

Your New Committee

Please welcome our new President Olga Wilkinson and Committee elected by our members at the AGM held at Tidal River Information Centre thetrette on Sunday 17th July.

Olga has been a member of Friends of the Prom for about 8 years. Many of you will be familiar with Olga's welcoming and friendly face at Friends of the Prom activities and around the Stockyards campsite with her A-van. She introduces herself: *I joined Friends of the Prom eight years ago. I now attend Prom Nursery every fortnight and all our working bees. My childhood holidays were at the Prom every year. Barefoot and free it's a special place.*

I am retired and live on a farm with my husband in the Mirboo North hills."

We wish Olga all the best in her new President role.

The Committee is now:

- ▲ President – Olga Wilkinson
- ▲ Vice-President – Deb Henry
- ▲ Secretary – Karin Ruff
- ▲ Treasurer – Peter Wilson
- ▲ Ordinary Committee members – Lisel Thomas, Alex Blazejewski, Kelsey Fraser, Peter McDowell, Keith McDougall, Bill Hansen.

We welcome three new faces on the Committee, and asked them to introduce themselves:



KEITH MCDOUGALL

Over the past 40+ years, Keith worked as a plant ecologist / pathologist in Victoria, WA and NSW, but recently retired to the beach at Phillip Island. He joined FOTP with fond memories of summer holidays at the Prom in the 1970s. He holds an honorary position at La Trobe University.



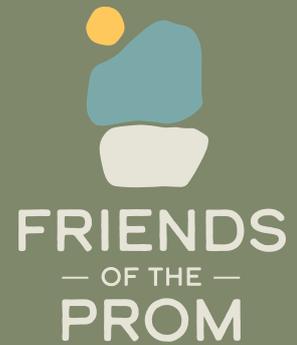
ALEX BLAZEJEWSKI

A passionate landscape designer with a love for indigenous Victorian plants, I am a horticulturist at heart with experience in landscaping, project management, administration, plant propagation as well as many other creative pursuits. In my landscaping business I am privileged to regularly work with indigenous plants and improve local ecology.



LISEL THOMAS

I live in Melbourne's inner west but the Prom is my happy place. I've been a FOTP member for a few years now and figured it was about time to join the committee. I'm also part way through an attempt to hike every track shown on the Rooftop's Wilsons Prom map.



WHAT'S INSIDE

- 1 Your New Committee
- 2 Notes from your Committee
- 3 Grazer Monitoring Project
- 4 — 7 Presentations at AGM
- 8 Koala Habitat Restoration Project
- 9 Completing the Circle
- 10 Winter is the time for Planting
- 11 Nursery News
- 12 Calendar of events

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Notes from your Committee

We were delighted when one of our Committee members, Kelsey Fraser, was able to attend the June 2022 Coastcare Forum at Inverloch on 6 June and give a presentation “Restoring Hooded Plover Habitat at Prom beaches”. We received lots of very positive feedback on her presentation.

These regional (and State) forums are valuable experiences for personal and group development. They are an opportunity for members to rub shoulders with like-minded volunteers doing interesting things in other parks and reserves, and to learn from them.

Park Closure

Parks Victoria has notified us that Wilsons Promontory National Park will be CLOSED from 5 pm Sunday 14 August to 8 am Friday 19 August 2022.

The closure will allow for important park management and conservation programs to take place, including the annual deer control program to reduce the deer population in the park.

Sambar and Hog deer cause significant environmental damage by grazing, trampling, and forming wallows, threatening the health of native plants, and destroying habitat for native animals.

Below:

Ghost fungus: This photo of the fungus was taken at night by one of our regular volunteers, Eddy Pang, scientist and photographer.

Eddy explains that “Each one is made from a stack of six 5-minute photos. To the naked eye they appear as faint “ghostly” objects. We’re lucky that they’re coming up just next the campground. We may expect them to come up every year in this spot.”



Grazer Monitoring Project

This year's monitoring program started on a fine winter's day, Tuesday 14 June, with 9 volunteers visiting the marked sites to remove all accumulated grazing animal dung within a 3 metre radius under the supervision of rangers Megan Underwood and Daniel Gunn.

This was in preparation for the first count on Tuesday 2 August by 10 volunteers under the supervision of Jim Whelan.

So on 2 August, under Jim's eagle eye, a small group of 10 set off in several directions to discover how many pellets had been deposited since the sites were cleared.

Rabbits were the predominant numbers; some groups counted up to 100 in one area! Other sites showed wombat, wallaby and deer in smaller numbers.

For the botanically minded, Early Nancy plants were flowering

and many markers were hidden behind lush growth ... and quite a challenge to discover the markers, often hidden by scrub and fallen wood.

The weather was kind despite forecast showers, and we enjoyed a sunny morning in one of the remote areas of the Prom.

We welcome two new attendees; Pat O'Malley and Tim Wall.



Photos: Ranger Jim handing out tally sheets, carefully measured string, marker pens to identify site numbers and pencils to score dung pellets; tiny fungi - can anyone identify? (Tim Wall); happy dungflingers (Lynne Muir)



Presentations at AGM

We were very lucky to have two really interesting presentations at the AGM. The first, by Area Chief Ranger Brett Mitchell, brought us up to date with current planning and management of the Prom.

He explained the difference between the Prom Revitalisation project and the Prom Sanctuary project —

▲ The Prom Revitalisation project is about capital works (\$23 million) on built assets i.e. the exclusion fence across the Yanakie isthmus, new roofed accommodation inside and outside the park, a new Telegraph Saddle trail to connect Tidal River and Mount Oberon, improved car-parking and traffic management options and an upgrade of the Tidal River visitor precinct.

▲ The Prom Sanctuary project is about creating a 50,000 hectare climate change safe haven where some of Victoria's rich wildlife and habitats are free from the pressures of introduced predators and pests. Firstly it aims to eradicate deer, rabbits, foxes and feral cats from Wilsons Prom to reduce the threat of predation on native species such as the Southern Brown Bandicoot, Long-nosed Potoroo, Ground Parrot, New Holland Mouse, Eastern Pygmy Possum and Hooded Plover. Secondly, it aims to restore natural vegetation communities by controlling introduced weeds and over-abundant native species such as Coast Wattle and Coastal Tea Tree. Finally, being situated on the southernmost point of

mainland Australia, Wilsons Prom is naturally sheltered from the dramatic impacts of climate change. Through the Prom Sanctuary project, it will become the perfect place for threatened species, plants and animals, whose habitat in other parts of Victoria is suffering and may never be the same again. Only recently, 17 critically endangered Eastern Bristlebirds were translocated 870 km to the Prom from the Jervis Bay area of NSW. The aim of the translocation was to increase the species' long term prospects of survival.

Some of the other important points Brett made are –

▲ Planning and design for the exclusion fence across the Yanakie isthmus is well under way and is proving to be a substantial exercise in itself because of the high number of difficult and sensitive issues to be addressed such as vegetation loss, cultural heritage, high value habitats, the fence's

terminal points (especially the Shallow Inlet side) and understanding coastal processes and mobile sand dunes.

▲ Engagement with traditional owners is now a large component of planning and management at the Prom.

▲ Fire management is an important tool for maintaining the ecological health of the Prom, for example, for controlling unwanted invasive plants. The Prom now employs its own fire ecologist who is involved in planning ecological burns and providing advice on fire management at the Prom more generally.

▲ Currently, there is a strong emphasis on feral animal control programs at the Prom. Over the past year, there were 9 operations to reduce hog deer numbers, and programs targeting predators such as foxes and cats. Different methods of humane trapping are being trialled.



Above: Eastern Bristlebird (Photo: DELWP website)

Presentations at AGM

▲ Storm damage repairs to walking tracks are taking a long time because of the enormous amount of damage inflicted. Norman Bay to Oberon Bay track should be re-opened by the end of 2022. The Windy Saddle to Sealers Cove track will remain closed until at least spring 2023. The entire two kilometres of the Sealers Cove boardwalk needs replacing.

▲ The current Prom Conservation Action Plan, dated 2017, contains restoration plans and detailed actions for key ecological vegetation classes (EVCs) in the Park. It informs all conservation work at the Prom, and is the basis for our own Hooded Plover and Koala Habitat projects. The plan is to be reviewed in 2023.

▲ Approval has been given for a much overdue review of the Wilsons Promontory NP Management Plan. Parks Victoria will review and update the Management Plan for Wilson's Prom and this will take into account the various projects going on.

The management planning process will include extensive engagement, both in the development of the draft and feedback on the draft. Parks Victoria staff are doing preliminary work for the process, but they cannot yet confirm when the public discussions and engagement on the plan will occur.

The review will take in the marine as well as terrestrial areas and islands. Expect a formal announcement

soon. The new management plan is expected to place a strong emphasis on cultural heritage. The review would address many of the questions raised by members at the AGM, such as –

- Visitor carrying capacity of the Park and the possibility of charging day visitors;
- Future of the Big Drift walk (subject to many cultural heritage sites);
- Future of the Stockyards campsite. For the time being camping at Stockyards is available only to *Friends of the Prom* volunteers during authorised weekend activities.



Photos: Sealers Track 2022: Damage to Sealers Track boardwalk (Photo Parks Vic.)



Restoration Ecologist, Brooke Love, gave the second presentation at the AGM on restoring vegetation communities at the Prom. She talked about three major projects

1. YANAKIE ISTHMUS COASTAL GRASSY WOODLANDS PROJECT

- ▲ A history of cattle grazing until as recently as 1992
- ▲ The Prom has 75% of the State's remaining Coastal Grassy Woodland EVC and 100% of the Calcareous Coastal Swale EVC.
- ▲ Restoration has been focussed up to now on an area referred to as Varney's Grassland.
- ▲ Control of unwanted invasive plants such as Tea Tree has been tried using a number of methods – ecological burning, slashing, and weedicide application. A combination of mulching and burning is the most effective method of controlling large swathes of Tea Tree. The first ecological burn was 2012, the second series of burns was 2015 to 2017, and the third 2020 to 2022.
- ▲ The results have been very satisfactory. Large areas of Tea Tree thicket have been replaced by open grassland supporting Kangaroo Grass and various herbs and small shrubs.
- ▲ The Grazer Monitoring project uses *Friends of the Prom* volunteers (aka the dungflingers) to collect data for assessing grazing animal populations in this area.

2. AIRBASE RESTORATION PROJECT

The soils in this area have been greatly disturbed – e.g. ground levelled to form the runways.

- ▲ The area is infested with the introduced weed Fleabane. The team is currently working on possible control methods.
- ▲ Part of the airbase has been planted out with Swamp Gums and Manna Gums under the *Friends of the Prom's* Koala Habitat Restoration project. The plan is for the remaining area to be open grassland and herbage.



- ▲ Tea Tree and Coast Wattle are coming back over the whole area and need to be controlled, but the method of removal is yet to be fully determined, likewise the problem of overgrazing.
- ▲ The team is now considering the next phase, which may involve creating a trial large enclosure area of around one hectare, planted out with local grasses and herbs propagated in the *Friends of the Prom* Tidal River nursery.
- ▲ They are also keen to link into a project studying koalas as a threatened species. They want to understand which genetic strain Prom koalas belong to – are they part of the Strzelecki strain or some other one? How many persist at the Prom and are they in decline or recovery? A possible *Friends of the Prom* project is to collect koala scats for analysis to determine their genetic strain and provide data regarding abundance and distribution.
- ▲ Visitors to the park are encouraged to download the free app iNaturalist if they have a smart phone. This app allows you to record an observation of interest e.g. koala, and have it included in a scientific spatial database – your phone automatically records the location and artificial intelligence assists with identification of species.

Left: Restored part of open grasslands, spring 2021 (Lynne Muir)

3. WILSONS PROM LANDSCAPE TRAPS RESTORATION PROJECT

- △ A landscape trap is effectively a 'hole' in the tree canopy and there is evidence these areas once supported damp old-growth forest. But after several fires in succession (possibly before the 1950s), the natural re-growth of canopy trees was suppressed, allowing dense scrub to take over, creating areas that are dry and fire-prone. This ambitious project, funded by DELWP is a trial to test out the method to restore old-growth forest at two trial sites at the southern end of the Prom (not far from Roaring Meg campsite) each with an area of 16 ha.
- △ The project would employ arborists to collect the fruit (seed pods) from suitable eucalypts in the locality to be passed on to the nursery for processing – enough seed for aerial seeding, 16 kg, is the target.
- △ Herbicide will be applied aurally to dry off the vegetation to facilitate burning.
- △ An ecological burn will be done in spring either 2023 or 2024
- △ The areas will be aurally sown with Eucalypt seed.
- △ The project will seek assistance from *Friends of the Prom* for processing the Eucalyptus fruit to extract seed and viability testing of seed. It could also assist with vegetation surveys before and after treatment.
- △ This project is very much a trial and will be closely monitored to see what works and what doesn't, utilising Adaptive Management principles.
- △ The project will consider provenance of the eucalypt seed, testing both local and sources elsewhere for viability and resilience. For example, the Mountain Ash growing at the Prom was found to be a Mountain Ash/Messmate hybrid – has the appearance of Mountain Ash but genetically nearly 90% messmate.
- △ The cooler/damper climate of the Prom means that some vegetation in the rest of the mainland could have a better chance of survival here.

Photo: one of the many landscape traps scattered across the forests of the Prom, some up to 300ha. (Jim Whelan)



Koala Habitat Restoration Project

It is hard to beat a day out amongst the wildlife on the Isthmus on a perfect autumn day.

Everything went according to plan for our tree planting activity on Saturday 21 May – well almost everything.

42 volunteers turned out to plant trees around the former airfield site. This was a truly gratifying turn-out for one of our activities, even though it was about 30% more than we had planned for. The down-side was a shortage of tools and some volunteers may have felt under-utilised, but on the upside volunteers seemed to enjoy planting 170 trees for Koala habitat, all protected with steel tree-guards. We could easily have installed all 200 tree-guards, but 30 guards were kept aside.

Several groups of volunteers carried out maintenance on our previous plantings – replacing unviable trees and cutting back encroaching scrub. They were able to remove tree-guards from about five trees from one of our early plantings because the trees were judged large enough to survive on their own.

There was one discordant note. One of our volunteers, Lisel Thomas, was struck on the head by a falling star picket while kneeling to plant a tree. Ranger Cassie was quick to apply first-aid to stem the bleeding and, as a precaution, ranger Maggie drove the patient to Foster Medical Centre to be checked out. In this case the accident turned out to have no serious consequences, but it did shake us up a bit. It reminds us to always be mindful about the risk of accidents and that safety must be top of mind for everyone.

Lisel offered us this account of the valuable lessons learnt from her experience:

Lesson 1: Catching a star picket with the back of your head hurts.

Lesson 2: Hats provide more than sun protection. The cut to my head would

likely have been worse if I hadn't been wearing my straw hat.

Lesson 3: The rangers are kind and well prepared. The rangers on duty cleaned my wound and drove me to the hospital in Foster to have my injury assessed.

Lesson 4: Take your credit card. Unfortunately the emergency services at the hospital in Foster are privately provided and you need to pay to see a doctor.

Lesson 5: The other volunteers will do whatever they can to help you, including warning you that you shouldn't be driving after a head injury and driving your car back to the camp site for you.

Lesson 6: Not being able to drive for 24 hours isn't so terrible if the place where you are stuck is the Prom and you get to take a hike up Vereker Outlook with friends while you are waiting.

Lesson 7: The glue used to stick a wound back together takes ages to get out of your hair, especially because they twist the hair on either side of the wound together to pull the cut closed.

Lesson 8: This is the most important one. If a star picket nearly falls on your head, tell someone. My injury could have been averted if it had been realised earlier that leaning the pickets on the tree guards was a potential accident in the making.

Thank you to everyone who made the day a success – the volunteers for being patient and doing the work, rangers Cassie, Maggie and Max for making sure it all went smoothly, Cam Downing (Parks Vic) who did an amazing job to provide clear access to the planting sites and to other Park staff who transported the tree-guards from Yanakie out to the site.



Photos: Mark, Abigail and Jackie with a freshly planted tree; Eddie (Mr Gadget) with his nifty drill augur (Olga Wilkinson); Justin and Antoinette planting (Eddie Pang); Morning briefing at the former airfield; Olga showing planting techniques to the group (Eddie Pang).



Completing the Circle

On Thursday 28 July, ten Mirboo North SC students and their teacher Allan Risely met two of our volunteers, Olga Wilkinson and Bill Hansen, and Prom education ranger, Bill Playne, to plant 30 trees out at the former airfield site and install all our remaining tree-guards.

This same group of students built many of the tree-guards in two visits to Yanakie earlier in the year, and they were keen to experience

first-hand how the tree-guards are put to use. The weather gods smiled on us, turning off the rain squalls for the duration of the tree planting and turning on the sunshine – perfect planting weather. The local fauna turned out in force to observe us from a distance.

After planting the trees, the students had time to continue on to Tidal River where Mary Walker gave them a lightning tour of the nursery.

They saw where the trees that they had been planting were propagated from seed. We left them heading for the café.

We thank the Mirboo North SC students and their teachers for their big contribution to the Koala Habitat Restoration Project over the past 6 months. They have helped us complete our grant obligations for Stage 3 of the project.



Photos: Parks Vic's Bill Playne briefing the Mirboo North SC students planting trees and installing tree-guards.



Winter is the time for planting

Nature has taken its toll on the tree canopy within the Tidal River campsite and parts of the low sandy ridges between campsites along 34th Avenue have the appearance of being hit by a cyclone. Two tree-planting activities in July were aimed at restoring a canopy of She Oak and Tea Tree along this ridge. On Saturday 16 July, 36 volunteers got to work removing the tree guards from casuarinas that had grown to 3 or 4 metres tall since we planted them between 3 and 5 years ago. We also planted grasses

and the prickly Sweet Bursaria but without tree-guards as they have a lower risk of being grazed by the local fauna.

Only two weeks later, on Sunday 31 July, we were at it again for National Tree Day. We thank the 28 eager volunteers, including quite a few new ones, who planted 265 trees in bare areas along the ridge. We planted mainly She Oak and Tea Tree, with the time consuming part being the installation of tree guards to protect the plants from grazing deer, wallabies and wombats. We

worked until 1:00pm then we called it a day as there were no more long wooden stakes and the BBQ lunch was ready. We want to thank Park staff, Cam Downing and Daniel Gunn, for arranging the activity and preparing a delicious lunch for the hungry volunteers.

Sunday 31 July was also World Ranger Day, a day celebrated worldwide that gives us the opportunity to thank rangers and celebrate the work that they do to protect the planet's natural treasures and cultural heritage.



Photos: Olga and Mary demonstrating planting techniques (Photo: Wendy Jacobs); Passing on wisdom? Or looking for worms (Photo: Wendy Jacobs) Morning briefing by Cam and Maggie (Photo: Bill Hansen); National tree day volunteers, also thanking park rangers on World Ranger Day;



Nursery News

The nursery operations are continuing as normal – maintenance around the nursery compound, propagation of plants from seeds stored in our controlled temperature cabinet, maintenance of the display garden outside the café, weeding and maintenance of previous plantings around the camp ground and some planting. The nursery group enjoys helping

out Park staff with their Prom Junior Ranger program in the school holidays. The young children are always eager to try their hand at planting seedlings and installing tree-guards.

The nursery group has been conducting small experiments with various seeds collected by ranger Brooke Love from the Isthmus. For example, we have sown seed

from emu dung to identify, count and record any plant species that germinates – so far we have identified Coast Wattle, Cassinia and Pig Face amongst others. The experiment will show us what plants emus rely on for food, and allow researchers to ponder what environmental impact their feeding habits might have.



Top: Junior Ranger program – planting with Nursery volunteer Bill Hansen (Photo: Lucy Stephens); the nursery crew planning tactics for National Tree Day; Christine, Mary and Cam at work at the nursery's propagating table; Junior Ranger program – Ranger Brooke Love wearing a different hat



EVENTS CALENDAR FOR 2022

Except for the nursery, which is every 2 weeks throughout the year, we will email out details of all activities before the dates shown.

WEEKEND ACTIVITIES

SATURDAY 24 SEPTEMBER

Tidal River tree planting and clean-up of plantings amongst the camp sites.

FRIDAY 4, SATURDAY 5 & SUNDAY 6 NOVEMBER

3-day sea spurge removal – various locations

WEEKDAY ACTIVITIES

TUESDAY 6 SEPTEMBER

Grazer monitoring project (aka the Dungflingers)

EVERY SECOND THURSDAY

Tidal River nursery – every second Thursday (Register on *ParkConnect* or contact Mary Walker).

REGISTERING WITH PARKCONNECT

Please remember to register for all activities on ParkConnect and make sure you have a Working with Children Check loaded on to ParkConnect. WWCCs are now compulsory (unless you are volunteering with us for the first time). If you need assistance with navigating your way through ParkConnect or the WWCC process, you can contact Friends of the Prom's Peter McDowell by email pdmcdowell101@gmail.com.

NEW MEMBERS

**We extend a warm welcome to new members —
Susan and Peter Boyle;
Bron Elmore and Phil Slattery;
Lisa Grady;
Jo Wainer.**

MEMBERSHIP FEES

You don't have to be a financial member to participate in our activities. But we urge those of you who have attended more than one or two activities to become financial.

Your membership fees keep us afloat (just) – without them we cease to exist. The fees we receive are low and only just cover our basic running costs, most importantly our public liability insurance.

To renew your membership, please contact our Treasurer Peter Wilson at membership@friendsoftheprom.org.au

You can pay via Direct Deposit to our Westpac account:
Account Name:
Friends of the Prom Inc.
BSB: 033 152
Account Number: 188795

**Single: \$15, Couple: \$20,
Family: \$25**

Please remember to provide your full name as a reference so we can identify you on the bank statement.

CONTACTS

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