

Hamilton Field Naturalists Club – President’s Report for 2018

Presented by Diane Luhrs

13th December 2018

Dear HFNC Members,

I present the President’s Report for 2018. First of all, I would like to say that this year has been a year of many achievements, not least being, that after being formed in 1958, the Club this year celebrates 60 continuous years of environmental advocacy and action.

Environmental advocacy and action

This year, the Club’s environmental advocacy was rewarded with two changed State Government policies leading to replacing detrimental environmental practices with more favourable practices. The first success came after Club members, along with many others, made submissions late in 2017 – in response detrimental farming practice on Harmans Valley and to the Southern Grampians Shire’s proposed Planning Scheme Amendment for the Significant Landscape Overlay C36 covering the section of the Harmans Valley within the Shire. Members argued for protection of the geological features of Harmans Valley, features that had been surveyed and mapped by Ken Grimes (and which had been submitted to the Shire in the early 2000s).

Janeen Samuel presented the Club’s case for an overlay that protected the geological features (and hence associated flora and fauna) of Harmans Valley. Janeen and Diane Luhrs also made further personal representations to the Planning Panel Hearing in support of applying a Significant Landscape Overlay to Harman’s Valley. Following Ross Cayley’s suggestion, the Club asked Professor Ray Cas to appear as an Expert Witness at the panel hearing. Professor Cas accepted our invitation and explained to the Panel the international importance of an intact Harmans Valley to geology students and fellow geologists and of his personal involvement with Harmans Valley in his teaching and research. The case for a significant overlay was supported by many speakers, only a few land owners (farmers) spoke against the overlay. The case was resolved in favour of a Significant Landscape Overlay such that a permanent Significant Landscape Overlay for Hamrans Valley was published in the Victorian Government Gazetted on October 18, 2018.

I thank Janeen for representing our Club on this issue, and for working with Glenys Cayley and Dave Munro to coordinate the well-attended public lecture (over 70 people) at HIRL given by Professor Raymond Cas on the origin and history of Victoria’s active volcanic plains while he was in town to present as the Expert Witness to the Panel Hearing; and for organizing the pre-lecture dinner at the Botanical Motel for supporters of the Overlay.

The second success followed lobbying by Diane Luhrs (to members of State parliament and local sports store proprietors) to have the Opera Nets used to catch fish and yabbies’ to be banned because of the indiscriminate killing of native mammals and reptiles, e.g. platypus and tortoises. The State Government has since banned these nets and is currently operating a voluntary exchange for more environmentally friendly nets for fishermen to use. By the mid-2019 it will be illegal for fishermen to use opera nets.

The annual program

As with previous years, the HFNC committee devised a program of monthly excursions and bi-monthly special presentations that were open to the public. This was published at our first special meeting in March and on the HFNC website. This year we made a special effort to invite

field naturalists of other areas to participate in excursions to their regions (for example in April - Mt Shadwell (15 people) – Timboon FNs, and in September - the Ararat Flora Reserves (16 people) – former Ararat FNs now HFNC members). We also combined with Friends of the Grampians for our October excursion (19 people) to the Wartook Reservoir area. Sharing our excursions with others enables us to enjoy the particular knowledges and interests of other groups and to enjoy greater number of participants at the events. However, more participants does present some logistical problems with transport and travelling in convoys, such that all drivers do have to be aware of following correct convoy procedure to ensure that no drivers are left stranded.

Two special excursions followed presentations by specialists in their fields. In July, Lachlan Farrington, senior ecologist with Nature Glenelg Trust, presented on the ecology of SW Victoria's wetlands and on the work to restore drained wetlands. Lachlan lead an excursion at Walkers Swamp on the following weekend to explain and demonstrate the works to restore this once-drained wetland. It is a mammoth undertaking, and to which HFNC is contributing some financial support and survey work. Progress is already evident in the water and organisms now present.

In November, Ross Cayley – senior geologist with Geological Survey Victoria –presented a comprehensive account of his team's work to unravel the processes of Victoria's geological change and hence to determine the origin of landscapes of the Grampians region. On the next day, Ross led a party of 19 participants (in convoy) to point out and explain the different ages, geology and geological processes that occurred in 7 sites – 4 near Glenthompson, 1 near Willaura and 2 near Balmoral.

Other excursions for the year included the annual February Lake Linlithgow wetland complex (Lake Kennedy, Lake Linlithgow, Lake Bullrush, Krauses Swamp and Harnath Swamp) with eight members attending. Rod has kept an ongoing report of the birds seen on these wetlands, of the water depth of wetlands during the survey and of the annual rainfall. Rod, Steve Clark and Jane Hayes add to the shore bird data with their repeat visits to these wetlands and to others in the region.

In March, six members visited Drajurk State Forest and Mereek State Forest. Participants agreed that it would be a good place to return to in spring for the wildflower display. In May, six members attended the weekend visit to Beachport, South End and Canunda National Park organized by Janeen Samuel and Glenys Cayley. This was a great weekend with much of Saturday spent walking in the Canunda National Park along the limestone cliffs at Southend. Thank you Glenys and Janeen for all the work in organising our accommodation and program for this weekend at the Southern Ocean Tourist Park.

The Mt Napier excursion in June to find Elmore's Cone and the Lava Bridge attracted 5 participants. Many fungi were photographed (and identified with the help of Dave Munro later) as we walked to the crater. We managed to find the cone and the lava bridge – Rod now has a GPS and a Black Wattle mark to make it easier next time.

Seven members attended the August excursion to Harmans Valley lead by Sophie and Damien Mag (local residents and owners of the property containing this part of Harmans Valley). It is good to know that there are residents and property owners who do value the geological and ecological values of this volcanic landscape.

Special presentations not yet accounted for in this report are those for March, May and September. In March, David Pitts, a park ranger with Parks Victoria, spoke of his work in implementing weed control and other management programs to ensure the survival of native species in general and endemic orchids in particular of SW Victoria – of which, almost half of the orchid species are considered threatened. Steve Clark delighted us at the May meeting with his presentation on the wildlife he photographed in the many national parks and other natural

landscapes of Uganda while living in that country for a year with his wife Jenny. In August, Diane Luhrs, with the assistance of Rod Bird, provided a slide show and commentary on their tour with Outback Spirit through Eastern Arnhem Land. Geology, flora, fauna and Aboriginal rock art in Arnhem Land were the main features of this presentation.

Working bees and fauna surveys

Hamilton Field Naturalists are committed to continuing projects begun in previous years through programmed working bees and annual fauna surveys. While some projects are decades old – for example the 18-Acre Reserve at the Wannan, others are more recent but have become ongoing. The four main areas HFNC concentrates on are: Fulham Streamside Reserve, Nigretta Flora Reserve, Kananwalla Rail Reserve, Bear State Forest and Lake Linlithgow. We are still awaiting permission from the Shire and/or DELWP to undertake much-needed weeding works on the 18-Acre Reserve.

Our working bees at Fulham SR and Nigretta FR are directed at removing environmental weeds – Cape Tulip, Sparaxis, Gladiolus and African Weed Orchid at Fulham SR, and African Weed Orchid and Phalaris at Nigretta FR from these floristically rich reserves. Peter Hocking, Rod Bird, Diane Luhrs, Roger Thompson, Janeen Grimes, Kate Kennedy and Daryl Delahoy contributed time to this project this year. Rod also kept up a program to rid Kanawalla RR of Phalaris, *Oxalis purpurea*, Galium and Fumaria.

In August, the club conducted a tree-planting day at Kanawalla where trees (Banksia and Casuarina species native to the region) grown by Rod and Arborline. Rod Bird, David Munro, Lyn Munro, Glenys Cayley, Janeen Grimes, Peter Hocking and Diane Luhrs planted the trees and erected guards (provided by Reto Zollinger) around most of the young trees. Rod Bird, Peter Hocking and Diane Luhrs followed up on this day with planting more trees and erecting more guards.

Aside from the water bird surveys early in the year (described above), HFNC continues to monitor the 10 nest boxes in the Bear State Forest. This year with the aid of the pole camera, animals – sugar gliders – were found in four of the ten boxes at four different sites. Some of the uninhabited boxes had signs of animal presence in the shape of swirled leaves. Fortunately, no bees were seen in any of the boxes this year.

Submissions and involvements with other groups

Members continue to invest time in supporting and promoting other environmental groups and in making submissions in response to environmental issues as they arise. The formal submission work this year was undertaken by three members Rod Bird, Dave Munro and Janeen Samuel who each spent considerable time drafting and submitting responses on the Club's behalf, and we thank them for this work.

In autumn, Peter Hocking joined his Blackburn Tree Preservation Society friends at their Little Desert weekend campout. Peter described HFNC's weed-eradication programs to this group and suggested that a combined excursion/special meeting may be possible for the two groups in 2019.

On the weekend of 27-29 April, Glenys Cayley, Dave and Lyn Munro, Rod Bird, Yvonne Ingeme, Reto Zollinger and Diane Luhrs attended the SEANA autumn camp at Healesville for a delightful and interesting weekend of presentations and excursions. As no-one club volunteered to host the 2019 autumn campout, Diane Luhrs suggested that it be a non-hosted campout with participants organizing their own accommodation and excursions in Port Fairy. On returning to Hamilton and visiting Port Fairy, Diane produced a folder of possible speakers, venues and excursions that could be undertaken in Port Fairy for the SEANA committee to consider. As a

result, the SEANA Autumn campout will be conducted as suggested by Diane – loosely organized but with an AGM and a formal dinner to occur on Saturday 23rd March, 2019 at Charlie's on East, Port Fairy.

On Sunday 23rd September, Dave and Lyn Munro and Glenys Cayley attended the Walkers Swamp Open Day to help celebrate that achievements of Glenelg Nature Trust in this restoration project. Dave was given time to represent HFNC's involvement in this project, thank you Dave for doing this.

HFNC supported Reto Zollinger, Jane Hayes and Yvonne Ingeme and Steve Clark at \$1 sponsorship per bird identified/sighted on the Birdlife Australia Twitchathon held on 22/10/2018. They identified over 100 different bird species on this one-day survey.

Ross Simpson attended Greg Kerr's 10-week Bird Identifier Course, and Rod Bird helped out when he could to take small groups in their field-work identification exercises.

Diane Luhrs was asked to make a presentation on the geology of the region at the Lake Bolac Tourist Office AGM in November. This turned out to be a good public relations exercise and a means of promoting our Hamilton Region Nature Guide. The Tourist Centre purchased one of our Nature Guides, and the Ararat Visitor Information Centre would also like to purchase copies. We will have to consider a reprint of this publication in the very near future.

Yvonne Ingeme attended the Grasslands Conservation Conference in Melbourne and Dave and Lyn Munro attended the Wimmera Biodiversity Conference – both excellent conferences to highlight environmental issues and to provide up-to-date remediation practices.

After Christmas, Yvonne Ingeme and Reto Zollinger will attend the annual Caving Conference to be held in Tasmania.

Successes

HFNC has enjoyed greater patronage at many of its excursions and special presentations than in previous years. This appears to be in part through combining some excursions with other groups and through matching excursions to special presentations so that visitors to the presentations are reminded/encouraged to participate in the excursions. These excursions are more like workshops following the presentations.

And we have welcomed some new members to the Club this year. As always, our membership stayed above 30 this year and hence contributed to the funds to operate the Club.

Ongoing Issues for the HFNC

Two main issues are significant for the Club:

The first is engaging sufficient people to undertake the onerous and ongoing work needed to maintain weed-free places in our floristically rich reserves. Rod Bird, Peter Hocking and Roger Thompson have been the stalwarts in this project – without their time and effort many of the reserves would revert to weed-infested areas that would compromise the biodiversity that their efforts seek to protect. This a real challenge for our club and we haven't managed to overcome it yet.

The second issue is the hold-up to environmental works through bureaucratic obfuscation and/or inaction. It is now well over a year since Rod Bird communicated with both the Shire of Southern Grampians and with DELWP about work to be done by HFNC at the 18-Acre reserve – we are still awaiting their response and no work can begin until HFNC has a permit to conduct its planned works to remove *Acacia paradoxa* seedlings and to thin out the large stands.

Another issue to emerge is that as the Club now receives little or no payment for its works on public lands, our financial reserve combined with an annual Direct Grant from the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority, annual membership fees and donations at our

special meetings are all we have to cover ongoing financial commitments. We need to be mindful of what future costs may be and how much we need in reserve to cover these costs. If we continue to spend as we have done this year, on my calculations, we will have only to be able to fund three more years. I will leave it to Glenys Cayley to provide full details in her Treasurer's Report.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank all members who in many and various ways have contributed to the successful functioning of the HFNC this year whether by way of attending meetings and excursions, writing excursion reports, making presentations at our special meetings and/or helping to set up these presentations, hosting special guests, organizing HFNC events (working bees and excursions), publishing details of our events in the local newspaper and sharing data and images that can be used in HFNC reports, submissions, newsletters and the HFNC website.

In particular, I thank Rod for the mountain of work he completes in managing the correspondence and in organizing and managing the working bees, Dave for preparing news releases and advertisements for our special meetings and for running meetings in my absence, Glenys as treasurer who provides bi-monthly reports on the Club's financial activity and status and for preparing the annual Treasurer's report (forthcoming), Peter for assisting with the minutes, maintaining the sightings reports at each meeting and for assisting presenters to set up their presentations and Janeen for pursuing the details to maintain an accurate quartermaster's inventory of HFNC items and intellectual property.

Thank you everyone

Diane Luhrs (HFNC President)

13-12-2018