

FEBRUARY 2021, ISSUE 1

# THE BABBLER

The official e-newsletter of the Buloke and Northern  
Grampians Landcare Network



Natte Yallock

## NEW YEAR, NEW BEGINNINGS

**BY ANDREW BORG, FACILITATOR BNGLN**

Hello Everyone! Welcome to the first edition of the BNGLN Babbler. I sincerely hope that you'll indulge me in using this name. One of my favourite birds, a species of Babbler, lives throughout our area. They are incredible to watch as they dig around in the soil, collect leaves and grasses, play in family groups, and occasionally have disagreements. Ultimately, however, they interact for the good of their group. I'm sure you can see the similarities... and let's face it, I also tend to Babble a bit about things I am passionate about.

Anyway, without further ado, I present this first newsletter as an Annual Report for the Year 2020.

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# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

**BY KEN COATES, PRESIDENT BNGLN**

This last year has been a very challenging one for Landcare Groups. The ability to meet, organise projects, deliver projects or even just socialise was limited. Understandably, this has probably caused a few of you to question just what your main priority is in life.

Personally, over the last twelve months, I have only attended two meetings in person. Zoom and Teams were the only way of meeting for most of the year, and as good as they can be, there is no substitute for personal interaction. For many in our community, Landcare may be their main social outlet, so the sooner we can get back to normal the better.

I was very sorry to be notified of the resignations of three long-standing, and valued members of the steering committee prior to the AGM.

To **Ann Dunstan**, **Lindsay Ezard** and **Anne Hughes**, I wish you all health and happiness in whatever you undertake in the future, and thank you for being champions of the Landcare movement in your own areas and groups. I would also like to thank all of the other Steering Group members – especially to **Prue** for stepping in as Honorary Secretary, and to **Ellen** for her work towards ensuring that our financial and governance foundations remain solid. I believe we now have a number of vacancies on the committee, so it presents a great opportunity for renewal. I hope we can attract some new faces with new ideas, and enthusiasm for what we can achieve through Landcare.

We are very fortunate to have Andrew as our facilitator, and he has seamlessly taken over from Kevin. His enthusiasm, knowledge and ability to get things done give me confidence in the future of the Network. Andrews' report will cover just what the Network has managed to accomplish over the past year, and considering the limitations, I believe an awful lot has been delivered. The next challenge is to have Andrew re-employed post June. For that we need all member groups to indicate their need for BNG to employ a facilitator on their behalf.

My association with the NCCMA continues. I still Chair the Regional Sustainable Ag. Steering Committee, and I am a member of the Community Leaders Group. Almost all of those meetings were conducted online last year, leading to a feeling of dis-connection.



Chairman, Ken Coates

**Looking to a better 2021 in every way.**



# A WORD FROM THE FACILITATOR

**BY ANDREW BORG**

As Ken has written, 2020 was a challenging year for all of us in so many aspects. It was certainly an interesting time to take over from the very experienced Kevin Spence, and unfortunately circumstances have meant that I have not been able to meet as many individuals or groups as I had initially hoped to do. But, in spite of everything thrown our way, I think that as an organisation we have continued to contribute to positive environmental change. Together, we have accomplished some amazing work – a summary of which I hope to convey here, referenced against the key Landcare objectives.



Network Facilitator, Andrew Borg

## Achievements against our Strategic Plan

### **1: Operate: Organised, Effective and Efficient Groups and Networks**

2020 has been a difficult operating year. Landcare did not provide new maintenance/projects grants rounds (due to the COVID-delayed State Budget) and the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program remained in a state of flux. As a result of the former, there was some consternation and/or ‘disgruntlement’ amongst a few groups – under the circumstances, I think this is perfectly understandable, and we can only hope for more positive times ahead. Notwithstanding, the overwhelming sentiment arising from groups that I have met as in fact one of positivity: the need is as important as ever to identify and implement on ground projects. However, there is still much work to be done: only a handful of groups conducted Annual General Meetings (again pandemic conditions are the major factor here), and a few groups are contemplating going into recess due to a reduction in members.





Community plant-outs (like this one at Coonooer Bridge) are an essential Landcare activity. This project was sponsored by 15 Trees.

## 2. Engage: Landcare Groups and Networks Engage Communities

The main method of engagement this year, in the absence of our ability to work with school and/or interest groups, was through social media. In 2020, our Facebook engagement (follows, likes and comments) increased by over 100% (we moved from 62 ‘followers’ to 139). We also created an Instagram page (366 followers) on which to share information and photographs of our projects. These metrics may not seem huge, but it’s a start. As a group, we need to identify ways of engaging a wider demographic and social media, and our new website is a component of that strategy. There was also some very positive feedback to articles printed in local media and Landcare Newsletters for wider distribution, which is always pleasing.

## 3. Collaborate: Landcare collaborates to increase its reach and Impact

Our ‘reach’ not only continues through use of social media, but also by a concerted campaign to engage and form partnerships with other organisations. The presence and work of the BNGLN was been shared in a variety of in-person and online forums this year. In addition to over 15 online events, I attended:

- *Landcare Program Review Summit – Huntly, February 2020*
- *Central Highlands Region Environmental Volunteers Networking event – Ballarat, February 2020*
- *Growing Ideas Festival 2020 – Marnoo, March 2020*
- *Biodiversity Response Planning (BRP) sessions (conducted online throughout 2020).*

BRP is a long-term collaborative approach involving everybody with an interest in regional biodiversity to encourage alignment of biodiversity actions. This is done in order to support the goals of the 20-year biodiversity plan “Protecting Victoria’s Environment – Biodiversity 2037”. Facilitators provided input to this process, through the CMA, on behalf of their respective networks. A copy of the materials is available on the website (under resources).

- *Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) (conducted online throughout 2020).*

Similar in construct to the BRP, the RCS is done at a catchment level. Facilitator input was sought on Network areas of priority and the opportunities, risks and threats when conducting work within the catchment area. Work on this activity is currently being finalised by the NCCMA.



Additionally, I worked with all levels of Government to further our Network aims:

- with our Federal MP, Anne Webster, to arrange for a Volunteer Grant. The Volunteer Grant was received (almost \$4000 of equipment to assist volunteers) and should allow projects to be completed in a more 'comfortable' fashion in future.
- with State Member, Louise Staley, to discuss the importance of Landcare, and plans for the 35th Anniversary.
- several meetings with individuals from the Northern Grampians and Buloke Shires.

*It is vital that these partnerships be enhanced and maintained moving forward.*

An alternative way of sharing the BNGLN with the wider world was undertaken in September 2020. As a network, we competed in the 2020 'Great Southern BioBlitz' – a biodiversity mapping project for all countries in the Southern hemisphere. Photographs of the species living around us were shared with thousands of other participants and groups. It may surprise you to know that 'our little region' finished in the top 25 of participants, behind much larger entrants such as Cape Town (South Africa), Sydney, Melbourne, Buenos Aires (Argentina), Lima (Peru) and Quito (Ecuador). We are home to several endangered species, but our network area is well serviced by organisations specifically committed to the preservation of flora and fauna.

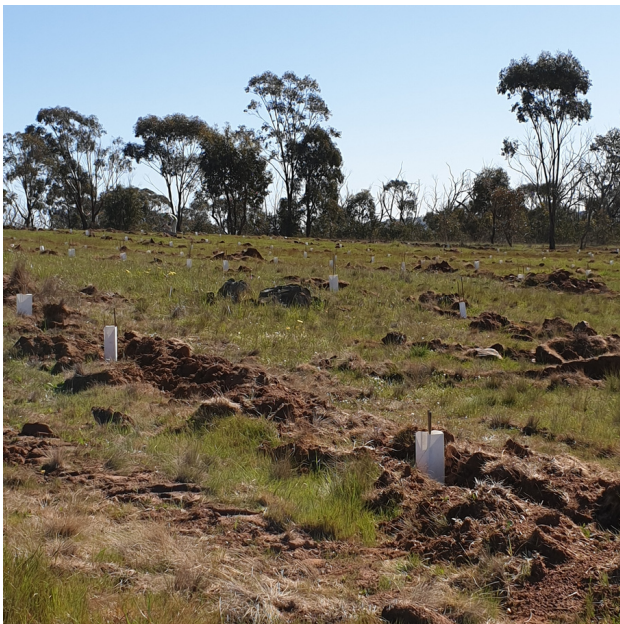


Our region is home to a variety of eco-systems,  
and some wonderful (and sometimes endangered) species.

#### 4. Do – Landcare Achieves Specific and Measurable On-ground Actions

**This is where we did our best work!** The funds provided through several Landcare Grants, as well a wonderful partnership with the **15 Trees** organisation, enabled us to plant **20,032** seedlings throughout our region in **26 projects**, totalling about **32 hectares**. At a conservative 5 minutes per seedling, this amounts to some **1670 volunteer hours** in this activity alone! These plantings represent significant contribution to: the repair of degraded landscapes such as erosion gullies, increased carbon storage, revitalisation of soils and the restoration of habitat for our unique biodiversity. Obviously, trees are extremely important to the health and wellbeing of all living things, but nature needs our help! In addition to these important activities, we commenced the mapping and removal of regionally controlled weeds and pests in partnership with Shire Council and VicRoads.

*Well done to all involved!*



A biodiversity project plantout at Berrimal (left) and (right) local farmer, Luke Batters shows a Sustainable Agriculture project to Tess and Darren (NCCMA)

#### 5. Tell – Landcare can Tell the Story

This is undoubtedly a work in progress which will become increasingly important in 2021. As we approach *Landcare's 35th Anniversary* later this year, it is now more important than ever, to stay true to the Landcare Vision:

*“All Australians caring for the land and water that sustain us”.*

Apart from social media and print articles, our new website and regular newsletter (of which this is the first) will be utilised to share our successes and ideas with a wider audience.



## A BRIEF LOOK AHEAD -2021

### Regenerative Agriculture

The Buloke and Northern Grampians Landcare Network will also be ensuring a greater focus on Regenerative Agriculture. We have some brilliant farming families out there who are keen to look at ways of improving soils; utilise alternative methods to costly, synthetic inputs; and who want to work with the natural environment by building upon the existing landscape bio-links. Hopefully, we can continue to assist them by providing knowledge and expertise from guest speakers and like-minded organisations; and, should appropriate funding be made available, develop a Regenerative Agriculture Group with two-three on-ground development and demonstration project sites. *(We have already received some good news on this front, which I am currently not permitted to distribute widely, so watch this space.)*

### Community Celebrations

Landcare holds special significance for those within our community who are aware of its origins. It started in this area! The very first Landcare Group –a community of dedicated **Winjallock** farmers – was launched on **25 Nov 1986**. That fact alone is something that our community should be proud of, and we should intend to ensure that this year is celebrated (hopefully the pandemic allows for this!) As part of this celebration, it is our intent to conduct a celebratory dinner (November) with recognition for those of our members who have been a crucial part of the success of the Landcare movement.

### Revegetation

We have a lot of projects in the planning phase, just waiting for some funding to come along! Through our partnership with 15 Trees, it is hoped that we can provide 150-200 trees for each of our Member Groups for planting small '35th Anniversary Plots'.

### Pests and Weeds

In conjunction with the North Central CMA, the Northern Grampians Shire and Agriculture Victoria, we are hopeful of conducting a 'Rabbit Buster' event in October. Part of the preparation for this event is the development of a Rabbit Action Plan which can hopefully be rolled out across our Member Groups.

Resources and funding for this activity are currently being pursued. We have also started making preparations for the mapping of invasive weeds across our area, and will definitely need inputs from all of our members. In this way, we will be able to justify and provide better access to resources and funding for our Member Groups.

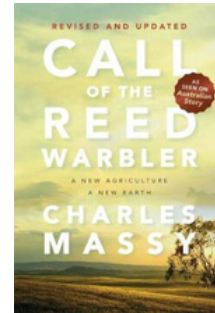
### Biodiversity

With help from our Member Groups and Partners, we're hoping to advance an understanding of our region's wonderful biodiversity. Accordingly, we will be participating in the Great Southern BioBlitz by hosting our own series of events in September. This will include activities for the schools within our region and, hopefully, some special guests from the Melbourne Museum to assist and guide us in this Project.

## RESOURCES

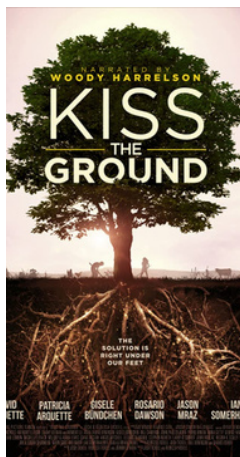
## Worth A Read...

Regenerative Farming: 'Call of the Reed Warbler'  
by  
Charles Massy (UQP, 2020)



## Worth a Watch...

*Kiss the Ground (Netflix)*



*A Life on Our Planet (Netflix)*



## Worth a Look...

Our Website: [www.bnlandcare.org](http://www.bnlandcare.org)

Biodiversity: <https://inaturalist.ala.org.au/>

Regenerative Farming: <https://regenfarmers.com.au/>

*Do you have any recommendations? Please, let us know!*

**The Babbl**er is a publication of the **Buloke and Northern Grampians Landcare Network**

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We acknowledge that our Network performs its activities on Dja Dja Wurrung Country. We acknowledge and extend our appreciation for the Dja Dja Wurrung People, the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work. We pay our respects to leaders and Elders past, present and emerging for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and the hopes of all Dja Dja Wurrung Peoples. We express our gratitude in the sharing of this land, our sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of that sharing and our hope that we may walk forward together in harmony and in the spirit of healing.