

Friends of Sassafras Creek

Newsletter Edition No. 2

April 2022



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

Good to finally be able to return to the reserve! With Covid restrictions reduced, working bees have resumed. So far we've had 3 main working bees: January (Beagleys Bridge) February (Secret Garden - first cleanup) and March (Warwick Farm Road entry to the Secret Garden). The Wednesday group have completed one working bee in February potting out seedlings. In March, the group has completed 3 activities removing weeds at Beagleys, Secret Garden and Lyrebird Falls.

Storm damage works begin. Parks have appointed Jarrod Megans to coordinate works starting in Sherbrooke Forest and Silvan area. Unfortunately for Sassafras Creek NCR the assessment has been done but no works yet. On the Parks web page it remains closed but locals are walking the tracks containing holes and debris.

Bridges are another story. Some are due for repair in September 22 & June 2023 but no plans yet for Lyrebird Falls bridge. We wait for a reply from a letter sent to the Minister for the Environment. Also Ms Cathrine Burnett-Wake (eastern member of Legislative assembly) asked a question in February; reply to come.

Work with Community Weed Alliance of the Dandenongs' VIF grant continues. Bill Incoll has processed the drone footage of the reserve (Perrins Creek to Kays picnic ground) mapping the Mt Ash and other trees in this area. Community engagement activities to follow. Following his talk on Vegetation and water quality of Sassafras Creek, Peter Lind took another workshop on Feb 26, to look at the fish populations at Beagleys and to sample macroinvertebrates, measure water quality and assess streamside vegetation (*continues on page 2*)



Sally, Judy, Eddie, Marion, Kellie and Alex re-potting native plants bound for revegetating at our upcoming working bees

(continued) Garrique Pergyl (Southern Dandenongs Community Nursery) looked at the vegetation here.

Planning for our Secret Garden grant continues. We have removed 2 trailers of rubbish and plan another day later in the year. We will be having a follow-up talk on the female lyrebird with Vicki Austin in May and also a community day showing weeding techniques to interested people. Our Melbourne Water grant works with contractor will begin soon. This is on the creek, below the hairpin bend in The Crescent, Sassafras. Also in May, Yarra Ranges Landcare Network will be having a meeting – details to follow.

Congratulations to Jasmine for publication of her fauna survey work in the reserve. Meghan is assembling the FOSC web page – looking great! Will let you all know when it is released. Thanks to Meghan, Jasmine and Ash for their continuing work on our excellent Facebook page. Always good to read! Thanks also to everyone who has come to our working bees – we have had several new people attending and always a great day! Amazed at how hard and dedicated you all are!

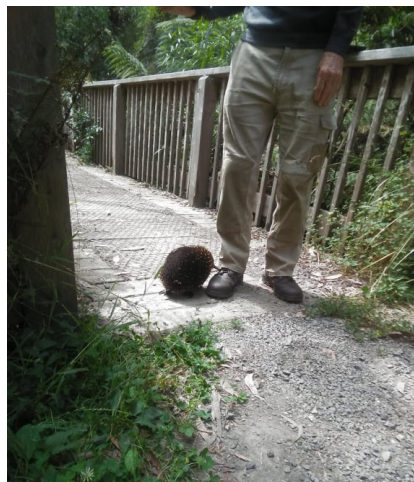
Jane Hollands
1 April 2022



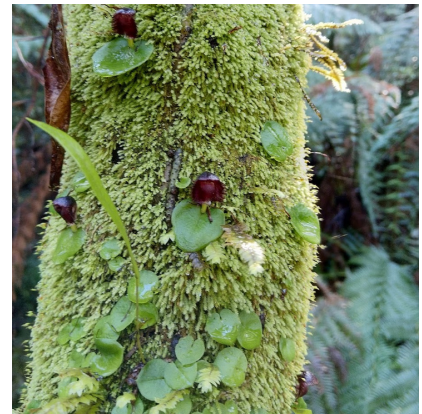
What a haul! Sally next to the trailer load of rubbish pulled out at the February Secret Garden working bee



A full house! Native seedlings and plants waiting for their new home at our upcoming working bees



An echidna making friends with Bill Incoll at the fish populations survey



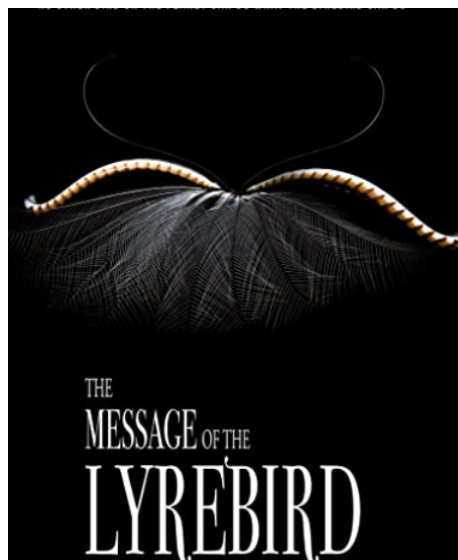
The rare Corybas Grumulus (aka Mountain Helmet-Orchid) growing on a tree fern along the Sassafras Creek

Volunteer with FOSC!



Are you keen to support our beautiful ecosystems and meet like minded people? Volunteer with FOSC! All are welcome. If you're interested, email foscreek@gmail.com to find out more.

The Message of the Lyrebird



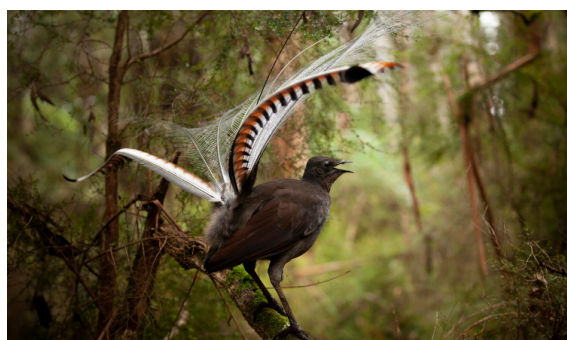
On February 12th Message of the Lyrebird premiered at Cameo Cinema, Belgrave to a full house of local nature lovers. Filmed in Sherbrooke Forest with the Sherbrooke Lyrebird Survey Group, this film showcased the characters (both human and lyrebird) known well by those who frequent Sherbrooke Forest. Congratulations to committee member Alex Maisey for the feature! The screening was a fundraiser to help the lyrebird group continue their study on the evolution of song and mimicry in female lyrebirds.

This editions bird feature - The (very!) Superb Lyrebird

Did you know the Superb Lyrebird holds the world-record for the most material moved, per unit area, of any animal on Earth? They undertake this remarkable “ecosystem engineering” process when foraging in the litter and soil for macroinvertebrates (insects, bugs, worms, crustaceans etc). In Victoria’s tall forests, lyrebirds shift about 155 tonnes of litter and soil per hectare, per year, in pursuit of their prey! The lyrebird is a long-lived (>25 years) iconic songbird of the Australian avifauna. Songbirds have the ability to produce complex sounds using a sophisticated voice box called a “syrinx”.

You may have seen David Attenborough’s *Life of Birds* series, in which a lyrebird produces perfect mimicry of kookaburras, rosellas and even man-made sounds like drills, camera drives and chainsaws. While it is rare to hear man-made sounds in the repertoire of wild lyrebirds, they never fail to astonish with the accuracy of their mimetic skill!

Male lyrebirds are quite the performers, producing this mimicry, along with many of their own sounds, to attract a female mate. Using his long and stylish lyre-shaped tail, a male lyrebird inverts his plumes over his head to display his feathers in coordination with a complex, rhythmic dance to accompany the song. This all takes place on an earthen stage, constructed in a patch of dense ground vegetation that provides the curtain backdrop to his performance, while expertly lit from above by a prominent gap in the canopy. Females appear to be very picky, so a male must work very hard to win the affections of a lady!



A mature male lyrebird in partial tail display on an elevated perch.



A female lyrebird banded in Sherbrooke Forest as a nestling in order to recognise her place of origin and age.

Female lyrebirds undertake all the nesting duties alone. She builds a large domed nest constructed with sticks, moss and fine fern rootlets to house the single egg, layed in the depths of winter. With her smaller brown tail feathers and dusky body plumage, she camouflages well when moving about the shady forest floor. The females are very selective about where they place their nests, preferring to build them on creek embankments in cool temperate rainforest, with good overstorey to conceal the nest from aerial predators such as Brown Goshawks or Pied Currawongs. Introduced foxes are a constant threat to nestlings, so the provisioning mother must remove the chick’s droppings. These droppings are coated in a gelatinous-sealed “faecal sac”, which is to be dropped into a creek or carefully buried in the soil to hide the olfactory (smelly) clues that may give up the location of the nest. Of course, lyrebirds were doing this long before foxes were roaming the continent, when native Tiger Quolls (now locally extinct) were most likely their key terrestrial predator.

In Sassafras Creek, a small population of hardy, street-wise peri-urban lyrebirds are defying the odds and successfully breeding among the roaming cats, dogs and foxes (there is no fox control in the nature conservation reserve due to its linear form and thus proximity to human habitation). Throw in the threat posed by traffic on the many roads that criss-cross the forest corridor, plus the squeeze on habitat by environmental weeds like English Ivy and Sycamore Maples... it’s a wonder that we still have them here at all!

If you live along the Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve and want to help lyrebirds prosper, you can 1) remove environmental weeds that choke out the native ground vegetation and therefore allow lyrebirds access to the litter later; 2) make sure your pets (and if you can, your neighbours pets) do not roam into the areas occupied by lyrebirds; and 3) join the Friends of Sassafras Creek at a dawn lyrebird survey in the winter breeding season to count the male lyrebirds in the reserve.

FOSC Youtube Channel

Did you know we have our very own Youtube channel? Keep on top of environmental talks and relevant info to do with the Sassafras Creek.

Some of our videos include:

- Peter Lind - Sassafras Creek: Vegetation and Water Quality
- Ian Smith - Dieback in the Dandenongs Forests and Gardens
- Yarra Ranges Council - 'How to Treat English Ivy' and 'How to Treat Woody Weeds.'

We've also got footage of the walking track in several sections from Teleopea Rd Emerald to the Sassafras township. These were filmed by Bill Incoll, looking at track conditions in 2018 - interesting to compare with now, after the June 2021 storm!

For more info, follow the link here:

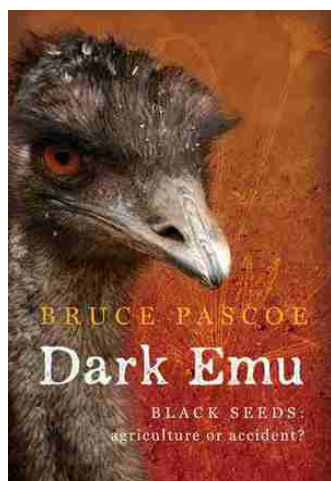
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAY3-8cxDqEjZp_D188jpiw

Upcoming working bees for 2022

24th April, 29th May, 26th June, 31st July, 28th August, 25th Sept, 30th Oct, 27th Nov

Time to fill the calendar! 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 some 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 Jane Hollands foscreek@gmail.com.

Book of interest - Dark Emu by Bruce Pascoe



Dark Emu is a non-fiction book that reexamines colonial accounts of Aboriginal people in Australia, and cites evidence of pre-colonial agriculture, engineering and building construction by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Author Bruce Pascoe argues for a reconsideration of the 'hunter-gatherer' tag and attempts to rebut the colonial myths that have worked to justify dispossession. The book includes compelling evidence suggesting that systems of food production and land management have been blatantly understated in modern retellings of early Aboriginal history, and that a new look at Australia's past is required.

Wandering Trad lookalike - Forest Hound's-tongue

Our last newsletter highlighted environmental weed Wandering Trad (*Tradescantia fluminensis*), the smut biocontrol developed to combat it, (*Kordyana brasiliensis*), and the great work done by Bill Incoll to supply the community with material to release. This edition we thought it a good idea to raise awareness of a local native plant that may be mistaken for Wandering Trad, and share some differences between the two.

Wandering Trad is a ground cover succulent. Stems are soft and very easily broken. The fleshy stems root at any node that is on the surface and spread via this vegetation as opposed to seeding. Leaves are oval dark green and shiny. Flowers are small white and three-petalled flowers with yellow tipped stamens.



Wandering Trad

To new eyes, Wandering Trad may look similar to one of our local native plants, Forest Hound's-tongue (*Austrocynoglossum latifolium*).



Forest Hound's-tongue

Forest Hound's-tongue is a trailing perennial herb with stems to about 100 cm long which are sparsely covered with small prickly-like hairs. They have ovate leaves and flower in spring, producing tiny white to pale blue 5 petalled flowers.

Get in touch!

Our brand new webpage is up - www.fosc.org.au. Email us - foscreek@gmail.com
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