continues fortnightly, with activity at Beagleys Bridge, the Secret Garden and also cleaning the track entrance at Mechanics Hall Sassafras (*continued page 2*).

(continued from page 1) There was a 'special working bee' on Friday 24 March, with several workers from Yarra Valley Water volunteering to help out at the Secret Garden! Our new Landcare Grant for \$19,990 has also begun, with contractor work in the area between two landowners whose properties border the creek along Sassafras Creek Road. Thanks to Meghan for her help with this grant. There will be work both in the reserve and also along the boundary of these properties. We are planning to have another night observation walk and also another community day during the year as well as our lyrebird survey - stay tuned for more information. We also received a \$1,000 donation from the Tecoma Anti Macca's group as they finalise the group - thank you! Thanks to all who have come to our working bees so far this year. All helps to make 2023 a great year!

Jane Hollands - President - Friends of Sassafras Creek

### This editions bird feature - Powerful Owl (Ninox Strenua)

We have the largest owl in Australia living along Sassafras Creek! Powerful Owls are incredible birds, with bright yellow eyes, huge claws and a majestic woo-hoo call.

They mainly prey on possums but occasionally snack on other animals including flying foxes.

Powerful Owls are a threatened species in Victoria. Land clearing since European settlement has destroyed much of their habitat and the huge tree hollows they need for nesting. A more recent threat to these beautiful owls is rat poison. Traces of different poisons are turning up in a huge number of owls.

You can help Powerful Owls by not using rat poison at home or work. There are other ways to get rid of problem rodents, you can find more information here: [www.actforbirds.org/ratpoison](http://www.actforbirds.org/ratpoison)



Photo by Alex Maisey

### FOSC President awarded Yarra Valley Councils Environmental Achiever of the Year

What an amazing achievement! FOSC President Jane Hollands has been acknowledged for her extraordinary environmental work for the Sassafras Creek corridor. Jane won Yarra Ranges Council's Environmental Achiever of the Year award and was presented her award at a ceremony in January 2023. As noted in the YRC [website](#), Jane is a dedicated environmentalist and her care for our local ecosystem and surrounding waterways is evident in the work she has been doing for over 20 years and how she mobilises others in caring for the natural world.

Jane is a dedicated Landcare member throughout the local area and is also a member of Community Weed Alliance of the Dandenongs. Jane is active in raising issues to be addressed at all levels of Government, calling for change and environmental action for the benefit of the region and all who call it home. Jane has succeeded in achieving great results from her advocacy in grants, funding and movement on countless projects. The FOSC committee are so proud of Jane and endlessly grateful for all that she has done and continues to do. Congratulations Jane!



Jane receiving her well deserved  
Environmental Achiever of the Year award

### Volunteer with FOSC!



Are you keen to support our beautiful ecosystems and meet like minded people? Come and volunteer with Friends Of Sassafras Creek! All are welcome. If you're interested, please email us at [foscreek@gmail.com](mailto:foscreek@gmail.com) to find out more information.

## Some history of The Secret Garden

At our last working bee on February 26th 2023, we again filled up 2 trailers of various types of rubbish, found in the large rubbish pile. The main question asked by those in attendance was 'how did all this rubbish get here?' Here is some history of The Secret Garden.



*The Williams Nurseries truck*

The Secret Garden now is approximately 5.5 hectares, also known as the 'Perrins Creek Reserve'. The Williams' Nursery was established on this site by Jack Williams in 1941 and ceased to function in the 1960s. The area had been divided (on paper) into '28 lots' including several roads. The remains of these roads exist today. The nursery was situated in Lots 14 to 26, at the center. Lots to 13 along the edge of Perrins creek Rd were purchased by the Forest Commission for \$21,000 in August 1976, and declared 'Forest Reserve'. Two lots 27 and 28 were added to the property at 5 Warwick Farm Rd, at a later stage. The Valuer General's report in 1982, assessing the value of the property for purchase indicated that there was a 40 year old fibro-cement house in the area where the stairs are today. This house needed attention. At this stage, the property was occupied by an employee of the nursery, rent-free in return for work on the property. There was also a corrugated iron carport, a second dwelling, once used as a holiday house by the owners. Five glass houses, each with concrete brick walls and steel framed glass roofs with cement floors, all requiring maintenance.

There were other structures of timber and iron construction including a packing shed, office and pumping shed. The property was eventually bought in May 1984 for \$85,000 by Forest Commission. This information has come from the files of a friends Group called the Friends of the Secret Garden, formed in the 1990s to 2000s. There is a report 'Williams' Nurseries, Perrins Creek Road, Olinda' on the history of the area, prepared for this group by Dianne Kueffer in 2000 with more details, available on our website: [www.fosc.org.au](http://www.fosc.org.au). What actually happened to these buildings and how they were removed by the Forest Commission needs further investigation!



*This is a photo from 2015, showing volunteers removing weeds such as sycamore, NZ wineberry, holly and ivy left behind by the nursery.*

## Great results in recent working bees

Tackling the pesky *Lonicera Nitida* (box hedge) was a weed removal priority in the Secret Garden in March. Over two days, we were able to remove an incredible amount of the plant in preparation for revegetation of native plants. FOSC were lucky to have several workers from Yarra Valley Water use their volunteer leave to volunteer with us and help on March 24th - thank you to all! This photo shows part of the track up from Perrins Creek Road covered with *Lonicera nitida* before weed removal works began (*more photos on page 4*).





Above and left - Before and after photos of box hedge removal in the Secret Garden.

Below - Wonderful FOSC members do a great amount of weeding in Sassafras during a Wednesday working bee. Get in touch if you'd like to join us midweek!

### Join us for a working bee in 2023!

30th April, 28th May, 25th June, 30th July, 27th August, 24th September, 29th October, 26th November

Our main working bees are the last Sunday of every month. Information about the working bees will be sent out via email in the days prior to each date to let you know where we will be working. Remember too that a group of us meet a couple of times a month on Wednesday afternoons from around 1.30. If you would like to come then, even if only occasionally, please email us at [foscreek@gmail.com](mailto:foscreek@gmail.com).



### Book of the month: Otherlands: A World in the Making by Thomas Halliday

To go into the forest and sit and just observe for a time can be an illuminating experience. Fine details became apparent. Greater resolution sharpens into focus. Behaviours and relations in an ecosystem begin to reveal themselves. Many of the inhabitants make themselves known. Yet we can only ever have this with what is here around us in our nook of the world.

*Otherlands* is an impressive exploration and patient observation of ecosystems through the deep past to the very beginnings of life on earth. Halliday combines the erudite scope of an Attenboroughesque documentarian with the almost hallowed reverence of a poet to create fantastic vignettes of unique moments in time and place in our planet's history. The experience of stillness in a forest alluded to above, *Otherlands* channels onto the page, and reading the book for an hour gives one the feeling of bathing in the natural world in all its glory (*continues page 5*)



(continued from page 4) Beginning in the just recently departed Pleistocene tundras of Ice-Age adapted megafauna and our hominid kin, Halliday walks us backwards in time each chapter, visiting salt plains, rainforests, alpine lakes, coastal zones, deserts, swamps and oceanic depths, as mountain form and erode and the continents drift apart and back together and apart again until our planet is barely recognisable as our own.

*Otherlands* is a narrative tour de force weaving the fruits of two centuries of scientific discovery in paleontology, biology, geology and climatology into a prose that flows like a story and is not overly weighed down with the technicalities of fieldwork and research. We see the flourishing of mammals across the planet; the reign of the dinosaurs, pterosaurs and marine reptiles for 200 million years; the giant conifer forests that dominated the globe; the age of amphibian diversity; the rise of insects alongside first Carboniferous era tropical forests; the symbiotic conquest of the terrestrial world by plants and fungi; the primordial oceanic paradise gardens of organisms before predator and prey relationships ever evolved; and the titanic struggle of our furthest single-celled ancestors to reach for starlight and transform the planet.

We often view fossils from the past as a single discrete species trapped in a rock and always pointing in some way to what it or its relations would evolve into in our current era. *Otherlands* vividly shows the reality that these fossilised organisms going back a billion years were always but a part of a grand ecosystem of millions of other species that all played out their lives exactly how we do in our ecosystems today. Ecosystems have always existed with organisms superbly adapted to the totality of that particular ecosystem, and not as a transitional half-evolved version of something to be long in the future. It is a beautiful, celebratory, haunting and meditative book that truly takes you out of yourself and gives you a taste of the scale and tenacity of life. Similar to how you might look at old photos of your parents as young people and be startled to really see they had a life before you, *Otherlands* masterfully reveals an Earth before us and all the beings that called this planet home before we did.

### Entering Waring Season - Eastern Kulin Seasonal Calendar

The lands of the Eastern Kulin people include the Dandenong Ranges which is referred to as the 'cold country'. The Kulin have a detailed local understanding of the seasons and the environment. Each season is marked by the movement of the stars in the night sky and changes in the weather, coinciding with the life cycles of plants and animals. Waring (Wombat) Season is April - July. This means cool, rainy days follow misty mornings. We see the highest rainfall and lowest temperatures during this time. Waring emerge to bask and graze in the sunshine. Bulen-bulen (Superb Lyrebird) males perform their courtship displays. Hearts of Kombadik (Soft Tree-ferns) are the major food when no fruits are available. Days are short and nights are long. The constellation of Sagittarius rises in the southeast after sunset, indicating the mid-point of cold weather.

Source: [museums.victoria.com.au/melbournemuseum/resources/forest-secrets](https://museums.victoria.com.au/melbournemuseum/resources/forest-secrets)

### Weed in focus - Aluminium Plant

Aluminium plant (*Lamium galeobdolon* 'Variegatum') is a pesky weed in the hills. It can spread very quickly and smother large areas. It forms a thick mat that stops native seedlings growing. It is often found in gardens growing in the cooler areas around trees and shrubs.



*Aluminium plant*

Aluminium plant is a pleasant smelling, erect ground cover up to 50cm tall. The leaves are hairy, pointed, coarsely toothed, and mint-like, in opposite pairs, with silvery-grey patches on the upper surface. Stems are purplish, square and densely hairy on the angles. From December to May tubular, hairy, lemon yellow flowers (20-25mm long) are produced, but no seed is set.

It is a tricky weed to get rid of! You can remove it by hand, but beware. Even little bits of stem and leaves, if left touching the soil, can take root. When hand weeding, make sure you remove every little piece carefully.

If you have this pesky plant in your garden, please help protect Sassafras Creek by removing it.

### Thank you!

A big thanks to those who contributed to this newsletter:  
Jane Hollands, Ash Bond, Meghan Lindsay, Alex Maisey, James Magree

**Get in touch!** [www.fosc.org.au](http://www.fosc.org.au) - [foscreek@gmail.com](mailto:foscreek@gmail.com) - [www.facebook.com/friendsofsassafras creek](https://www.facebook.com/friendsofsassafras creek)