



MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

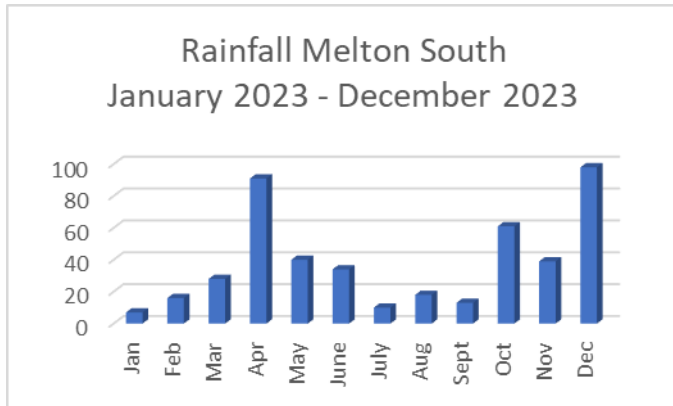
JANUARY 2024

Volume 13

WILDLIFE RESCUE

Ring: 13 000 94535

DECEMBER



A cold & wintry start to summer & a wet end to 2023! 32mm rainfall between 27th November – 1st December. 13mm at the beginning of summer- 43 mm in a week. Followed by fierce thunderstorms a week later. Sadly a bit late to save those of our plants that succumbed to the dry spring so soon after planting, but it should give the survivors a new lease of life. The weeds will no doubt also benefit greatly! Christmas saw an unseasonal Victoria-wide downpour. Melton South received 73mm rainfall & thunderstorms over three days of Christmas. There is again a large waterfall flowing over Exford Weir

DECEMBER ACTIVITIES:

Eynesbury Environment Group: planning meeting

EEG had a a planning meeting on Wednesday 6th December at Eynesbury Homestead

Eynesbury Environment Group

Christmas breakup Friday 8th December 6.00

Eynesbury Environment Group's end-of-year Christmas Party was unfortunately cancelled due predictions of stormy weather.

It has been postponed to Friday 3rd February. It will be a BBQ at the tennis courts near the Discovery Centre, starting at 6.00. BYO drinks

PLEG Christmas breakup



On Thursday 14th December Pinkerton Landcare & Environment Group (PLEG) held its 2023 Xmas breakup at the Green Shed in Pinkerton Forest. Irene, Rosemary, Lorraine, Jenny, Simon & Daryl were joined by Frances who came all the way from Anglesea, & Kellie of NatureWest. We were joined by Laura of Themeda Ecology (Environmental contractors for Pinkerton Forest) & three of her team. The Forest was looking spectacular with few weeds. There are still some Galenia but Laura & her crew are removing these.

After the wild & woolly weather of the previous few days the day was pleasantly warm. The wind that threatened to pick up remained mild. We even had a surprise visit from our own resident Brown Snake who decided to sneak past us into its home in a hole at the base of the tree beside the Shed! The snake (presumably the same one) has lived here for some years & occasionally appears on our trail camera. First impression could have been that the snake was behaving aggressively, heading directly into our midst. However it was intent on getting to

the safety of its home beneath the tree. This is often the case when people are standing between a snake & its home, where the snake's attempt to find safety in its home is mistaken for aggression. However Brown Snake bites can be deadly so they are best avoided!

JANUARY ACTIVITIES:

Possum Walk at Hannah Watts Park Saturday 20th January 7.00pm – 8.30pm

In November we had to cancel our newly re-instated Possum Walk at Hannah Watts Park to visit the Possum Tree, due to rainy weather. We had to cancel these walks due to several year's Covid lockdowns. The walk is along a concrete footpath (no bushwalking in the dark!). We *should* be able to guarantee to see possums. Numbers of possums live in the Possum Tree and they emerge at nightfall to feed on picnic leftovers in the playground. This is a child (& elderly person!) friendly event, with possums (virtually) guaranteed. (sadly nothing in life is guaranteed!)



In past years it was held on Friday evening to better coincide with Bird Week in Melton. However, Saturday may suit people better now.

Meet in Hannah Watts Park carpark at 7.30 (7.00 for those who wish to snack before walk. Tim Tams provided! Please wear sturdy shoes and bring a torch. We will be walking on a paved footpath!

COMING ACTIVITIES

Eynesbury Environment Group Christmas breakup Friday 3rd February 6.00

Eynesbury Environment Group's end-of-year Christmas Party was unfortunately cancelled due to stormy weather. It has been postponed to Friday 3rd February. It will be a BBQ at the tennis courts near the Discovery Centre, starting at 6.00. BYO drinks

Eynesbury Environment Group Meeting Wednesday 7th February 6.00

EEG's first meeting for 2024 will be on Wednesday 7th February at Eynesbury Homestead. Arrive at 6.00 for tea for a 7.00 start

Pinkerton Landcare & Environment Group Meeting Thursday 15th February 2024

PLEG's first meeting for 2024 will be Thursday 15th February at 10.00 at the Green Shed in Pinkerton Forest

Other coming activities

Latham's Snipe survey dates 2023-2024 January 13.

Melton Botanic Garden is an important stopping point for Latham's Snipe on their epic migration between northern Japan, Manchuria & Siberia; & southern Australia.

Dr Birgita Hansen writes:

'Hi all

*The 2023-2024 snipe surveys dates for the upcoming season are, **November 11th and January 13th** I hope that you might all be available again to assist. Please put these in your calendar.*

In other news, I have had a few people ask what happened to the snipe wetland guidelines we workshopped last year. They are coming! I am hoping to have them drafted and to Melbourne Water for comment in the next fortnight. So I expect them to be ready in mid-winter.

Cheers

Dr Birgita Hansen

Senior Research Fellow, Federation University
Australia Mount Helen, Suite 14B, Greenhill
Enterprise Centre, PO Box 691 Ballarat Vic 3353

BIRDWATCHING IN MELTON

Birdwatching activities in Melton are now confined to two groups.

These include:

- Pinkerton Landcare & Environment Group
- Eynesbury Environment Group

PLEG / Werribee Wagtails:

Bird surveys at Pinkerton & Eynesbury

Pinkerton Landcare & Environment Group (PLEG) & Werribee Wagtails once again invite the community to join them birding at Pinkerton Forest & Mulla Mulla Woodland (Bush's Paddock) in the morning.

Within the greater City of Melton, over 170 different bird species have been recorded. About 127 bird

species have been recorded at Pinkerton & about 170 at Eynesbury to date. Wedge-tailed Eagles regularly nest in these woodlands. These quarterly surveys provide valuable data as to both bird diversity & numbers in these woodlands. Citizen science in action! We may see some of the many kangaroos that live in all three of these sites.

Pinkerton is private property located at <http://goo.gl/maps/drFnS.0-p;l./>; As you drive up Mt Cottrell Road from Werribee there is a group of houses on the left. The gravel track to Pinkerton (behind a locked gate) is just before the first house (1668 Mt Cottrell Road). Mulla Mulla Grassland (formerly Bush's Paddock) is accessed by the same track. For more info: John McKenzie jackmack37@hotmail.com; or Daryl Akers daryljpolyanthemos@outlook.com; Meet at Mt Cottrell Road. Melway Map 221 Ref H8 Gates open 8.45 am, walk starts 9.00

Bird surveys are held quarterly on the third Sunday of February, May, August & November

Eynesbury Environment Group

The Eynesbury Environment Group's nature walks are back for 2023. Join us for a guided walk through the Eynesbury Grey Box Forest and discover why it is one of the most important woodlands around Melbourne.

Meet outside of the Eynesbury General Store. Bring long pants, walking shoes, water, binoculars (available to borrow), camera. All walks are free! All ages, bird watching abilities and interest levels welcome. More walks and events are added throughout the year. For further details, updates or to join the Group contact us at: eynesbury.environment.group@gmail.com; or follow Eynesbury Environment Group on Facebook.

Melton Bird Walks

extra bird walk in January!

Melton bird walks are held on the third Saturday of the month.

There have been no bird walks in December or January. December is usually too busy with Christmas & end of year functions, while in January many people are away on holidays. However, it has been suggested that we could have our first bird walk of the year in January. A bushland setting may be impractical & possibly unsafe in midsummer. All our walks take place on tracks or paved footpaths.

Perhaps we could reschedule our cancelled Possum Walk in January?

It has been suggested that perhaps we have an extra bird walk in January. Over the history of Melton bird walks, the walks have not taken place in December or January. December is traditionally a very busy period with end of year and Christmas functions, with little spare time for bird walks. Likewise, many people have been on holidays in January.

All walks begin at 9.00.

Note: on Fire Ban Days or where there is a prediction of thunderstorm activity or high winds, bird walks in old growth woodlands (Eynesbury Forest or Melton Gilgai) will be cancelled for safety reasons (to avoid potential danger from falling trees or branches). In adverse weather conditions the Eynesbury walk will be around the ornamental lake.

Bird walk schedule for 2024

Eynesbury Environment Group: Bird Group Possum Walk at Hannah Watts Park Saturday 20th January 7.30pm – 8.30pm

In November we had to cancel our newly re-instated Possum Walk at Hannah Watts Park to visit the Possum Tree, due to rainy weather. We had to cancel these walks due to several year's Covid lockdowns. The walk is along a concrete footpath (no bushwalking!). We should be able to guarantee to see possums. Numbers of possums live in the Possum Tree and they emerge at nightfall to feed on picnic leftovers in the playground. This is a child (& elderly person!) friendly event, with possums (virtually) guaranteed.

Saturday evening may be more convenient. In past years it was held on Friday evening to better coincide with Bird week in Melton, & avoid a school night. However, Saturday may suit people better now. The weather in January should also be less unpredictable,

Meet at the carpark/rotunda at Hannah Watts Park Please wear sturdy shoes and bring a torch. We will be walking on a paved footpath. Meet in Hannah Watts Park at 7.30.

Saturday 17th February Caroline Springs

Caroline Springs wetland has a rich variety of waterbirds. A birdlife oasis in the midst of the western suburbs. One of Melton's best waterbird sites. A paved footpath is on both sides of the

waterway. Meet in the carpark in the new shopping centre beside the large lake at the entrance at Caroline Springs BLVD. Melway 358 Ref G4

Saturday 16th March Eynesbury

Eynesbury is a 200 hectare Grey Box Woodland with over 150 bird species observed so far, as well as a small ornamental lake rich in wetland birdlife. A rare opportunity to see woodland bird species. Toilet facilities, general store, restaurant & bar! On Fire Ban Days, walk will be around the lake only. Eynesbury Discovery Centre Melway 226 Ref H1

Saturday 20th April Little Blind Creek

Little Blind Creek flows through Melton, meeting Toolern Creek at Hannah Watts Park. It is home for large numbers of birds. The many old hollow trees provide nest sites for many hollow-nesting birds & possums. Meet in Guide Hall carpark in Pinkerton St (off Yuille St opposite Melton Golf Course). Melway Map 337 Ref C8

Saturday 18th May Melton Botanic Garden

Melton Botanic Garden features plants that tolerate a dry climate and low water conditions. It is one of Melton's finest birding sites. Gather at the information Shelter near the corner of Williams & Tullidge Streets.. Melways Map 337 Ref: C10 and D10

Saturday 15th June Hannah Watts Park

Hannah Watts Park is a popular park, beside Toolern Creek, in High St, just east of the shopping centre, opposite the golf course. Melway Page 337 Ref D9 Saturday 20th July Toolern Creek (Big Red) Toolern Creek (Big Red) There is a footpath that runs along the creek. The creek forms a corridor for birds & other wildlife through Melton, from Toolern Vale in the north to the Toolern Regional Park in the south, thence to the Werribee River. Melway Ref 337 C9

Saturday 20th July Toolern Creek

Toolern Creek (Big Red) There is a footpath that runs along the creek. The creek forms a corridor for birds & other wildlife through Melton, from Toolern Vale in the north to the Toolern Regional Park in the south, thence to the Werribee River. Meet at Tamar Drive Melway Ref 337 C9

Saturday 17th August Strathtulloh

Strathtulloh Woodland is a remnant regenerating Grey Box Woodland overlooking Toolern Creek Meet in Strathtulloh Circuit Melway 343 Ref A12

Saturday 14th September Melton Gilgai

Melton Gilgai Woodland (Harkness Road Woodland) is a remnant Grey Box/ Yellow Gum woodland. We hope to see a variety of woodland birds. Perhaps also some of the 100+ kangaroos that live here.

Meet in Harkness Road Melway map 330 Ref B11 Drive through Melton along High Street, west along the old Western Highway toward Bacchus Marsh.

Turn right (north) into Harkness Road, just before descending into the deep Anthonys Cutting. There is a woodland a few km down the road.

Saturday 19th October Eynesbury Forest

Eynesbury is a 200 hectare Grey Box Woodland with over 150 bird species observed so far, as well as a small ornamental lake rich in wetland birdlife. A rare opportunity to see woodland bird species. Toilet facilities, general store, restaurant & bar! On Fire Ban Days, walk will be around the lake only. Eynesbury Discovery Centre Melway 226 Ref H1

Saturday 16th November Long Forest Mallee

Long Forest Mallee (LFM) is a unique Mallee remnant between Melton & Bacchus Marsh. Long Forest Road Melway 335 Ref E3

OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL EVENTS

National Eucalypt Day Saturday 23rd March,

Held annually on 23 March, National Eucalypt Day aims to raise awareness of eucalypts and celebrate the important place that they hold in the hearts and lives of Australians.

'The National Eucalypt Day program aims to meet the promotion, education and conservation objectives of Eucalypt Australia by addressing the themes of tree breeding and genomics, primary education and public awareness.

'Eucalypt Australia is the operating name of the Bjarne K Dahl Trust. It is a charitable trust that awards grants to support the conservation, education and research of eucalypts.

inaugural National Eucalypt Day on 23 March 2014. The 23rd of March 1898 was the birthdate of the Trust's benefactor, Bjarne K Dahl.

Eucalypt Australia supported the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria to create a series of videos on how to select, grow and maintain suitable eucalypts in the home garden.'

[https://www.eucalyptaaustralia.org.au/cool_timeline/national-eucalypt-day-turns-10/;](https://www.eucalyptaaustralia.org.au/cool_timeline/national-eucalypt-day-turns-10/)

This could be a day to celebrate our own iconic Grey Box, the defining species of Eynesbury Forest.

Wattle Day

September 1st, the first day of spring, is recognised as Wattle Day in Australia.

According to the Wattle Day Association: *'Since 1992 National Wattle Day has been 1st September in all of Australia's States and Territories. Before then, Australians in different States celebrated wattle day on different days between August and September.'*

[https://wattleday.asn.au/;](https://wattleday.asn.au/)

Noted ornithologist & early Field Naturalists Club of Victoria member A J Campbell, founded the 'Wattle Club' & advocated the creation of a 'Wattle Day' to commemorate these most well-known of Australian flowers; & as a celebration of Australia. Wattle Day is a fitting day for environmentalists, especially local ones, to celebrate. A J Campbell founded a Wattle Club in Victoria in 1899 to promote a Wattle Day demonstration every September to encourage recognition of the flower as a symbol of patriotism. In 1908 he delivered a lecture entitled 'Wattle Time; or Yellow-haired September' in which he stated that 'by numbers, the Wattle is almost exclusively Australian, and should undoubtedly be our National Flower'.

Melton has a long historic connection with Wattle Day. A J Campbell was a member of the Pinkerton family, early settlers at Melton. Their property was beside the Werribee River, where Western Water's treatment plant stands today. It is still known today as Pinkerton Forest. His interest in birds & natural history was no doubt fuelled by many visits to Pinkerton Forest & the nearby Werribee River. According to Wikipedia: *'the first recognised use of wattle as a symbol of the first day of spring was the formation in 1899 of a 'Wattle Club' in Victoria by Mr A. J. Campbell, a field naturalist. For several years the club organised bush outings on the first day in September. The first suggestion of a Wattle Day was made by Mr Campbell during a speech in September 1908.'*

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wattle_Day;

There are almost 1000 species of Wattle in Australia. The Golden Wattle possible our best known native flower, is the official floral emblem of Australia; & our national colours are green & gold,

reminiscent of wattle trees. The Golden Wattle is the floral symbol of Australia. Details of Wattle Day can be seen on: [http://wattleday.com/;](http://wattleday.com/)

Melton Wildlife

Fruit Bats

A small number of huge fruit bats, (aka Grey-backed Flying Foxes) appeared in a Melton South backyard on the 1st December, marking the first night of summer 2023. Possibly not the first night they have visited but the first time they were observed. They appeared to have a wingspan of almost one metre! One fruit bat was seen dead hanging from power lines in Brooklyn Road.

The eyes have it!

The water trough at Pinkerton continues to be a focus of wildlife activity. About eight kangaroos have also returned to Pinkerton. This mother with a joey was caught on camera at the water trough.



Kangaroo with joey Pinkerton

This kangaroo showed an inordinate interest in the tap at the Pinkerton water point. It investigated the tap for some minutes, on camera. Perhaps it can sense water here or perhaps there is a slight leak or drip.



Kangaroos in Mulla Mulla Grassland

About 60 Kangaroos were seen grazing in the patch of grassland recently burnt in October. The Kangaroos were quick to take advantage of the green pick that grew after the burn.



Kangaroos in Mulla Mulla Grassland

Juvenile Wedge-tailed Eagle in Bush's Paddock



This juvenile Wedge-tailed Eagle perched just above its nest was photographed by David Jenkins on the last PLEG/Werribee Wagtails bird survey in Mulla Mulla Woodland (aka Bush's Paddock) in November. Pinkerton Forest & Bush's Paddock continue to provide precious habitat & nesting sites for these & other birds.

Lorikeets nesting at Brookfield



These Rainbow Lorikeets were seen nesting in one of the nestboxes provided by MEG. They were built by Melton Mens Shed & painted by children from Melton primary school children.

Frogs spawning in response to heavy rains



Frogspawn in Melton Gilgai Woodland

The massive rainfall event over Christmas triggered an equally massive frog spawning event in & around Melton. Melton Gilgai Woodland, in Harkness Road, was loud with the calls of Spotted Marsh Frogs, accompanied by one lone Pobblebonk. Although most gilgai depressions were filled with water the frogs were only spawning in the single deep pool beside the road. Perhaps the smaller, shallower depressions may not hold water long enough to allow tadpoles to grow to adulthood. The larger waterholes that form the upper reaches or Arnolds Creek between the woodland & the cemetery are no doubt also the scene of this same massive spawning event. The pool only fills with water a few times per decade or so, after heavy downpours. Other nearby dams & roadside puddles had similarly large numbers of frogspawn, easily visible from the road.



Frogspawn in roadside puddle Toolern Vale

Also visible from local roads were large numbers of puddles & farm dams, similarly lined with frogspawn. One roadside puddle near Toolern Vale had perhaps 100 rafts of frogspawn! Sadly many of these shallow roadside puddles may not last to allow the tadpoles to survive to maturity.

Possum taken by fox

Our fox was caught on camera with an animal in its jaws that looks suspiciously like a Possum. Hopefully it is a rabbit but the ears don't look long enough. Our Possum that regularly appears on camera is still there each night so it must have been be another Possum wandering at large. The juvenile that was on its mother's back last month was again accompanying its mother, but less closely, so the fox appears to have taken another possum. Immature wildlife can sometimes be unwary. Looks like the fox goes on the 'wanted' list!



Night blooming cereus cactus



Large cactus

These night-blooming cactus growing in Melton South (possibly *Cereus* species) flowering spectacularly over the Christmas period opening for two nights only in mid-late December. The first species grows to almost two metres in height. The spines are small, soft & inoffensive, hence its

proximity to the back door! Its enormous dinner plate sized white flowers are 20cm in size, with yellowish bracts.

The second, smaller cactus grows to about 1.5 metres tall, with considerably fiercer & longer spines. The slightly smaller flowers are saucer sized with pinkish bracts.



Smaller cactus

The honeyeaters & lorikeets that feed in the plants only a metre away ignore it so the nectar is possibly not to their liking. Or perhaps the large flowers are difficult to access. Honeybees seem to be the only insects that visit them. The faint aroma is distinctive although not pleasant. It also never sets fruit or seeds so presumably it must be missing those insects, birds or bats that would pollinate it in its native America.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Wishing everyone a Happy New Year

Take care on the roads!!