

# Friends of Sassafras Creek

Newsletter Edition 14

April 2026



*The majestic Wurrun (Manna Gum) in flower - photo by Alex Maisey*

## Jane's journal

Welcome to the April 2026 edition of Friends of Sassafras Creek's newsletter. Autumn has finally arrived with warmer days and cooler nights - perfect weather for enjoying outdoor activities in the reserve. Finally, there has been some rain with many plants in the reserve challenged with the dry summer. We had a night walk in March along the creek, near Waterfield Rd, hoping to see possums living there in large, older eucalypts.

Contractor works for our current Landcare grant, along the track below where the track crosses over Olinda Crescent, weed works on ivy and woody weeds are nearly completed where it crosses. Revegetation works to come, planting larger sassafras trees along the creek. We have found that planting the larger trees, with tree guards, gives a better result.

CWAD (Community Weed Alliance of the Dandenongs) provided a grant to our group some time ago, for further works in the Secret Garden area of Perrins Creek Reserve. Contractor works will end soon. Most of the large sycamores found below the Warwick Farm Rd entry have been drilled and filled. A great result for this area by treating the 'Mother trees', significantly reducing seed dispersal.

We have met several times with Parks Victoria (PV) about replacing the PV sign at the start of the track, in Sassafras. The sign will have artwork showing wildlife that may be seen or heard while walking. Draft has been approved by PV and artwork is progressing  
*(continued page 2).*

*(continued from page 1)* We have had several new volunteers this year, some through Park Connect and others from our webpage and Facebook posts. Always great to have new volunteers join us at our events and working bees.

*Jane Hollands  
Friends of Sassafras Creek*

## Banking the Good Years: Prickly Currant in Full Fruit

Prickly currant-bush (*Coprosma quadrifida*) is in the full swing of fruit production at the moment. Across damp and wet forests of the Dandenongs, the shrubs are heavy with glossy red fruit, a sweet edible drupe that has long been noticed by people as well as birds. In Aboriginal plant-use records from the Coranderrk area, the plant is recorded as Morr, with its sweet fruits noted as edible.



*Prickly currant-bush (Coprosma quadrifida)  
Photo by Alex Maisey*

Over the last few years, the pricklies have put on leagues of growth, I feel like the forest has been banking the good La Niña years. After ample rain, prickly currant-bush seems to have raced ahead of the hungry mouths that usually hold it back – feral deer and wallabies that hammer the soft new shoots as soon as they appear. When the shrubs get that rare run of wet years and reduced pressure, they build something important: dense cover, nesting habitat, shade over the ground layer, and now, in late summer and autumn, an abundant food source.

Yarra Ranges and similar local plant guides describe the species as strongly bird-attracting, both for food and habitat, and right now that is easy to believe. This week I counted about 60 Red Wattlebirds using these plants, moving through the fruiting shrubs in a large, noisy loose flock. It is hard not to see prickly currant-bush as a quiet understorey workhorse: feeding birds, sheltering small nests, and casting the kind of protective shade that lets lyrebirds work the litter beneath (*cont. page 3*)

(cont. from page 2) I have watched these shrubs for years under heavy browsing pressure, shaped into strange little topiaries, with prickly outer branchlets protecting a green middle. The fresh growth is highly palatable, and recent work in forests browsed by invasive sambar deer found that deer strongly preferred the soft new stems of *Coprosma quadrifida* before prickles had developed. That fits what many of us see in the field: when the plant is trying to grow, browsers are right there waiting.

The prickles themselves are intriguing. There is some broader evidence from spiny plant research that spine density can decline as plants get older or taller, and one study discussing *Coprosma quadrifida* notes that leaf spine densities decline with plant height. So the old, lightly browsed plants that seem to lose their prickles may not be an illusion at all. It may be that prickliness is, at least partly, a defence most needed when shrub is young, reachable, and under pressure.

*By Alex Maisey*

## Waring (wombat) season on Wurundjeri Country

Misty mornings and cold, rainy days. Days are short and nights are long. Wombats are seen during the day seeking sunshine. Moth and fungi are by the creek.

Waring is the coldest and wettest season, with misty mornings, high rainfall and low temperatures. Days are short and nights are long. Valleys see morning mist and cool, rainy days fill bolin bolin (billabongs). This is the time for humans to move to higher areas, away from low-level flooding and keep warm by fires and possum skins, enjoying all Waring has to offer. At this time of year, Waring bask and forage in the sunshine while bulen-bulen (superb lyrebirds) perform magnificent courtship displays.

Brush-tail and ringtail possums mate. The rain moth emerges after living underground for years as a grub eating tree roots. Many different moths are eaten by birds during the day, and by sugar and feathertail gliders at night. Eastern grey kangaroos and wallabies feed on new growth. Bunjil (wedged-tail eagles) build their nests and migrating birds arrive from Lutruwita (Tasmania).

Hearts of the Komba'derk (soft tree fern) are a major food source when no fruits are available. Small tuberous plants grow well after rain, as do all sorts of fungi, while the ground is still warm. The beautiful casuarinas flower.



*Mother wombat and her joey - photo by Parks Vic*

Sources: [www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/Services/Support-for-people/Aboriginal-community/Wurundjeri-seasons#section-4](http://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/Services/Support-for-people/Aboriginal-community/Wurundjeri-seasons#section-4)  
<https://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/EE-Newsletter/Gardens-for-Harvest/Waring-Wombat-Season>

## Guidance to help you find the perfect plant for your garden

Do you have a spot in your garden ripe for planting but not sure which native plant would best suit? Look no further - the Yarra Ranges Council website has a local plant directory that lists over 900 plants suitable for our region for you to peruse. You can search by storey, plant group, flower colour and more. Get started by visiting the council website:

[www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/PlantDirectory/Home](http://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/PlantDirectory/Home)



*Sprengelia incarnata*, Pink Swamp-heath

## FOSC night walk in Sassafras Creek Reserve

On Friday the 20th of March, FOSC held a night walk to look for wildlife along the lower section of Sassafras Creek Reserve. We were joined by a number of visitors from nearby environmental groups and some neighbours and had 14 people in attendance. After a picnic tea together, we split up into groups of two to three and spread ourselves out over about one kilometre along the track. The noisy Sulphur-crested Cockatoos took quite a while to settle down and mosquitos and leeches were encountered as we waited for dark to fall. Unidentified bats were also observed feeding amongst the trees. Results: S= seen, H = heard.

Sulphur-crested Cockatoos S  
Eastern Yellow Robin 1H  
White throated Treecreeper 1H  
Laughing Kookaburra 1H  
Common Brushtail Possum 1S & 1H  
Southern Boobook Owl 1H  
Common Ringtail Possum 1S  
Common Blackbird 1S  
Bushrat 2H  
Grey Fantail 1S  
Bare-nosed Wombat 1H  
Krefftt's (Sugar) Glider 1S  
Short-finned Eel 1S

We were surprised not to see or hear more nightlife, as it was a still, warmish evening. However, we hope to organise another walk or two in the future and to continue adding to local records. All the data we collect is entered in to the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas.

*By Sally Bewsher*

## The latest from FOSC working bees

Our first working bee for 2026 was on February 1st. We met on Olinda Crescent where the walking track crosses the road. This area moving downstream is the site of our 2025 Landcare grant. Contractor works progressed here with removal of woody weeds and ivy up trees. The group continued with removal of ivy along the track and other weeds. Followed up with a drink and FOSC member Alex Maisey presenting 'weed of the month' as Mistletoe and it's important role in the environment.



Above (L): Alex Maisey talking about Mistletoe. Above (R): Our wonderful volunteers enjoying a post-bee cuppa. Middle (R): Volunteers tackling weeds under Beagleys Bridge. Bottom (R): Reaping the rewards of a job well done

Our next working bee on February 22<sup>nd</sup> had us return to Beagleys Bridge with 6 volunteers, working under the large bridge in the reserve.

There is a tributary here moving storm water traveling down from Kallista, behind houses on Monbulk Road and below Kallista tearooms. The tributary joins the creek just before it moves under Perrins Creek Road. The tributary had low water levels which allowed entry to the area under the bridge to remove weeds including tutsan, ivy, blackberry and monbretias along the edges of the tributary. It was a great day.



## The wonderful Wurun (Manna Gum)

Wurun, or Manna Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) is a well loved, fast growing upper storey tree that calls the Dandenongs home. The Manna Gum finds its home in deep moist loam soils, in valleys or low lying areas. Now in bloom, the pale yellow blossoms contain a rich nectar that smells like smokey honey. It is also a very thirsty tree, preferring an annual rainfall of >800ml and full sun to reach its full growth potential. In the warmer months its bark sheds in iconic long ribbons from the upper trunk and branches, making it easy to spot on walks in the forest.



Words by Ash Bond, photo by Alex Maisey

Importantly, the Manna Gum holds incredible cultural significance for our local mob the Wurundjeri People, who take their name from it. In the Woiwurrung language the word 'wurun' means the Manna Gum, and 'djeri', the grub which is found in or near the tree. Leaves from the Manna Gum are used in ritual in Welcome To Country.

Sources:  
[www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/PlantDirectory](http://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/PlantDirectory)  
[www.wurundjeri.com.au](http://www.wurundjeri.com.au)

## 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 this beautiful forest. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

## Get in touch with Friends of Sassafras Creek

Are you interested in joining FOSC or have a question about weeds in your garden? Have you got something you'd like to add or see presented in the newsletter? Wanna come to a working bee? We would love to hear from you!

[www.fosc.org.au](http://www.fosc.org.au)  
[foscreek@gmail.com](mailto:foscreek@gmail.com)  
[www.facebook.com/friendsofsassafrascreek](https://www.facebook.com/friendsofsassafrascreek)

