



Grasslands in the virtual world

The usual frenetic activity of spring in the world of native grasslands projects has largely been transferred to the virtual world this year.

Although small groups have been able to work and explore in the regions lately, larger organised gatherings have not been possible. Despite this, we have found new and creative ways to achieve our projects and continue to educate people about the importance of native grasslands.

A range of webinars, online meetings, workshops and virtual tours have been held, and while it's not quite the same as being there "in real life", it has made a wide variety of information available to a wider audience. For people who live and work in the regions, those with a disability or mobility issues, people with caring or other responsibilities, or a range of other reasons, accessing the latest information online has never been easier.

Here are some highlights in case you missed out or would like to watch again and share with your networks;

- The **SWIFFT seminar** in October featured four fantastic presentations on a variety of grassland projects. You can view the seminar notes here: https://www.swiff.net.au/cb_pages/swiff_seminar_notes_-_native_grasslands.php

- This spring, **Glenelg Hopkins CMA** delivered a number of fascinating live-stream talks during Biodiversity Month in September. Check out the video of Aggie Stevenson and Ben Zeeman giving us a tour of **Grasslands of the VVP**.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgE88OCyYhY>
- Some other Spring Grasslands virtual tours by Glenelg Hopkins CMA:
 - An **On-Farm Field day** with info about how to manage grasslands on farms.
<https://fb.watch/1RKLMml3tM/>
 - and a **Wildflower Walk**
<https://fb.watch/1RG2H6vYBP/>
- Article in The Age newspaper:
https://www.theage.com.au/national/the-tale-of-the-lonely-button-wrinklewort-20201202-p56jy9.html?fbclid=IwAR0YvTQSkRe6aL2zQRJE1xc_hkLEeb513Qx5Yhl2tuukBD0pgpvi4sG9qX_A
- **Woorndoo Land Protection Group** held their annual community day in November with an online seminar featuring Prof. John Morgan and Dr Paul Gibson-Roy.
Full program:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLgZ2SITjEo>

The role of CFA volunteers

The long-established practice of CFA brigades carrying out planned fuel reduction burning on roadsides is important for maintaining the overall health of native grasslands. Planned burning in late Summer and Autumn benefits biodiversity by reducing biomass (native and introduced), allowing native species to set seed and germinate and opening up spaces for greater diversity of species. It's also a critical component of this project, as we are prioritising the weed control works on recently burnt sites for greater efficiency and safety.

Some of the best examples of native grasslands on roadsides occur on roads that have a long history of regular burning. In the South West region alone, CFA brigades have been known to burn up to 1,200kms of roadside per year. A decline in planned burning would see a decline in the condition of roadside native grasslands.

There are a multitude of factors that may impact on CFA's ability to achieve planned burns. For example, change in land use and social demographics, regulatory processes, diminishing and aging populations and the ever-decreasing climatic windows of opportunity.

CFA numbers have been steadily falling since 2010 when there were approximately 40,000 volunteers. This year's annual report from the CFA shows that volunteer fire fighters numbered 30,977, down from 34,483 the year before.

Read more in this research paper: "A Culture of Burning: Social-Ecological Memory, Social Learning and Adaption in Australian Volunteer Fire Brigades."

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08941920.2020.1819494?journalCode=usnr20>

and recent ABC article:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-10/cfa-volunteer-numbers-in-decline-victoria/12970688>



CFA Planned burning on roadsides.

Our Linear Reserves Project partners and stakeholders have had many discussions about the barriers to burning and the ways that this project may be able to encourage, educate and assist brigades. In previous years, we have held community days with guest speaker Prof. John Morgan presenting information about the importance of burning in grasslands and leading a tour of a site.

This year, instead of holding community events, we developed a survey for CFA members to get their perspectives on the burning issues. We also developed an educational presentation to give a brief introduction to native grasslands, why they're so rare and significant, and the benefits of appropriate burning regimes.

This video has been aimed at CFA volunteers but it's also being shared with council work crews, Regional Roads Victoria, contractors, water authorities and others, in the hope that it may go some way in preventing disturbance and damage being done to roadside grasslands.

You can view the video here:

<https://publish.viostream.com/play/ny1ykcsdbeybid>

New invaders

Chilean and Texan Needle Grasses are highly invasive and a threat to both agriculture and native vegetation. Valuable native grasses are often mistaken for these weeds, and landholders need to be sure of their identification before undertaking control.

Now in its third and final year, Golden Plains Shire Council's "New Invaders Project" is tackling the invasive weeds through mapping and controlling the grasses in high-value native reserves on roadsides west of Shelford. Funded by the Victorian Government's Biodiversity Response Program, the project has demonstrated that the species can be controlled with a consistent annual control program.



Corangamite CMA - Protecting the VVP

Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands of the Victorian Volcanic Plains contain some of our most iconic trees across south-west Victoria. The majestic twisted shapes of the old River Red Gums (common paddock trees) provide critical habitat for birds, bats, arboreal mammals, reptiles and invertebrates to feed, roost, nest and shelter. These woodlands are also home to amazing wildflowers and native grassy tussocks which live underneath the canopy. Patches of purple Chocolate Lilies, white Milkmaids, yellow Everlasting Daisies, spiky Blue Devils and fluffy Featherheads can be found during spring and early summer.

This is the landscape the Corangamite CMA is working hard to protect through the “Protecting the Victorian Volcanic Plains” program funded by the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program. There are three sub-projects under this program:

1. Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands Stewardship Project
2. Cultural Burning
3. Linear Reserves Project

The Cultural Burning and Linear Reserves Projects are being delivered in partnership with DELWP and the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation.

The Grassy Eucalypt Woodland Stewardship Program (GEW) aims to support private landholders looking after remnant Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands on their property to increase the connectivity, quality and extent of this critically endangered ecological community.

An important part of the project is the sharing and collaboration of local knowledge with key stakeholders and partners. The creation of the GEW Steering Committee has brought together an amazing brains trust of people and organisations who have worked in this area for a long time, such as DELWP, Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Geelong Landcare Network, Golden Plains Shire, Greening Australia, Trust for Nature, Geelong Field Naturalist Club and community representatives.

Community workshops and forums (delayed due to COVID-19) will continue the sharing of local knowledge and will be hosted over the next three years.

Long-term monitoring programs with Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research, Wadawurrung Traditional Owners and Geelong Field Naturalist Club will

monitor the outcomes from the GEW project to learn and share how environmental investments can help improve Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands.

If you’d like to find out more and have remnant patches of Grassy Eucalypt Woodland on your property, we would love to hear from you.

Expressions of Interest are still open. Call 1800 002 262 to learn more about the program, submit your EOI via the CCMA website or email jess.lill@ccma.vic.gov.au

This project is supported by Corangamite CMA, through funding from the Australian Government’s National Landcare Program.



Grassy Eucalypt Woodland of the Victorian Volcanic Plains.



Common Everlasting *Crysocephalum apiculatum*.

To take or not to take, that is the question!

I'd like to update you on some recent changes to the native vegetation legislation that may affect the projects you work on.

Many native plants are protected by law and you may need a special permit to collect them. The legislation that protects native plants on Crown Land is called the *Flora Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (FFG). Crown Land isn't just obvious parks and reserves, but also includes roadsides and any land managed by a public authority. You require a permit to take any part of the native species that are listed as Protected Flora.

The protected flora list includes plants from three sources:

1. Plant taxa (species, subspecies or varieties) [listed as threatened](#) under the FFG Act
2. Plant taxa belonging to communities listed as threatened under the FFG Act
3. Plant taxa listed on the restricted use protected flora list. These plants are generally are attractive or highly sought after, such as orchids and grass trees. They are protected so that the removal of these species from the wild can be controlled.

Example: All correas, all grevilleas and all orchids are Protected Flora.

What is the FFG Act 1988?

The FFG Act is Victoria's main legislation for the conservation of threatened species and communities, and for the management of potentially threatening processes. The aim of the Act is to conserve all of Victoria's native plants and animals. The FFG Act places importance on prevention to ensure that more species do not become threatened in the future.

The Act has been recently amended

The Act changed on 1 June 2020, and while some details are still being worked through, this will mean strengthening of our laws around compliance. The Act had not been significantly amended since 1988 and approaches to conserving biodiversity have changed over the years. The amended Act:

- reclassifies the state advisory list for our threatened species to a national approach

- introduces principles to guide the implementation of the FFG Act, including consideration of the rights and interests of Traditional Owners and the impacts of climate change
- introduces changes to the categories of protected flora, the way they are regulated, and the penalties associated with their protection
- emphasises the importance of cooperative approaches to biodiversity conservation and recognises that all government agencies and the community need to participate in the conservation effort.

What if you see other people removing native plants when you think they shouldn't be?

You are often the eyes and ears on the ground, so if you see things happening on Crown Land, please report it to DELWP. This information helps build a picture about what is happening on our public reserves.

Report environment, wildlife and forestry crime through Crimestoppers on 1800 333 000, or email DELWP at customer.service@delwp.vic.gov.au

If you are ever in doubt about what you can or can't do when undertaking projects on Crown Land, please contact us at DELWP or visit

<https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/conserving-threatened-species/victorias-framework-for-conserving-threatened-species>



Protected. Salmon Sun Orchid, *Thelymitra rubra*.

Native gardens

Created natural spaces are a great opportunity for people to and learn about native flora without causing negative impacts to wild populations. Compaction and the spread of weeds and harmful pathogens have the potential to threaten fragile and rare ecosystems. However, it's important to see and learn about these places before we can appreciate and conserve them.

One example of a native garden featuring local grassland flora is at Mount Leura, near Camperdown. The garden has been planted and maintained by the Friends of Mount Leura volunteers who hold regular propagation days and working bees.

To find out more about events and news and to become a member, visit the website –

www.mtleura.org.au/



Bulbine Lily, *Bulbine bulbosa*



Grass Trigger Plant, *Stylidium graminifolium*



Common Everlasting, *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*.