

ROUND THE BEND
CONSERVATION CO-OPERATIVE

A residential conservation community



Supporter Impact Report

Working together to protect
habitat and biodiversity

2022



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We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations as the Traditional Owners of the land on which Round the Bend Conservation Co-operative stands. We respectfully recognise Elders both past and present and endeavour to demonstrate this respect by managing this unique land and protecting its integrity.

Welcome

"Protecting the environment is not a luxury, it's not just for aesthetic reasons: our health, our living standards, our cultural and spiritual fulfilment, and our connection to country are all interconnected and are all negatively impacted by our deteriorating environment.

Biodiversity is the foundation on which our system depends."

Prof. Ian Lowe, John Sinclair Memorial Lecture, 2022

We are extremely grateful to funding bodies and our Patrons for supporting our work and helping to protect this important 130 hectares of native bush; home to Powerful owls, Brush-tailed Phascogales and many other important and endangered species of plant and animal life.

Over 50 years of co-operative land management we have achieved the preservation of an area that is now considered of exceptional local and regional biodiversity. We are helping endangered species survive and protecting a vital section of the Warrandyte-Kinglake conservation corridor.

Since colonisation we have lost 30 mammal species and 29 bird species in Australia*. We have the highest mammal extinction rate in the world and 17 unique birds and mammals are

likely to disappear in the next 20 years*. So, it's more important than ever that we protect our bush and advocate for conservation.

Our Members contribute to the conservation of this property through annual levies and through volunteering their time. Weeding, planting, monitoring cameras (requiring a hard slog up ridges and down gullies to replace batteries and SIM cards; checking and logging images), checking exclusion plots and plant guards are just some of the activities undertaken every month by Members.

We apply for and gratefully receive a range of grants every year that go solely towards the conservation work we do and you can be assured that you are making a difference.

Thank you for your ongoing support!

Activities

Work parties – the backbone of our work

Work parties often involve walking through the bush and offer the opportunity to learn about our environment: the indigenous flora, how to correctly identify a weed, and the skills to differentiate one from the other when they look alike. They are guided by our Flora Strategy, which is based on the latest science.



Despite losing several work parties to Covid, we've achieved a lot this year:

- Erected a new exclusion zone to protect *Goodia Lotifolia*.
- Placed guards around over 200 "recruits" species
- Maintained the "Burgan Line" to prevent it encroaching into targeted areas of high biodiversity.
- Minimized the encroachment of woody weeds and exotic grasses.
- Surveyed two groups of partial & total exclusion plots and regularly monitored them to determine who the main grazers are: wallabies, rabbits, deer or kangaroos.
- Prevented soil erosion from our access tracks by filling pot holes, re-shaping and clearing drains.

Activities

Plush new homes for phascogales

Our Fauna Committee has been monitoring our existing 20 or so nest boxes for over a year now, but although we have observed Phascogales, caught them on camera and know they nest in people's roofs, they don't seem to make use of our existing boxes.

There may be reasons for this of course: their numbers, their range, existing natural hollows; but we wanted to investigate if the accommodation could be more appealing.

After much investigation, we settled on a design from the Gould League. This design includes thicker, more insulating walls: thicker walls equals warmer Phascogales in Winter. Members put the boxes together, painted them and then installed them.



Activities

We considered ways of excluding Sugar Gliders – which are our usual nest box residents, but consensus suggests that there is no entrance hole size that would allow one but prevent the other. However, we were advised by someone with a PhD on Phascogales, who has a lot of experience in setting up nest boxes, that if a Sugar Glider and a Phascogale were vying for the same box and push came to shove, a Phascogale would probably push harder. Placing groups of three boxes near each other is also a preferred option to provide accommodation for both.

The next step is to monitor them to see how they are being colonised and thanks to a recent grant from Bendigo Bank, we've now enlisted motion-sensing cameras in the monitoring of our nest boxes.

Three new motion-sensing cameras will play a crucial role in this project by providing 24 hour surveillance of the new nest boxes. This will give us more information on which animals visit, how long it takes for residents to move in, and if Phascogales find them more attractive.

Let's hope the Phascogales approve of their new accommodation!

Activities

Fauna Cam

The health and diversity of the Co-op's flora and fauna is central to our mission. We have substantial records dating back 30 plus years (you can see species lists on the website – [flora](#) and [fauna](#)) and with improved technology we are now able to expand our records.



Our latest project is to install motion-sensing cameras in strategic locations throughout the property to capture data on the variety of animals that are inhabiting our bush, 24/7.



There are three drivers for Fauna Cam:

The Good

The first driver is to expand our records on the diversity and frequency of animals sighted, and to improve our data on the presence or otherwise of rare and endangered species, for example Phascogales and Bandicoots. Over time the motion-sensing cameras will cover the wide variety of habitats across Co-op land and build a substantial data base of animal sightings.



Activities

The Bad

The second driver is to gather data on the presence and distribution of feral animals. We already have anecdotal evidence of the presence and damage caused by foxes, deer, rabbits et al. Fauna Cam will expand that evidence. Early results show that we are getting important visual data of the prevalence of feral animals: in the last month alone six cameras (three cameras at each of two sites, chosen at random) recorded over 20 deer sightings and over 30 images of foxes. We were also able to capture a fox preying on a Lyrebird chick.

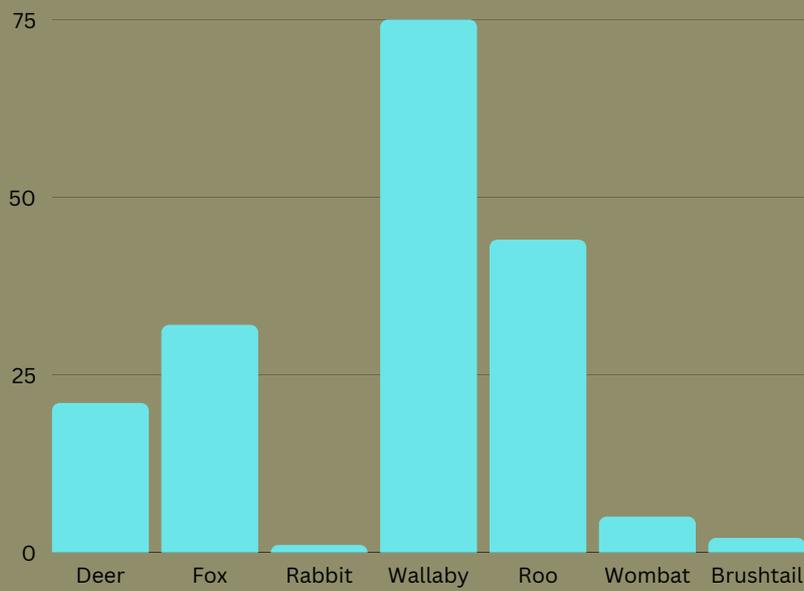


The Ugly

The third objective is to support future feral animal control and eradication programs and we are expanding our search for ways of managing these impacts. There has been some success in deer and fox culling programs conducted through the [Sugarloaf Link Project](#) but this has been limited in scope and duration. We are now investigating options for more locally-targeted systematic control, and initially foxes are our target.

Activities

Early data collected through Fauna Cam is already pin-pointing areas frequented by foxes and these sightings are collected regularly and recorded and will assist in targeting fox control measures that are being developed.



Fauna Cam records June–August 2022



Achievements

Ten years of our Flora Management Strategy

Much environmental progress was achieved in the first 40 years of the Co-op, including the removal of 2000 pine trees and swathes of Boneseed, which is now a very rare find.

However, the principles of ecological management developed significantly over that time, and in 2012 we engaged an expert ecologist to assess the state of the flora on our property and to make recommendations for a strategy to best protect and enhance the biodiversity.

The result was a comprehensive Flora Strategy covering three areas: environmental weed control, Burgan spread control and the protection and recruitment of threatened species. The Strategy was reviewed in 2018 and our restoration approaches were reviewed in 2021.

Seeking expert advice is critical to our management strategies.

This [video presentation](#) outlines the approach we took and the outcomes after 10 years.

You can also see various reports on our conservation activities [here](#).



Achievements

Flora Strategy achievements this year

As our Flora Strategy outlines, weeds are one of the biggest threats to our bushland. They are the 'silent killer' of biodiversity and our greatest effort is expended on controlling them.

Our intensive efforts in this critical area is made possible not only by our own members' labour, but greatly expanded by the financial support we've received from Nillumbik Shire Council and Melbourne Water. We hope that our achievements are positive affirmation of the value of their support.

This year we have:

- Continued control of Sweet Vernal and Briza below the "weed line" with both our volunteer labour and contractors.
- Continued control of the spread of Burgan, including follow-up treatment.
- Inspected most ridges and slopes for woody weeds such as *Acacia howittii*, *Acacia floribunda* and *Pittosporum*.
- Checked all gullies for thistles, blackberry and exotic herbs.
- Engaged contractors to control thistles and other weeds on Stevenson Ck. and its tributaries.
- Undertook our annual follow-up check of *Ehrharta erecta*. Two years on from the successful completion of this 6-year Ehrharta Control Project confirmed that we are still on the path to long-term success.
- Updated our 'site specific' Weed Management Plans, with some excellent feedback from members.
- Reviewed our progress on threatened species protection and planting, with expert input. Several items were identified, and these are being progressively actioned. Plots have been upgraded and 72 plants have been planted. We have continued to place guards around naturally recruiting threatened plants in targeted areas.

Achievements

Reintroduction of the Wine-lipped Spider orchid

We've achieved some great results in this project to reintroduce the locally threatened Wine-lipped Spider orchid, *Arachnorchis oenochila*.

This project was begun in 2018, in partnership with Nillumbik Shire Council, when a 30m x 30m exclusion plot was established on the Co-op, selected for its high biodiversity habitat and for the commitment of its members in assisting with the many tasks involved.

This year the orchids had a 50% increase in bud numbers on previous years.

The exciting news is that for the **first time**, new plants have produced flowers and at least one of them has been pollinated. These plants have naturally germinated on site from seeds of an original plant that was planted in 2018.

This is a key achievement for this on-going project.

News

Climate change and land management seminar

This seminar, presented by Andy McMahon in May, focussed on how climate change is impacting our bushland and how we can adapt our land management strategies. It attracted a large audience of Co-op members and residents of the Bend of Islands as well as a representative from Nillumbik Shire.

After a summary of our current land management strategies and programs for context, Andy McMahon provided an overview of climate change scenarios and the potential impacts on various bio-regions, followed by a more detailed discussion on what is happening in our own area.

A lively engagement with the audience provided individual residents' observations of changes in the bush that may be associated with climate change. Andy gave explanations for probable mechanisms at play and what we could expect in the longer term. This led to a discussion on how we may be able to adapt our land management strategies to maintain our biodiversity.



The bad news is that climate change is already having a noticeable effect which will accelerate for the foreseeable future; the good news is that our bioregion (box-iron bark forest) is one of the more resilient vegetation types and there are strategies that we can adopt that can reinforce this resilience; and the encouraging news is that we are already doing many of these things.

Andy's presentation was very well received and those attending gained a greater understanding of climate change and a scientific basis for action to reduce the impacts on our bushland's biodiversity.

New species recorded on the Co-op



This **White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike**, the dark morph of the subspecies *robusta*, is in transition from immature to adult plumage.

It is a new species for the Co-op and brings our bird list tally to 131 species.

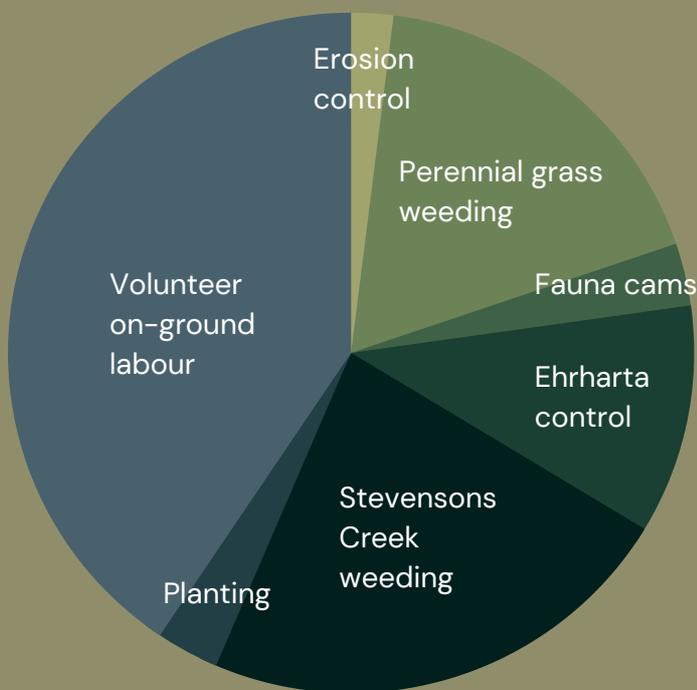
Mainly seen alone, sometimes in pairs, or occasionally in small flocks, this bird eats invertebrates, as well as some fruit, nectar and seeds. They are mostly seen amongst the branches and foliage of trees. The nest is a shallow cup of plant materials bound with spider web in the fork of a tree.



A **Royal Tigertail**, *Parasyntemis regina* – the first to be recorded on the Co-op.

Thanks for your support

100% of grants and Patron fees is spent on conservation. This pie chart illustrates our conservation spend and the allocation of conservation work this year, including the volunteer labour of Members and Friends.



The chart does not include the many hours spent writing grants, planning and organising works, or any of the administration involved, all of which is done by our volunteer members.



45

Number of Co-op members



12

Number of Friends

ROUND THE BEND CONSERVATION CO-OPERATIVE

A residential conservation community



Website: roundthebend.org.au

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Patron

Anitra Nelson

We are grateful for the support of:

Nillumbik Shire Council

Melbourne Water

Warrandyte Community Bank

Community Bank
Warrandyte



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Christmas Guinea Flower

Ours and the smaller population at Boomers Reserve are the only representatives of *Hibbertia porcata* in Victoria.