

FRIENDS OF BRAESIDE PARK NEWSLETTER

March 2008 no. 2



BRAESIDE PARK

Astronomy Night	2
Activities Calendar	3
Indigenous Gardening cont.	4
Noisy Miners & Revegetation	5
Nursery Report	6
Park Report	6



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Stars in our eyes



ASV member at the scope, 2005, photo: www.asv.org.au

How long would it take to drive your Alpha Romeo to Alpha Centauri? How do you pronounce Betelgeuse? How big is it?

Everyone who attended the Stargazing Night on March 6th learned the answers to the above and other weighty questions. Perry Vlahos, a Vice President of the Astronomical Society of Victoria (also a frequent guest on ABC 774 Radio), led us on a quick tour of the skies, 'touching' the main stars with his powerful laser pointer.

The astronomers, including a few females, set up at least 10 telescopes on the lawn south of the Visitors' Centre, each scope focussed on a particular sky object. The longest queues formed at the Saturn scope. Other features included the Horsehead nebula in Orion, The Jewel Box (in the Southern Cross), and

Alpha Centauri (the bottom Pointer to the Southern Cross), actually a double star. Die-hards stayed at the scopes until after 10.00pm when clouds formed at a high dew-point.

About 50 people attended; it was great to see so many youngsters in the group. Shame about the urban light pollution, which meant that we could barely see the Milky Way and some constellations that were low in the sky. Perry warned that the fifth star of the Southern Cross will disappear from view in our cities unless we reduce unnecessary outside lighting.

We need to contemplate the vastness of the universe now and then; we humans think we are so important, but we are the merest pin-prick in our cosmos. Thanks go to the Friends Committee and to the Astronomical Society of Victoria for a terrific night.

Answers to questions:

To drive to Alpha Centauri would take roughly 40 million years, give or take a few million, if you observed the speed limit. (This star is our closest, being only 4.3 light-years away.)

Betelgeuse (Orion's shoulder) is pronounced 'betel-gers'. Since it is a 'red giant', Betelgeuse is very, very big; it would swallow up a sizable proportion of our solar system. (If you want to know exactly how big it is, you'll have to look it up, or attend a stargazing night.)

NEXT COMMUNITY PLANTING DAY If Autumn rains come Saturday 26th of April 9.00am to noon

Follow the arrow signs to planting site

A Bouquet to Ron Pearson

By Elsie Anderson

On Sunday 16 March our plant nursery had several interested visitors. They were looking at facilities for a Community Native Plant Garden. Both novices and experts in plant propagation were very impressed with

our activities. We said Ron Pearson had established and led the nursery team for many years and our current success was because we practised what he had taught us. Unfortunately Ron is no longer able to take an active part in our work, but his legacy lives on.

Thank you Ron. You have been a good teacher.

Thanks To The Helpers
Those who helped produce the newsletter:

Elsie Anderson
Bev Bancroft
Ian Parsons
Park Rangers

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Friends of Braeside Park

ACTIVITIES CALENDAR

Activity	Time/Day	April	May	June
Committee Meeting	4th Monday, 1:30pm at the Visitor Centre	Cancelled	26	23
Community Projects Weekday	9:00 - 12:00 noon Wednesday at the Park Office	2 9 16 23 30	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25
Plant Propagation Nursery Facility	10:00 - 12:00 noon 1st Sat & Mon 3rd Wed & Sun	5 7 16 20	3 5 18 21	2 7 16 18
Seed & Cutting Collection Meet at Robin Car park	10:00 - 12:00 noon The Fri. before the 1st Sat. of the month	4	2	6
Water Quality Monitoring Meet at the Park Office	9:00 - 12:00 noon 3rd Tues	15	20	17
Community Projects Weekends	9:00 - 12:00 noon, follow the signs	Community Planting Sat. 26th (Autumn rain permitting)	Community Planting Sat. 24th (Autumn rain permitting)	Community Planting Sun. 29th
Special Activities		French Island Trip Sat. 12th Stony Point Tankerton Ferry Jetty 9.50am		Autumn Mystery Tour Sun. 1st Park Office 9am

FRENCH ISLAND EXCURSION 12 APRIL 2008

From Margaret Hunter

The Friends Group is holding a trip to French Island in Western Port Bay on Saturday 12 April 2008, leaving Stony Point at 10.00 am sharp. Bookings are being taken for this trip by **Margaret Hunter** on **9588 0867**. Cost \$15.00, plus the ferry fare of \$14.00 concession/senior, or \$20.00 full fare. The \$15 fee includes a bus tour of the island with French Island Eco Tours organised by Rod Johnston, plus a tour of the former French Island prison, now an eco-farm.

Travel to Stony Point by car pooling or by train from Frankston. BYO Lunch and snacks; morning and afternoon tea will be provided by the Friends group. Information is available on request from Margaret via email at: margaret.hunter3@bigpond.com or by phoning **9588 0867**.

French Island is well worth a visit to experience its unique island environment, with birds, fantastic beach scenery, flowers and good company. All are welcome to participate.

Wanted: Bar Frig

Our Plant Nursery needs a small bar frig in good condition for storing seeds. The nursery shed gets very warm at times; better storage will prolong seed life. If you are willing to donate a good bar frig, please contact **Marj Seaton** on **9570 6293**.

Indigenous Gardening, part three—Ground Cover Plants

By Kaye Proudley

There are many ground covering plants to choose from but don't just think of those plants that creep and trail, think clumping plants and grasses because these also can be thought of as groundcovers. So too, lilies and orchids. They all cover the ground, especially if planted closely enough.

Prostrate Creepers and Runners

To start with there are prostrate creepers and runners like Running Postman (*Kennedia prostrata*) with its letterbox-red flowers and obtaining a spread of up to 2 ½ metres; Bidgee Widgee (*Acaena anserinifolia* which used to be *novae-zelandiae*) which I suggest only for sock-less and pet-less gardeners because of its burr seed heads that transport themselves from place to new place by exactly those means. It still remains a hardy, soil-binding, weed-smothering plant that can cover up to 4 metres and is attractive with its ferny looking foliage.

There is Creeping Bossiaea (*B. prostrata*) with pretty yellow and brown pea flowers attaining a spread up to 1 ½m, a dainty plant with grey-green leaves and last; Kidney Weed (*Dichondra repens*) which is not a weed at all, has a very insignificant white flower, but covers a large area by rooting at its nodes to form a mat.

There are two more plants in this section that would very definitely deserve pride of place in anyone's indie garden but whether you can get them is another matter. I speak first of Honey Pots (*Acrotriche serrulata*) a very low and slow growing, dense shrub up to 1m. with greenish tubular flowers under the foliage, which later become the honey pots, that aboriginal people relished.



Honey Pot flowers © Ilma Dunn

Secondly, Cranberry Heath (*Astroloma humifusum*) at around 1 to 1 ½m., in time, is another dense mat



plant with slightly prickly leaves and brilliant red tubular flowers along its branches, but under the foliage, at most times of the year.

(Ed's note: both plants usually available at Bayside Community Plant Nursery.)

Cranberry Heath
© Colin Bower

For coastal gardens there are a couple more – Pigface or Karkalla (*Carpobrotus rossii*) that will easily cover 2 to 3 m. with its succulent leaves and bright purple flowers, both of which aboriginals ate fresh; and Glistening Saltbush (*Atriplex billardieri*) growing to almost a 1 m. spread with small green flowers. This last is now an endangered species in Melbourne and I'm not sure if anyone still grows it.

If you have wet, moist or damp places in your garden (do such places exist these days?!) there are a few extra choices you could make, like Angled Lobelia (*L. anceps*) and Poison Lobelia that is only poisonous to stock (*L. pratoides*). Both are prostrate, spreading herbs with pale blue flowers, the latter with a touch of white, and neither like the Lobelia we know from florists, or only superficially so! Creeping Raspwort (*Gonocarpus micranthus*) is quite a pretty plant in flower and very different to most plants, its red flowers so minute to be almost invisible on their own, but thrown together in masses on red stems as they are, make quite a definitive statement.

Native or Ivy-leaf Violet is a fairly fast-spreading mat of kidney shaped leaves with white flowers and a touch of purple at its heart. It will cover an area up to 2 m. And last but definitely not least; one of my all-time favourites would have to be Creeping Monkey Flower (*Mimulus repens*), which is another node-rooting, creeping plant with attractive mauve flowers with yellow centers that will cover a damp area (say beside a water feature) up to about a metre.

(Continued on page 5)

Indigenous Gardening, part three—Ground Cover Plants, cont.

By Kaye Proudley

(Continued from page 4)

Orchids lilies and irises

Now we get onto my favourites, the grasses, lilies and orchids. I'll deal with orchids first because it is probable that not many of local stock are to be had, more is the pity. Greenhoods (*Pterostylis* species) would probably be the easiest to find as they reproduce easily, as would Onion Orchids (*Microtis* species). You may be lucky to find someone selling Sun Orchids (*Thelymitra* sp.) or even luckier Tongue Orchids (*Cryptostylis* sp.) or Donkey Orchids (*Diuris* sp.) If you can find them, purchase immediately! Then watch the nature-show when they flower, as the little wasps come in to "mate" with them and in so doing, perform fertilization for the orchid.

Next are the lilies – Chocolate (*Arthropodium strictum*) and Vanilla Lilies (*A. milleflorum*) are "must haves" by my reckoning, flowering at different times with the Vanilla usually coming in after the Choccies have faded, and both of a mauve or violet hue and small grass-like clumps. They are named after the scent they supposedly give off, though I've never been able to smell them. They will seed readily and give you plenty of free plants but never be a bother. Leaves die down to a fleshy rootstock and come again next season. I wonder if they were hybridized, would we get Neapolitan? Yellow Stars (*Hypoxis* sp.) if you can get them are exactly what they sound like and are very fine, growing to just 20 or so cm. high (with only 3 or 4 leaves per plant) and go unnoticed till they flower.

Last are Flax-Lilies (*Dianella* species) that all produce blue to purple berries after flowering, and come in 5 varieties locally. These are Flax-Lily (*D. longifolia* var. *grandis*), Pale Flax-Lily (*D. longifolia* var. *longifolia*)—

which grows in a clump 30 to 80cm high X 50cm wide with panicles of light blue flowers; Spreading or Black Anther Flax-Lily (*D. revoluta*)—which grows up to a metre tall (but usually shorter) and can spread by rhizomes in time to 2 ½ metres and has bluer flowers than the Pale. Small-flowered Flax-Lily (*D. brevicaulis*) is a smaller plant all round with its flowers hidden down amongst its leaves and preferring sandy soil. Last is Tasman Flax-Lily (*D. tasmanica*) which is the giant of the mob – having taller, wider leaves and much larger berries, growing up to 1 ½m tall X up to 2m wide. All the Dianellas will grow happily, and flower, under trees.

Short (needing a moister position) and Long Purple-Flag (*Patersonia fragilis* and *P. occidentalis* respectively) are clumping plants of the Iris family growing from 10 to 20cm X 40cm with bright, deep purple flowers for the former and 20 to 40cm X 30 to 60cm high with blue-ish purple flowers for the latter. The Short presents its flowers down amongst the foliage whilst the Long presents its way above the foliage.

May I just say here that the people who gave many of our plants their names have a lot to answer for! I know back in those early days, knowledge was not what it is today and plenty of indigenous plants were given a bad name because they got in the way of 'good' introduced pasture grasses. But still...it is hard to sell someone Poison Lobelia or Sneezeweed or Kidney Weed or Sheep's Burr; but far easier to sell someone on the idea of Fairy Lanterns or Sweet Wattle or Purple Eyebright or Running Postman, all so attractive. A good excuse I believe for a few more name changes....aagh!

Coming in May: grasses.

Noisy Miners and Revegetation

From articles in *The Victorian Naturalist*

Our cities and gardens are increasingly dominated by that pugnacious local, the Noisy Miner (*Manorina melanocephala*). These birds are symptoms of how much we have altered our country.

In pre-European times, Noisy Miners were most likely much less common; they preferred open grassy clearings in Eucalypt forests adjacent to water. Clearing and agriculture have greatly expanded the birds' habitat and being adaptive, they have taken advantage of the change. Unfortunately for smaller birds, the Miners also communally defend their territory—driving almost all other birds out.

Currently, over \$6 million is spent annually on revegetation in Australia. But how much replanting is just creating more Miner habitat? Research shows that Miners will dominate the area up to 300 metres from a

vegetation edge. Hence, narrow corridors of reveg. will only favour Miners over the small insectivorous birds.

To make revegetated sites unattractive to Miners, plant corridors should be more than **600m wide** and any projections into unvegetated area should be included in planted area, thus rounding out the vegetation profile. Small woodland remnants should be joined up and complex habitats created. This practise also favours mammal and bird diversity.

References

- 'Use by birds and mammals of habitats of different complexity...', A.M. Wallis et al. *Victorian Naturalist*, v.124 (3), June 2007.
'Challenges in managing miners', M.F. Clarke et al. *Victorian Naturalist*, v. 124 (2), April, 2007

Nursery News—Waiting for Rain

By Marj Seaton

We are full!

The igloos are full of happily growing seedlings. The shadehouse has boxes and trays on all benches and all over the floor, even growing *into* the floor. As we continue to prick out, we'll need to shift quite a lot of stock outside to the hardening off areas and pray that not too much hot weather follows. Planting should start, hopefully, in April if the weather's right, and that will ease the congestion somewhat.

Student Visit: At the end of February we had a visit from some energetic and hard-working students of Mentone Girls' Grammar. They pricked out over six boxes of plants and washed about 13 or 14 boxes of tubes. This was much appreciated by the regular volunteers who had a few jobs up their sleeves to start the next session. Thank you MGGS. They sure kept their teacher and the three Propagating Friends overseeing them busy.

More Volunteers: We are all getting old. If anyone is able to help us find more volunteers in the propagating area, we would certainly appreciate it. No knowledge of growing Australian plants is required as we all learn on the job. Although we'd love to have some young people join us, we understand that they are always busy so maybe if there are any recent retirees out there, they might be interested in spending the odd hour or two helping the Park and the Community by keeping our area green. Contact Marj Seaton on 9570 6293 for further information.

Seed Collecting: At the end of February we collected some sweet bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*), the bush with the pretty creamy white flowers at the ends of the branches, and some of the remaining Lomandra. We also found a sedge which we have not grown before and expect to need to use a bog method to germinate it. The Wedding bush flowered very well last spring but there has been very little seed set. We haven't been able to get it to grow in the past so we're not too disappointed.



Bayside Bursaria seed-laden Photo: VL

Park Report—All the Rabbits Run

From Ranger in Charge Des Lucas' monthly reports

Park Rangers

Lisa Freeman finished at the Park in February, but she will be back for work experience. Lisa is working on some history projects in the Park. Des and Ernie recently celebrated 30 years working in Victorian parks.

**The next community planting is on
Saturday 26th of April,
from 9am to noon.
If autumn rains have begun.
Follow the arrow signs to planting
site.**

Pest Animal Program—Rabbits

Due to the ongoing dry conditions, our resident rabbits are breeding nearly non-stop. It is estimated that one pair of bunnies could produce over 700 offspring per year because of the extended breeding season.

Rangers are monitoring rabbit numbers every 2 months. Their population data show that an estimated 5,000 rabbits are living in the Park.

Pest Plant Program

The spraying program has concentrated on thistles, Paterson's Curse and woody weeds such as Borgan.

Community Garden

The Community Garden, near the Plant Nursery, had an Open Day on the 16th of March.