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THE BABBLER

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



Carapooee

WHERE DOES THE TIME GO?

BY ANDREW BORG, FACILITATOR BNGLN

Hello Everyone! It's taken quite a while but I've finally managed to make time to get a new edition of our newsletter written. As you'll see from the articles in this issue, this year has been a very busy time for us so far.

Several groups have been very active, there has been a lot of activity in the Grants space, we have undertaken a variety of projects, and we have even formed two new groups (who were accepted into the Network at the last AGM).

I hope you enjoy this latest issue of *your* e-zine.

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REGENERATIVE AG

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE 'KKRAG'

The ongoing loss of the world's fertile soils and biodiversity, and an ever-increasing reliance on synthetic agricultural inputs to compensate for poor soils, poses a significant threat to our future health and survival.

Regenerative Agriculture holds the key to a healthy planet.

At its very core, regenerative agriculture seeks to use scientific methods to identify and develop ideas and processes that **improve soil health** on farming land (through better retention of moisture and natural soil chemistry); **enhance ecosystem services** (such as pollinators or beneficial soil microbes); and, **increase a community's health and vitality** (through less reliance on synthetic chemical inputs).

The **Kara Kara Regenerative Agriculture Group** (KKRAG) (in a district centred on St. Arnaud, Victoria) was formed in March 2021 to pursue Regenerative Agriculture activities in the Buloke and Northern Grampians Landcare Network's (BNGLNs) area of interest.

Regenerative Agriculture in North Central Victoria is a community-based land protection program funded by the **Australian Government's National Landcare Program Phase Two** (NLP2). The funding has been provided to organisations to deliver activities to support planning, communication, project design, monitoring, and evaluation of regional agriculture. \$85,000 will be provided through the program to the KKRAG over two years.

The group has worked with the **North Central Catchment Management Authority** (NCCMA) to develop an action plan that will guide the group's activities over the next two years. The activities chosen are based on soil types, climate, local knowledge and experience.

Additionally, through the **Smart Farms Small Grants** program, the KKRAG has received funding to the value of \$99,785 for various activities; including the development of test sites in the region to examine cover cropping and natural inputs; and holistic grazing practices.



The Logo for the newly established
Kara Kara Regen Ag Group

"To be a successful farmer one must first know the nature of the soil." Xenophon, c.430-354BC

KKRAG PROJECTS

In 2021/22, the main focus areas are:

UNDERSTANDING SOILS, SOIL TESTING AND INTERPRETATION

Soil sampling paddocks will provide the group with an understanding of the condition of soils in their region. Baseline data on the current chemical, physical and biological status of different soil types will provide the group with information such as: soil structure, soil carbon levels, nutrient status, baseline fertility, subsoil limitations, soil water and production potential.

The soil tests will be subsidised by the Regenerative Agriculture Project. After the soil sampling is complete, the group will have the opportunity to bring their soil sampling results to a workshop to better understand how to interpret them and use the results to make decisions for their farm. This activity will be the starting point for the group to build their knowledge and skills and inform future land management demonstrations.

MANAGING EROSION

Many group members have erosion gullies on their properties and some members have already taken steps to address the issue. The main causes of the erosion problems group members are dealing with are due to run-off on hillsides, particularly where there is reduced ground cover.

Activities will include workshops by a Subject Matter Expert, as well as field visits to look at different erosion issues as well as mitigations.

SOIL AMELIORANT FIELD TRIAL

The area has a focus on broadacre cropping and the group is interested in exploring variable rate soil ameliorant application, to improve yields and reduce wastage. Better yields from more precise soil ameliorant application generally results in more plant biomass in and above the soil, increased ground cover and protection from wind erosion.

To undertake this activity a test site is being established just north of St. Arnaud. The aim of this activity will be to make assessments of the success of and costs associated with the improvement of soil health and moisture retention.

GRAZING MANAGEMENT FIELD TRIAL

Grazing management on farms generally varies across the country. Some farmers choose to continuously graze their properties, while others rotate their stock between paddocks. Continuous grazing generally occurs over large extensive areas of land with pastures never or rarely spelled. This method can be successful where stocking rates are conservative, however, the system can result in stock becoming more selective in their grazing and can lead to some areas being over-grazed, which can lead to a loss of ground cover and erosion.



With the assistance of the North Central Catchment Management Authority, the KKRAG was formed over the course of two meetings held in St. Arnaud.





The KKRAAG will be undertaking a large range of projects throughout the Network area.

Rotational grazing or cell grazing is where smaller paddocks are more heavily stocked for a short period of time followed by long periods of rest to allow for replenishment. This approach requires more intensive management, fencing and watering points for stock.

The group is interested in learning more about timed cell grazing and how it can be managed to maximise ground cover and improve soil health. A test site is being established in the west of our region to investigate and assess methods of rotational grazing regimes.



FRIENDS OF BLUE GUM RISE - HELPING TO PRESERVE A SPECIES

Squirrel Gliders (*Petaurus norfolcensis*) are a native arboreal, nocturnal gliding possum and one of four species in the glider family. They are considerably larger and less common than the well-known Sugar Glider, but are very closely related. The most obvious difference is the large, fluffy tail; reminiscent of squirrels which is presumably the origin of its name.

In Victoria, this Glider is distributed inland of the Great Divide, extending through the box-ironbark region of the State from the northern tip of the Grampians (Horsham) in the West, to Wodonga on the NSW Border to the east, and through the central and northern riverine plains.

However, there is – apparently – a major break in its range (of approx. 185km) with the last single confirmed sighting in the Stuart Mill area in 1995. In Victoria, the species is listed as ‘threatened’. This is predominantly as a result of previous land clearance and the introduction of foxes and feral cats.

At Blue Gum Rise just south of Stuart Mill, a captive breeding program has commenced with the aim of building up numbers of these gorgeous little animals, and a long term vision of rewilding the species back into region.



One of the Squirrel Gliders located at Blue Gum Rise.



RABBIT MANAGEMENT AT AVON PLAINS-BANYENA

The BNGLN was successful in obtaining a **Victorian Rabbit Action Network** (VRAN) grant back in March. The funding allowed the **Avon Plains-Banyena Landcare Group** to hold two workshops - with the assistance of Agriculture Victoria - including representation from private landholders and the Northern Grampians Shire.

The first workshop focussed on understanding the rabbit issue and was used to determine the extent of the rabbit problem in the area. 'Anecdotal' information was sought from local landholders on the extent of burrows and this subsequently facilitated a survey of some 7000 Ha of land. Instances of burrows and evidence of rabbits was uploaded to the 'RabbitScan' App.

At the second workshop, **Agriculture Victoria** provided a guest speaker who shared 'Best Practice' information for attendees, followed by several management and treatment demonstrations.

The workshop outputs have been used to develop a BNGLN Rabbit Action Plan which, although based on the Avon Plains landscape, will be generic enough to allow roll-out other regions within the network area). Concurrently, a survey will be conducted in the Lakes region to map out rabbit activity.

Agriculture Victoria will be commencing a 'Good Neighbours' rabbit management program in the Avon Plains area in the next few months to commence treatment of the rabbits.



OTHER NEWS...

Both **Wycheproof** and **Charlton Landcare Groups** held their AGMs mid-year.

Both groups elected new committees, and it is with great delight, the BNGLN welcomes the new Presidents:

Wycheproof Landcare Group: Marney Durie

Charlton Landcare Group: Tessa Fitzpatrick

Congratulations Marney and Tessa on being elected to these roles. Additionally, the BNGLN sends its sincere thanks to all committee members either recently-retired, re-elected or newly-elected for the wonderful contribution you have, and will continue to make, to Landcare.

Well done to all involved!

Revegetation Plant-outs...

While the Network has had to endure some 18 months without Landcare Project Funding, we were once again fortunate to receive support from the **15 Trees** organisation. This season, thanks to their donation, and with a little help from **St Arnaud Secondary College** and **St Arnaud Primary School**, we planted over 3500 trees!



Current VLG Grant Round...

At the time of writing, there was still no word on the VL Grant applications submitted by our Network and its member groups. Nine separate bids were developed by our organisation and we hope that we are able to proceed with at least some of them - fingers crossed.

A BRIEF LOOK AHEAD -2021

Regenerative Agriculture

The Kara Kara Regenerative Agriculture Group will be holding a series of workshops and field days. While their website is still in development, the best place to keep informed of their activities is their Facebook Page.

Community Celebrations

We are still hoping that we can celebrate **Landcare's 35th Anniversary** this November. Regardless of how this pans out, we will be ensuring that we recognise members who have contributed significantly over the journey. Accordingly, we are now seeking nominations from member groups and individuals (past and present) to **nominate someone worthy of recognition**. Please contact Andrew (Landcare Facilitator) at bnglandcare@gmail.com

Biodiversity

While our planned BNG BioBlitz can't proceed in its original format due to pandemic restrictions, we will be hosting several spring walks throughout the Network Area. Thanks to a generous Community Grant from the **Northern Grampians Shire**, and a small project Grant from the **Field Naturalists Club of Victoria**, we will be hosting several small events, and be able to document some of our native flora and fauna, as photographed by members of the public.

In October, we will also be able to compete in the **Great Southern BioBlitz** for the second year running. We did really well last year, showcasing our Biodiversity to countries all across the Southern Hemisphere. It would be wonderful to get more participants this year and see how many species we can find!

Details of both the Spring Walks and the Great Southern Bioblitz will be advertised through print and Social Media, as well as e-mails to member groups.



Est. 1880

The Field
Naturalists
Club of
Victoria

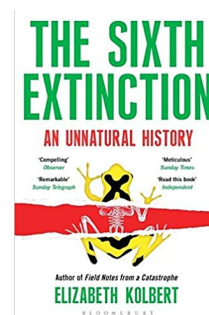
RESOURCES

Worth A Read...

The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History

by

Elizabeth Kolbert (Bloomsbury, 2020)

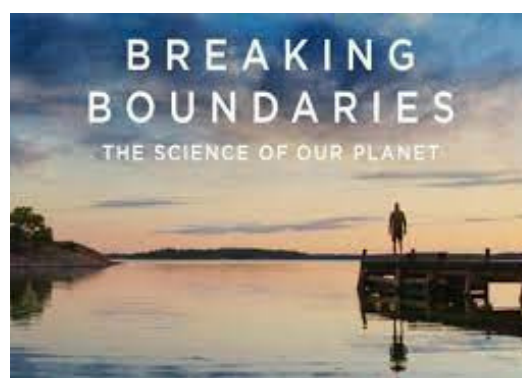


Worth a Watch...

Breaking Boundaries (Netflix)

May 2021

David Attenborough and scientist Johan Rockström examine Earth's biodiversity collapse and how this crisis can still be averted.



Keep an Eye Out...

The BNGLN has been nominated for several awards - the Landcare Victoria Network of the Year, the Victorian Premier's Sustainability Awards (Healthy Environment), and the Keep Victoria Beautiful - Community Environment Award. Keep an eye out over coming months as we look forward to the Judge's decisions! ***(Late Breaking News: We are a Finalist in the KVB Awards)***

Worth a Look...

Our Website: www.bnglandcare.org

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

The Babbler 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.