

FRIENDS OF HODDLES CREEK NEWSLETTER



FOHC Newsletter is also on line at www.provender.com.au/fohc.

Thanks to Yarra Ranges Council for printing of the Newsletter.

Prescribed burns: will they protect your home?

An International team of researchers led by Dr Phillip Gibbons of the Australian National University has recently released the results of a study of house loss on Black Saturday. The study indicates that a shift in emphasis away from broad scale fuel reduction burning towards intensive actions closer to property may be more effective in reducing house loss and hence loss of human life from wildfires in peri-urban communities.

What you can do

The study emphasises the extreme importance of landholders managing fuel close to their homes in order to reduce risk. Reducing the amount of trees and shrubs within 40 metres of houses was singled out as the most important effective action that can be taken.

The study confirms previous research

indicating that the effects of prescribed burning can diminish within a period of 2-5 years after the burn and also under severe fire weather conditions like those on Black Saturday.

The findings of this study, especially the relatively short-lived benefits of prescribed burning, are significant. Given that historical 'natural' fire intervals in our local forests can be measured in decades not years, FOHC is concerned that high frequency broad scale prescribed burning could result in significant loss of biodiversity, without playing a key role in protecting life and property.

A copy of the complete report on house loss on Black Saturday is available at the FOHC website (www.provender.com.au/fohc). The next issue of the Newsletter will examine more aspects of fire in native forests.

Rare plants found in Hoddles Creek: secrets to be revealed at February 20 meeting

Over the past year or so, botanist Dr Graeme Lorimer has undertaken detailed studies of the plants growing in the Hoddles Creek Education area and along the banks of Hoddles Creek. The studies were commissioned by Friends of Hoddles Creek and funded by grants from Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water.

Graeme, along with a team of enthusiastic FOHC helpers, has made some exciting discoveries and will be presenting the results of his work in an illustrated talk at 7 pm on Monday, February 20 at the Hoddles Creek Primary School, on Gembrook Road (more details on page 3). Come along and be educated and amazed.

More rare plants have been discovered by

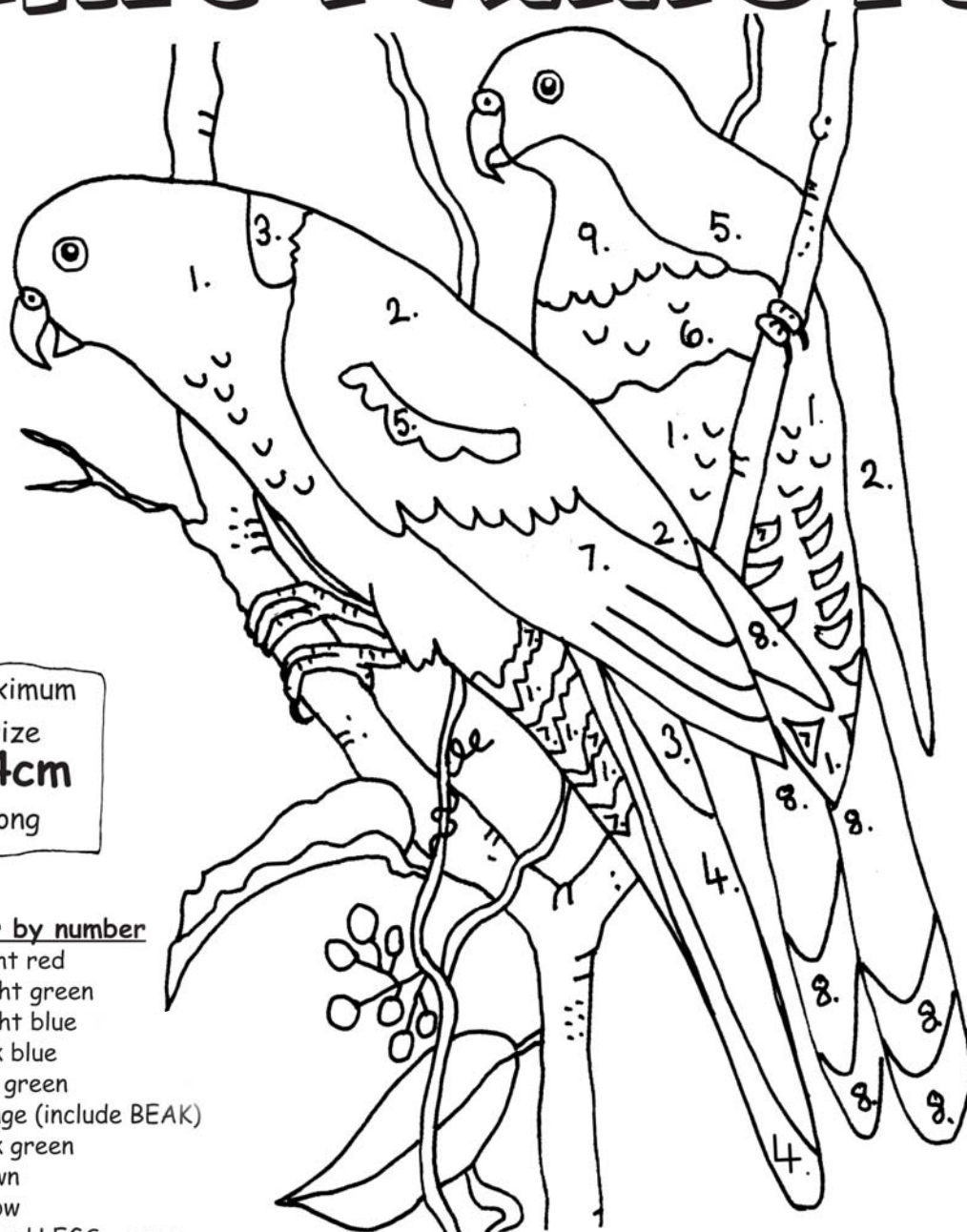


Thesium rodwayi, Fairy Lanterns (Photo by Keith Jesse)

FOHC president Keith Jesse, on his Hoddles Creek property. *Thesium rodwayi* (Fairy Lantern) is a very unusual plant, with only the small (less than 18 mm) red flowers visible above ground. It grows in leaf litter and has white scale-like leaves on an underground stem. *Thesium rodwayi* is listed as vulnerable, with only a handful of sites known in Victoria.

DSE and FOHC would be very keen to hear of any other sightings of this plant. We'd also love to hear of any other unusual animal or plant stories you may have.

KING PARROTS



Maximum
size
44cm
long

Colour by number

1. bright red
2. bright green
3. bright blue
4. dark blue
5. pale green
6. orange (include BEAK)
7. dark green
8. brown
9. yellow

FEET and LEGS - grey

TUMMY PATTERNS - dark green

EYE - reddish brown

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Here's a chance for you to show us your artistic side by colouring our feathered friends, the king parrots. There are four prizes to be won – one for adults, one for teenagers and one each for primary school aged boys and girls.

The adult winner will receive a \$20 gift voucher from Country Gardeners Nursery, the best teenage entry a \$20 gift voucher from Yarra Junction Pharmacy, while the best young entries will receive prizes valued at \$20 from Launch Hardware (boys) and Free Choice Stores, Yarra Junction (girls).

Entries must be received by Wednesday February 29 and should be mailed, with your name, address and phone number, to FOHC Competition, PO Box 298 Yarra Junction, 3797. Winners will be notified and the results will be published in the next issue of the Newsletter. Thanks to the four local businesses for their generous support in providing prizes for the competition.

Organics made easy: a simple way to healthy delicious vegetables

We've all heard a bit about organics – not harming the earth and what it produces with the use of chemicals and herbicides. Sounds good, but what does it mean for you? Well, for a start, it can provide healthier and more disease resistant plants in your home garden, by improving the biology of the soil.

Local grower Patricia Reeves mixes up a tonic to increase the microbial activity in the soil on her farm. Using a 10-20 litre bucket, Patricia's recipe combines liquid seaweed, fish emulsion and fulvic acid (available from large stores like Landmark), as directed on the labels, with worm 'juice' from her worm farm, with a bit a molasses and fine lime. She then puts about a cup or so of well rotted and

lively compost (if you don't have a compost heap, look for some rotted litter, preferably damp, from under a tree) into an old stocking and hangs it in the bucket, filling the bucket with water. This needs to be aerated for 12 to 24 hours to oxygenate it so as to multiply the microbes already in the compost (a fish tank aerator works fine).

Once this process is completed the mix is ready to use. Dilute the mixture at least 1 part to 10 parts rainwater and apply in clear weather preferably with rain due in a few days. Just sprinkle it over the soil in small droplets – you can use a spray backpack or a bucket and sprinkle with a paintbrush – you need it to apply it like raindrops and not in large quantities (the aim is to increase the microbial activity in the soil).

Vegetation Survey & Mapping Project for Hoddles Creek

Over the past 12 months, members of Friends of Hoddles Creek have explored the length of Hoddles Creek, from Black-leather Creek Road to Hazeldene Road, with botanist Dr Graeme Lorimer.

While identifying and recording vegetation, we have experienced a magical sliver of our natural environment. In spite of land clearing along both sides, the creek reserve still shelters communities of diverse and sometimes unexpected plants, large and small. These range from old growth Sassafras and giant Woolly Tea Tree to the rare Jungle Bristle Fern, a tiny filmy fern which is more usually found in the jungles of New Caledonia.

If you'd like to hear more about the plants of Hoddles Creek, please come along to hear Dr Lorimer's presentation on February 20 (see box at right) and learn more about this special part of our local environment.



Public Field Day during the Hoddles Creek Vegetation Survey. Dr Graeme Lorimer is on the left (with clipboard).

Vegetation Survey & Mapping Project for
Hoddles Creek
Presentation by Dr Graeme Lorimer
Hoddles Creek Primary School
Monday 20 Feb 7pm
All Welcome

How fast is too fast on Gembrook Road?

You will be aware of the maze of speed limits along Gembrook Road. Between Warburton Highway and Lusatia Park Road alone, there are no less than **six different speed zones**, with 70, 80 and 100 km/h speed limits, not including the 40 km/h limit at Hoddles Creek Primary School during school hours. There seems little rhyme or reason to the changes of speed limit and the prospect of travelling at 100 km/h on sections with this limit are truly frightening.

The road is narrow and winding, with deep roadside 'gutters' that severely limit the possibility of evasive action. The road has seen several serious accidents in recent times, as well as exacting a heavy toll on local wildlife.

We think the maximum speed limit should be 80 km/h. What do you think? We'd love to hear your views. You can write to us at FOHC, PO Box 298 Yarra Junction, 3797, or email us at friendsofhoddlescreek@gmail.com. We'll let you know the response in our next edition.



Goanna tales from Hoddles Creek

One of the most startling encounters while walking in the bush is coming face to face with the Goanna or Lace Monitor (*Varanus Varius*). These huge reptiles can appear quite intimidating – for a moment you could imagine that you have been transported back to the time of Jurassic Park! In fact Goannas pose no threat to people if they are treated with respect (they do have large sharp claws and teeth). Usually they will scramble for the nearest tree, hiding on the opposite side waiting for you to move on. After some minutes – if you stay perfectly still – they will forget your presence, back down the tree and resume their foraging activity, forked tongue flicking to pick up the scent of prey.

The Lace Monitor is the second largest of 20 Australian Goanna species, growing up to 2.1m in length (there are another 20 species across Asia and Africa, including the monster Komodo Dragon). Goannas are carnivorous, feeding on small mammals, lizards, frogs, mice and insects, as well as carrion.

Goannas hibernate over winter, emerging from their chosen tree hollow in early spring for a quick feed as the temperature warms up. They lay eggs in late summer in termite mounds, which form a natural incubation chamber keeping the eggs at just the right temperature. The mother Goanna returns to the sealed mound just in time to release the hatchlings from their chamber on hatching. Once they emerge, the hatchlings make for the trees, knowing instinctively that they are being eyed off as a quick dinner.

Goannas will raid your chicken shed for eggs (and chicks if they are hatched) – much easier than climbing a tree for uncertain rewards from magpie nest. We were recently surprised to see a very young Goanna in the nesting box with a broody chicken – apparently having difficulty removing the stubborn chicken from its eggs. They have also been known to regularly check out compost heaps for interesting scraps whilst on a tour of their home territory.

We have also seen them on several occasions squirming their way down rabbit burrows to feast on baby rabbits. After such a meal, a Goanna needs time to digest and will find a safe branch of a tree to flake out on whilst recovering. They will also dispatch mice and rats around houses and animal shelters. Amazingly, they also help keep snakes at bay – we have seen tiger snakes severed in two after making the mistake of crossing the path of a Goanna.

If you want to encourage these intriguing creatures you need to make your place 'wildlife friendly'. It is particularly important to keep aggressive and noisy dogs well contained away from where Goannas are likely to forage (a snake proof yard is also in the interests of your dogs survival). Goannas seem to quite happily co-exist with goats and other stock – realising that they pose little threat to them.



An amorous Goanna couple. Photo and article by Keith Jesse.

Come on and join FOHC

The Friends of Hoddles Creek group is looking for new members. FOHC was formed after a meeting of Land for Wildlife members in the area. We keep an eye on local development projects, aim to increase awareness of general environmental issues, especially those of particular interest to Hoddles Creek, and we have several 'hands on' projects.

Membership of FOHC has no age limits; all that is required is an interest in helping to maintain the special environmental aspects of Hoddles Creek – your home. If you would like to join, or if you would like more information about the group, simply complete the details in the box and send to FOHC, PO Box 298 Yarra Junction, Vic 3797, or email us at friendsofhoddlescreek@gmail.com.

Name:.....

Address:.....

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Phone:

Email:

I'd like to join Friends of Hoddles Creek.

I'd like more information.