



Newsletter

November 2017, Issue 2

Yellingbo Conservation Area Coordinating Committee

Background

The Yellingbo Conservation Area Coordinating Committee (YCACC)

YCACC was appointed in 2015 by the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water. The committee aims to improve coordination and collaboration between land managers and other agencies involved in the management of the Yellingbo Conservation Area. We are also establishing strategic priorities and clear directions for the area to assist land managers, local government and the community, to achieve better environmental outcomes. YCACC is guided by the recommendations outlined in the *VEAC Yellingbo Investigation Report and the Victorian Government response* to this report. The Committee first met in December 2015.

Yellingbo Investigation Area

The Yellingbo Investigation Area comprises 51,370 hectares. It includes the Dandenong Ranges and Yarra Ranges National Parks; and the towns of Yellingbo, Woori Yallock, Launching Place, Yarra Junction, Hoddles Creek, Cockatoo, Emerald, Monbulk and Seville [Click here for map](#).

Yellingbo Conservation Area

Within the Investigation Area lies the Yellingbo Conservation Area comprising 2,939 hectares. The geomorphic landscape within the YCA is complex and fragmented providing many challenges to integrated, coordinated and sustainable management. [Click here for maps](#).

We heard you.....

Some parts of the community think that the word "Yellingbo" does not accurately reflect the large area that will be the Conservation Area. We will be renaming the area and the community will get to vote. To find out more and have your say go to the [Engage Victoria website](#).

Welcome Message

Anne Langworthy

YCACC Convener

Welcome to the second issue of the YCACC newsletter! After completing stage one of our website redevelopment, we now have the capacity to produce regular email newsletters to our partners and the community members. I encourage you to sign up for future newsletters that will arrive via email. As I complete the YCACC Annual Report to the Minister, I reflect on the journey over my year as convener, the complexity of the Conservation Area itself, and the co-ordination required to effectively establish the Conservation Area under the National Parks Act in 2018.

Over the last months we have conducted five targeted consultation meetings which have provided rich and diverse feedback for the development of the Conservation Area Plan. The sessions have demonstrated not only the diversity of opinion but also the diversity of the values within the Conservation Area. The Conservation Area is such an important area in terms of ecological, and community value, but is also a relatively small area of just less than 3000 hectares.

It is important to note the valuable work that volunteer groups, adjacent landowner and individual are doing to protect the values of the conservation area.

We are just beginning to assemble good practice case studies and information resources to be included on the website; your contribution to these stories and information will be appreciated.

I look forward to sharing the next stage of the journey with you.

Anne Langworthy

Haining Farm

Thanks go to the Haining Farm Working Group and the DELWP YCA Project Manager, Victoria Purdue, who put in long hours from January to September this year helping to craft a final plan for the Haining Farm development.

The work done by the Working Group, Parks Victoria and DELWP has resulted in a plan which will deliver restored habitat for the threatened State Emblems—the Helmeted Honeyeater and Lowland Leadbeater's Possum—as well as paths and picnic areas for local community enjoyment. Yarra Ranges Council will also be providing a pathway connection to the Warburton trail which will allow the wider community to also enjoy the area. The Working Group with expert advice has contributed to the Bushfire Risk Management Plan for Haining Farm and the wider Conservation Area.

For details about the Haining Farm redevelopment project go to the *Engage Victoria* website.

The next step in planning...

The VEAC report and the government response provided clear direction regarding how the Conservation Area will be looked after. However more detailed planning is needed to determine how the area will be looked after on a day to day basis by the land manager. [A Conservation Area Plan](#) will be prepared, and we are seeking community input. For more information, and to participate in a survey, go to the *Engage Victoria* website.

YCACC have met with key Agencies who have an interest in the Conservation Area. We have also met with conservation groups, tourism and recreation groups, and industry groups. Please send us an



email if you would like someone to contact you regarding meeting with your group. Individual community members can access Engage Victoria for further information, and community consultations will be scheduled for early in 2018. Look out for these sessions on both the *Engage Victoria* website and the [YCACCC website](#).

Case studies

- **Development of a reach scale multi-function node on the Yarra River.** Presented by Dan Robertson from Melbourne Water, this detailed review of a particular reach of the Yarra river describes an unconfined alluvial flood plain waterway. The surrounding land use in the area and the main tributaries and the riparian vegetation in the reach. It details investment by Melbourne Water so far and future opportunities. ([see brief notes here](#)).
- **From Yellingbo to Butterfield Project: A community-led model of habitat restoration for endangered and threatened species.** Presented by Project Manager Gaye Gadsden this presentation describes how Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater along with project partners Maccelsfield, Monbulk and Johns Hill Landcare groups have established a project to work closely with landowners whose property adjoin the Woori Yallock creek south of the Yellingbo Conservation Reserve ([see brief notes here](#)).

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)

As well as having a representative on YCACCC, DELWP have a team of 4 staff that are dedicated to implementing the government response to the VEAC report. Key tasks that this team are working on are:

- meeting with adjacent land holders to discuss options for fencing, grants and rehabilitation work;

- organising meeting and engaging with the community regarding the development of the Conservation Area plan;
- working with the Office of Surveyor General to survey the boundary of the Conservation Area;
- working with key fire expert to ensure that the Conservation Plan will be based on a bushfire management plan that uses best-practice science and local knowledge in designing bushfire risk mitigation measures; and
- meeting with the CFAA and fire expert to develop the Conservation Area Bushfire Management Plan.

Melbourne Water

from Steve Hosking

Melbourne Water has invested significant resources into capital projects and incentive programs along the Yarra river. See below for two of these initiatives.

The Yarra Strategic Plan

Melbourne Water is leading the development of the *Yarra Strategic Plan*, which will provide the basis for the future planning of the Yarra river corridor and its reaches; and ensure the long term protection of the river and surrounding areas. Click [here](#) to see how you can be involved in the discussion.

The Healthy Waterways Strategy

Melbourne Water is developing long-term plans to ensure that the region's waterways are healthy, liveable and accessible for generations to come. Melbourne Water are asking community to influence the 10-year strategy for maintaining and improving the health of catchments, rivers, creeks, wetlands and estuaries by encouraging members of the public to contribute to the strategy by attending events and joining the conversation online. See [here](#) for details.

Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority (PPWCMA)

The *Port Phillip and Westernport Management Authority* is responsible for the development, implementation and oversight of the Regional Catchment Strategy for Melbourne and surrounding areas, including the YCA. Major projects relevant to the YCA area include: the *Dandenong Ranges Programme* where the PPWCMA is coordinating a range of community based projects designed to improve local biodiversity, habitat, and wildlife recovery whilst also reducing bushfire risk; and the *Yarra4Life program* – see below.

Yarra4Life

from Kacie Melfi

Yarra4Life is a major environmental project in the Yarra Valley that aims to protect, improve, increase and connect habitat for native animals including the Helmeted Honeyeater and the Leadbeater's Possum.

A long-term goal is to have habitat links from the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve north to the Yarra Ranges National Park, south-east to Kurth Kiln Regional Park and west to the Dandenong Ranges National Park, thereby expanding the habitat range for these and other native animal species.

Trust for Nature

from Ben Cullen

Trust for Nature works to protect nature on private land in Victoria. It is one of Australia's oldest conservation organisations, established in 1972 under an Act of State Parliament. The Trust collaborates with people and organisations to conserve habitat on private land, so Victoria's most threatened plants and wildlife can survive for future generations. The Trust has a unique power in Victoria, enshrined in legislation, to protect nature



on private land in perpetuity by applying conservation covenants to property titles in agreement with sympathetic landowners. The Trust is also empowered to purchase land with significant conservation values and facilitate its transfer to the Crown. By doing so, Trust for Nature has made a major contribution to the campaign to save the Helmeted Honeyeater and Leadbeater's Possum (Lowland) from extinction. The Trust has secured more than 150 hectares of land in the Yarra Ranges that includes important habitat for the Helmeted Honeyeater and Leadbeater's Possum (Lowland). The land is now held by the Crown as part of the Yellingbo Conservation Reserve. Trust for Nature itself owns a number of nature reserves throughout Victoria. Together with private land protected by conservation covenants, Trust for Nature has secured nearly 100,000 hectares of native habitat across the state.

Find out more at <https://www.trustfornature.org.au/>

Judith Eardley Save Wildlife Association

From Bob Anderson

The *Judith Eardley Wildlife Association* has recently provided funding to the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater to assist habitat restoration. This funding has enabled the purchase of the 'Bilagal' property in Macclesfield. Trust for Nature arranged the purchase which will be a significant addition to the Yellingbo to Butterfield project.



Bilagal © Gaye Gadsden

Community

Yarra Ranges Shire

YCACC Community Representatives

An opinion piece from Sue Tardif

The Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve (YNCR) protects plants, animals and whole vegetation communities that are not found elsewhere in Victoria, or Australia. Some of these are critically endangered, the definition of which is sobering, and includes "... a very severe reduction in numbers... its geographic distribution is precarious for the survival of the species..." There exists "... a relatively large risk of extinction in the wild..."

One of many species the reserve protects is the *Helmeted Honeyeater*. John Gould first described this bird on the 1st December 1867. Many surveys and publications since that time have documented community concerns about the survival status of the Helmeted Honeyeater. The community could readily see a significant decline in the population, and in 1967, the government of the time responded by setting aside the then Yellingbo State Wildlife Reserve (now YNCR), one of the few remaining habitat strongholds of the Helmeted Honeyeater. Public access to the YNCR—which is located within the wider Conservation Area—is closed to the public.

A closed reserve however, by definition, shuts people out. It's a dilemma. Why would we care about something we can't see, hear or touch? Closing the YNCR gates has been part of a long-term strategy to maximise the success of the Helmeted Honeyeater breeding program to ensure species survival into the future by increasing the number of birds in the wild population. The overall aim is for the Helmeted Honeyeater to be in areas where it can co-exist with people. As habitat links improve, they can find their own way elsewhere, but in the shorter term translocated (moved) to other more publicly accessible spaces.

It can be tempting to think the Helmeted Honeyeater, and other endangered species are doomed. That if they can't survive in the world then let them go. Another perspective is that all species have a place in the world, and our wants, as humans, shouldn't override the needs of those



Helmeted Honeyeater © Sue Tardif

other species. We can co-exist, if we choose to. Recent scientific modelling that included variables such as a 50-year climate projection and known habitat requirements of the Helmeted Honeyeater (from 150 years of accumulated knowledge) has shown a handful of areas where the Helmeted Honeyeater could live and thrive, if we choose to allow it. Most of this is in the Yellingbo Conservation Area.

In 1967, 166 Helmeted Honeyeaters were known to exist in the wild. This declined to 50 individuals in 1989. You'd think a 'weak' species might succumb to such low numbers, but just six years later the population had doubled. Then, one of the worst droughts in recorded history hit south-eastern Australia. Could a weak species survive that blow? Helmeted Honeyeater numbers were definitely impacted (as were many native and farm animals), but today, the population is close to 200 individuals, with an additional population in a captive breeding program at Healesville Sanctuary. Over the past three breeding seasons, breeding success has broken records. The signs are again



good this breeding season, with 22 fledglings already and 17 birds having their first successful nesting attempts. In a few months, the female offspring will disperse (move away from where they hatched) to find a mate and place in which they can raise young.

The seemingly simple but current big challenge is that they just need somewhere suitable to go.

Bushfire

Bushfire risk mitigation has been one of the key drivers in the development of the Conservation Area Plan. Bushfire risk management experts Kevin Tolhurst and Justin Leonard have been employed to analyse risk factors and mitigation strategies for the Conservation Area. Their research is underpinning the development of the Conservation Area Bushfire Risk Management Plan which is also being informed by consultation with the local CFA brigades. A presentation on the Bushfire Plan will be made to the December YCACC meeting.

Safer together - A new approach to reducing the risk of bushfire in Victoria details the Victorian Government approach to strategic bushfire management planning. A new *Victorian Fire Management Strategy* is currently being developed. A discussion paper can be found on the Engage Victoria website [here](#). Submissions from individuals and organisations can be made [here](#). Community feedback will contribute to the development of the Draft Victorian Fire Management Strategy.

See also Parks Victoria bushfire management information [here](#).

Pest and Weed Management

There are growing concerns about pests (plant and animal) in the existing crown land including the increasing damage by feral deer.

Community consultations so far have highlighted the importance of pest (plant and animal) removal to the restoration of habitat in the Conservation Area.

The DELWP YCA Implementation Team and Melbourne Water have funded some projects to remove weeds and restore habitat.

In addition volunteer programs involving *local Landcare groups* and the *Community Weed Alliance of the Dandenongs (CWAD)* are addressing weed infestation problems in the Conservation Area and surrounds.

The Shire of Yarra Ranges have an extensive range of *information about weeds* including a list common garden and agricultural plants that are environmental weeds ([see here](#)).

We will be developing an issues paper on pests (plant and animal) for the next newsletter.

Volunteers

Our next newsletter will highlight more of the collaborative projects being undertaken by volunteer groups and agencies in the Conservation Area.

Sign up to our e-news

Future newsletters will be in e-news format.

Please go to www.ycacc.com.au and sign up to YCACC e-news. This process will update our mailing list and ensure we have the appropriate permissions in place to send you ongoing information about developments in the Yellingbo Conservation Area.

More Information?

Please contact YCACC Executive Officer at enquiries@ycacc.com.au

