



Project Platypus Upper Wimmera Landcare

MISSION

To work in partnership with the Landcare community to improve the environmental health of the Upper Wimmera Catchment while maintaining and improving productivity.

**PROJECT
PLATYPUS**

UPPER WIMMERA LANDCARE

Find us:

 [FOLLOW on FACEBOOK](#)

 [VISIT our WEBSITE](#)

 [EMAIL](#)

Contact us:

11 a Ararat Rd Stawell, Victoria
PO Box 838 Stawell 3380
ph 03 5358 4410

Down to Earth

FEBRUARY 2021 UPDATE

Welcome to our newsletter *Down to Earth*,

I feel like this e-newsletter is a big one: in-depth stories about Landcare members making a difference in their patch; the exciting find of a Katydid (undescibed by science) at a Landcare event; another find of feathertail gliders; revegetation success years on; plus much much more. All of these stories connects us to a better environment in the Upper Wimmera.

I hope you enjoy

Cheers Andrea

Local Landcare Facilitator

llf@platypus.org.au

CALENDAR

February

1-28 [National Sustainable Living Festival](#) Plenty of online events to choose or just attend

Tues 9 Gathering at Kalyrna Falls. Carpool at Moyston Shop 5pm, BYO sandwich/roll & drink **Moyston Landcare Group** call Rosie for details mob 0427 329 468

Wed 10 Meeting, Phil & Joan Bennetts, Pomonal, **Jallukar Landcare Group**

Mon 15 Meeting, Elmhurst Golf Club, 7.30 pm, **Elmhurst Landcare Group**

Thurs 18 [Soils from the garden and out the gate](#) - introduction to better soils WORKSHOP

March

Wed 3 Healthy productive soils -session 4 **Perennial Pasture Systems** (bookings essential)

Save the date

21 & 23 June Orchid Conservation symposium online [Australian Network for Plant Conservation](#)

[Inc](#)

In this edition

[Latest news and grants](#)

[What Katydid](#)

[Revegetation 2022](#) - plan now

[Tale of Feathertails](#)

[Six years on - revegetation success](#)

[Landsborough Landcare's quiet achiever](#)

[Grampians olive farm is a labour of love](#)

[Greater Gariwerd landscape draft management plan meeting](#)

[Concongella Landcare cover cropping continues 2021](#)

[WCMA crew fencing of Six Mile Creek](#)

LATEST NEWS

Thanks to all my Landcarer contributors who send through some of the best news from around the traps, it all makes for thought provoking reading.

[Five Climate resolutions for 2021](#) Easy-peasy ideas to personally act on climate and reduce emissions ***Climate Council***

[Rethinking burning for biodiversity](#) Fire regimes are complex with no one size fits all approach ***Remember the Wild***

[Australia-first research reveals staggering loss of threatened plants over 20 years](#) Aussie plants are unique but disappearing way too fast ***The Conversation***

[How a 'tree mortgage' scheme could turn an Indian town carbon neutral](#) Money-tree fund that has benefit to landholders ***The Guardian***

[Kiss the Ground](#) Blockbuster and '**must watch**' movie for every land carer. Get family and friends in front of Netflix for this one!

[The mystery of the blue flower](#) Basically blue is rare and found more often in tougher environments ***The Conversation***

[Wimmera platypus in big picture](#) More on the platypus in our region and nationwide ***The Weekly Advertiser***

GRANTS/AWARDS

[Community Conservation Grants](#) (Closes February 26). The purpose of the grant is to assist in the protection of native species, habitats, landscapes and cultural heritage. ***Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife***

[General Jeffery Soil Health Award](#) (Closes March 31) ***Landcare Australia***

SOILS from the garden and out the gate WORKSHOP

Project Platypus and Elmhurst Landcare group have an introductory hands on soil workshop planned for Thursday February 18th, 12 pm. The topics covered on the day include:

- What is soil and why is it important
- Practicals of what makes a healthy soil (soil pH, soil stability, soil texture, soil colour, soil critters)
- Compost and helping our soils to be healthy

- Soils of the Elmhurst region

Bookings essential (and numbers strictly limited)

call Geoff 0438 422 375 or email penna.elmhurst@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION TO BETTER
SOILS
FROM THE GARDEN & OUT THE GATE
PRACTICAL WORKSHOP WITH
SOIL GURU REBECCA MITCHELL

THURS. 18 FEB
12 PM - 3.30 PM
ELMHURST GOLF CLUB
NUMBERS LIMITED
BOOKINGS CALL GEOFF
M: 0438 522 375 OR
PENNA.ELMHURST@GMAIL.COM
TEA/COFFEE/LUNCH
PROVIDED

AGRICULTURE VICTORIA
ELMHURST GOLF CLUB
PRACTICAL PLATFORM



What Katydid? New genus found at Jallukar Landcare event!

Last year at the Stawell Racecourse an undescribed (to science) Katydid or bush cricket was found at a seed collection workshop run by Jallukar Landcare Group. Elia

Pirtle photographed the insect and used the [INaturalist](#) app on

her phone to have it identified.

"Our photos have now found their way to the author of '*Grasshopper country: the abundant orthopteroid insects of Australia*' (David Rentz, a friend of my PhD supervisor) who agrees it is indeed an undescribed genus - he had photographed a nymph of the same sort years ago and included it in his book but it was never described (so its not quite 'new' but pretty close!)," Elia said.

"Got to get someone to describe it now! Though that's getting harder and harder the fewer professional taxonomists we have around (seems to be a job no one wants to fund anymore so we are just slowly losing really valuable expertise as its not passed along unfortunately)."

"Maybe if we find a female (wasn't actually an ovipositor sticking out the end of ours - turns out that was the male gear) and get some really good snaps, David could be convinced... Anyway, we better keep our eyes open for more of them!" Elia said.

So if you see the elusive Katydid let us know - we are looking for a female!

Side note:

iNaturalist record - "**Undescribed Australian Orthoptera: Phaneropterinae Genus Novum Species Novum (Western Victoria)**" <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/66234823>

Revegetation 2022 - plan now

Project Platypus are **looking for revegetation sites for the 2022 planting season**. We have been approached by a number of philanthropic organisations in recent months inquiring about larger scale sites for revegetation, up to 50ha in size. Project Platypus are interested in hearing from landholders that would be interested in revegetation sites large or small as we work out details of this very exciting potential funding stream/s for revegetation projects in the Upper Catchment. If you have any project ideas, please get in **contact with Al 0478628162 manager@platypus.org.au**



Tale of Feathertails

In early January Feathertail gliders were found nesting in a power box at Deep Lead Hall. Maintenance work on the box disturbed the gliders which saw them scurrying into nearby trees. Ian Holwell managed to capture the moment as seen in the photo (right). The Feathertail Glider is the smallest gliding mammal in the world weighing in at a meagre 12g. This marsupial provides important ecosystem services as pollinator and pest controller and is also a source protein for native carnivores such as owls. For more information on this local cutie check out [Glideways](#), or [Museum Victoria](#)



Feathertail glider
(*Acrobates pygmaeus*) found at the Deep Lead Hall. Photo Ian Holwell

Six years on - revegetation success

Project Platypus manager Al Stephens went out in the field late last year to visit and I had a Q & A for him on his return:

How many trees were planted? 2180 stems

Success rate? About 90%

Is it a community plant out site? Yes, it was a 2015 Plantout

What are the species of plants? Wattle (*Acacia acinacea*, *A. aspera*, *A. genistifolia*, *A. hakeoides*, *A. implexa*, *A. mearnsii*, *A. melanoxolyn*, *A. myrtifolia*, *A. paradoxa*, *A. pycnantha*); *Allocasuarina luehmannii*, *A. verticillata*; *Banksia marginata*; *Bursaria spinosa*; *Callistemon rugulosus*; Eucalypts (*Eucalyptus aromaphloia*, *E. camaldulensis*, *E. goniocalyx*, *E. leucoxyton*, *E. macrorhyncha*, *E. melliodora*, *E. polyanthemos*, *E. rubida*); *Hakea sericea*; *Leptospermum continentale*; *L. lanigerum*; *Melaleuca decussata*.

What is the average height of the plantings? Now up to 5 metres

Is the landholder happy with the project? Yes, we did a number of different sites on Tom's properties over about three years so I guess you could call him a return customer!

How are they managing it? Fences have been maintained. Timely crash grazing can occur from now on as trees are above browsing height and this will lessen the fuel load.



Revegetation December 2020 and the Sheoak is successfully producing seed which is a good result after five years. Planted July 2015. Tom Eastick's property, Rhymney.

Send in your plant out success stories. We'd love to see photos of before and after. Just email llf@platypus.org.au

Landsborough Landcare's quiet achiever

Landsborough Landcare Group's Darryl Leslie is a quiet achiever ensuring weeds are controlled and eradicated in the Landsborough township and district. He has also been instrumental in rabbit control over the years which have had flow on benefits to landholders and the environment.

Daryl keeps a close eye on seasonal weeds, what is emerging, flowering times and where control efforts should be directed. He is responsible for what you don't see (the weeds) with past efforts in weed control of Spiny rush, St Johns Wort, Boxthorn and Horehound. Weed management is critical to protect biodiversity and encourage indigenous flora and fauna. Weed control is especially important along creeks and waterways, sports fields, streets and laneways.

Having a local at the helm has ensured that many invasive weeds have kept at bay in the Landsborough district.

For many years the Landmate crew have helped the Landsborough Landcare Group with spraying and manual weed control but due to COVID-19 restrictions were unavailable. Darryl called on Project Platypus and the Wimmera CMA works crew who took up the mantle in 2020 to spray Patterson's curse and control its spread.

Daryl volunteers readily and has done so for years because he cares about his community and the environment. He has a lifetime of Landsborough and district knowledge and is happy to talk to people about weed control, rabbits and other Landcare issues. Just like the old adage "many hands make light work" Daryl and Landsborough Landcare would welcome support from volunteers to continue the good work they do, so whether you are town local, farmer or absentee landowner consider how you can help today. For more information, call Project Platypus ph 5358 4410.



Darryl Leslie on the outskirts of Landsborough near treated Pattersons curse.

Grampians olive farm is a labour of love

Story from the Summer 2021 [Victorian Landcare Magazine](#)

Landcare often involves partnerships. In the case of Rita Bikins and David Margetson from Pomonal their passion for improving the environment led them to the ultimate partnership – each other.

Rita and David met at a Project Platypus tree planting event. They married in 2013 and purchased Red Rock Olives, a 76-hectare property consisting of pasture, 5000 olive trees and a covenanted Trust for Nature reserve at the foot of the majestic Grampians National Park (part of the Gariwerd Aboriginal cultural landscape).

Red Rock's first event in the converted farm house café was David and Rita's wedding reception. Since then they have developed a successful paddock-to-plate enterprise supplying olive oil and other olive products. Farmgate tourism grew quickly and now makes up 90 per cent of their business.

According to Rita, the success of the business is due to the successful combination of skills – her previous business experience, and David's expertise in farming and natural resource management.

"We are very fortunate how well our skill sets match. My expertise is marketing and branding which complements David's knowledge of farming and his local knowledge – who to call, where to get help and his problem-solving ability," Rita said.

The couple responded to a strong demand for table olives from face to face contact with their customers. The farmgate gave them an opportunity to expand into value adding to their produce. This includes a unique range of salt products, olive leaf tea and infused olive oils.

Holistic approach underpinned by soil health

Their holistic approach to the business means caring for the environment and starts with soil health.

One-year-old merino wethers are grazed to suppress weeds in the olive grove and the annual prunings are mulched under the trees. This year extra mulching was applied to keep the tree roots cool and save on irrigation requirements. They purchased wheaten straw and duck manure for this purpose.

"We feel that if we can get the soil biology right the trees can then look after themselves. We feel soil health is the main driver of health in the grove," David said.

Restrictions due to COVID-19 have given them more time to concentrate on farming.

"We've had an opportunity to breathe, stop, look and work on the grove. We improved our harvesting practices. It used to take two weeks, but this year we harvested within the day and were able to get the olives to press within 24 hours. This ensured that our product was of extra virgin standard," Rita said.

A lighter footprint

Other innovations to the business include environmentally sound packaging. The salt bags are made of biodegradable cornstarch and the olive oil is packaged in cardboard casks with bladders. Rita has been keen to avoid the use of glass which is currently only produced overseas.

There are several solar panel systems installed to run the café, the insulated cool room storage shed, and to pump irrigation water from the dams and bore. There is also a charger available for customers with electric cars.

Adjoining the olive grove David and Rita manage a 30-hectare block of stringybark, red gum, grass trees, and many varieties of flowering plants and orchids. The block is covered by a Trust for Nature covenant.

In the last 10 years they have also planted more than 18,000 trees on the pasture and sheep farming part of the property. They are part of the **Jallukar Landcare Group's** project to build a biodiversity corridor from the Black Range to the Grampians.

David and Rita’s vision of learning, sustainability, and environmental stewardship means they are active in their community. They are also involved in the **Perennial Pasture Systems** and the local CFA.

Internet sales increased during the COVID-19 period. Rita explains that what looked like an overnight success was really eight years of hard work.

“Our continued sales through the shutdown period come from customer loyalty. Running a business in uncertain times is about keeping at it. Work it, work it, work it,” Rita said.



David Margetson and Rita Bikins

Gariwerd Landscape draft management meeting at Lake Fyans

Rhonda McNeil from Parks Victoria gave an overview of the [*Greater Gariwerd Draft Landscape Management Plan*](#) at a meeting organised by Landcare Facilitator Andrea Mitchell at Lake Fyans (Covid safe) in December 2020. The meeting was organised to hear first hand what the draft plan means for the region and how we (Landcare) could comment.

The draft was completed in 12 months and open for comment between mid-November 2020 and late January 2021.

The take home messages from the meeting were:

- It is a draft plan bold enough to aspire. It is not a “safe” plan
- It is a report which informs how Traditional Owners see the landscape and is the first time the night sky (The sky country overlay) has been included in a plan.
- It is a confronting plan, be prepared to think
- **Read the last chapter *Caring for Country together* first, it is really important.** The plan is large but its essence is in this chapter.

- Due diligence has been paid in considering rock climbing. Eight thousand climbing routes are in the Grampians and there are still further assessments to be completed.
- The second chapter is informed by the [Conservation Action Plan Grampians \(Gariwerd\) 2019](#)
- In recognition of the Grampians being an intact environment there is a proposal to reintroduce Apex predators such as quolls and dingo. This is aspirational but has been included and is more likely that this will occur in fenced areas and more likely be quolls.
- Talk about the plan and ensure comments/submissions are made especially if you feel relevant information is missing

Discussions at the meeting included:

- Weed control for Yarra Burgan (*Kunzea leptospermoides*) especially in Halls Gap
- Fire control and risk
- Dingo introduction concern
- Rubbish dumping in the park
- Sallow wattle control
- Cat, fox, deer and goat control measures



View from the meeting at Lake Fyans, December 2020

Concongella cover cropping continues 2021...

Mark Mclean and Bronwyn Bant's summer cover crop is going well after 110mm of rain during January at their property in Joel South. It was sown on the 14th of October 2020 with sorghum and millet at 5kg/ha each and tillage brassica and tillage raddish at 2kg/ha. No pesticides have been used. No fertiliser was used either, allowing the plants to only utilise and convert minerals left from the winter sown clover/ryegrass pasture. The benefits of the cover crop are: provision of ground cover; helping to hold the light sandy soils in place; and great sheep feed in autumn.



Cover crop, February 2021

Six Mile Creek fenced by WCMA COVID crew

The WCMA and Covid crews have done a great job working through summer 2020 - 2021 to fence and protect 10ha of the Six Mile creek at Joel South on the Mclean property. The works will protect the old growth remnant red gums, and improve water quality flowing into the Wimmera river (through stock exclusion) and provide new habitat once native grasses and shrub species are reestablished.



New fence line at Six Mile Creek

Thanks Mark Mclean for the updates. Mark is the secretary for Concongella Landcare Group and If you are interested in cover cropping or would like to join the group email: msmclean777@gmail.com

PROJECT PLATYPUS CONTRACTING SERVICES

- Specialists in broad-scale and targeted weed and rabbit control
- Provide environmental services such as tree planting
- Offering competitive rates on private and public land
- Insured and licenced.

FOR A QUOTE

PH 5358 4410

EMAIL

loki@platypus.org.au



Servicing:
Stawell
Halls Gap
Landsborough
Moyston
Pomonal
Navarre Crowlands
Dadswells Bridge
Great Western
Elmhurst



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Donation of support

Geoff & Helen Handbury Foundation



Copyright © 2021. Project Platypus Organisation Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Our mailing address is:

PO Box 838, Stawell, Victoria 3380

Down to Earth e-newsletter has over 300 free subscribers. If you are a first time reader and you'd like to join [update your preferences](#) or if you must leave it will break our hearts, au revoir for now, and [unsubscribe from this list](#).