

The North Central CMA and the Department of Environment Land Water and Planning (DELWP) are calling on the community for help in finding out what happened to two endangered snakes.

A North Central CMA field officer came across two large Murray Darling carpet pythons hung over the branch of a tree in the northern end of the Gunbower Forest in late November 2015.

North Central CMA Project Manager Adrian Martins said the find was of significant concern.

"Wildlife Officers from DELWP are investigating whether they were hit by a car, but the fact they were beheaded and strung over a tree suggests foul play is involved," he said.

"To see one carpet python in the forest is a rare sight. To find two adults in the one area is remarkable. That is what makes this very disturbing."

Carpet pythons are non-venomous, relatively harmless, unless you pick them up, when they only really bite to defend themselves.

They are one of the character species for the forest and are a regional treasure.

Mr Martins said authorities were looking into every possibility, including whether the snakes were dumped or accidentally killed.

"By the time we found them they were too decayed to work out whether they had been shot or hacked with an axe or shovel, but the fact their heads were removed suggests it wasn't an accident. The fear is these snakes have been killed and their heads taken as trophies."

Murray Darling carpet pythons were once widespread across Victoria, but there are now fewer than 200 confirmed records of them in the state.

Fragmentation and loss of habitat, predation by cats and foxes and poaching have contributed significantly to their decline.

DELWP Senior Wildlife Officer Brady Childs said all native wildlife in Victoria is protected under the Wildlife Act 1975.

"Any person who destroys threatened wildlife can be found guilty of an offence under S41(1) of the Wildlife Act 1975 which carries a maximum penalty of a fine up to \$36,400 and/or two years imprisonment," Mr Childs said.

If anyone has information about this incident, please contact the DELWP on 136 186 and speak to a wildlife officer.



*Disturbing discovery: two dead carpet pythons found beheaded in Gunbower Forest.*

This newsletter is made possible by funding provided by The Living Murray initiative of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority.

This publication may be of assistance to you, but the North Central Catchment Management Authority and its employees do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind, or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on information in this publication.

The Living Murray is a joint initiative funded by the New South Wales, Victorian, South Australian, Australian Capital Territory and Commonwealth governments, coordinated by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority.



**NORTH CENTRAL**  
Catchment Management Authority  
*Connecting Rivers, Landscapes, People*

**Welcome** to the fish edition! Read about the Native Fish Recovery Plan, the upcoming carp forum, re-snagging in Box Creek and monitoring results from the 2015 forest watering.

## Native Fish Recovery Plan

A world-class Murray cod trophy fishery is just one of the aims of the *Native Fish Recovery Plan for the Gunbower and lower Loddon region*.

Healthy waterways are vital to support healthy fisheries and the social and economic benefits they provide to our communities.

The Native Fish Recovery Plan includes on-ground actions to address the three key elements needed to recover fish populations:

1. Loss of connectivity for fish movement and migration (eg fishways);
2. Alteration of natural flows regimes (eg environmental flows); and
3. Loss of habitat (eg resnagging and protecting river banks).

"The Native Fish Recovery Plan recognises the irrigation system as a component of aquatic ecosystems and recommends ways to use irrigation infrastructure to assist in building native fish numbers, for example the delivery of environmental flows," North Central CMA Project Manager Louissa Rogers said.

North Central CMA and VRFish have recently established a new exciting partnership to implement the plan.

"By working with recreational anglers and irrigators we can help improve the rivers and rebuild fish stocks," Louissa said

"There's no reason why we can't make the Gunbower and lower Loddon the jewel in the crown of the Murray-Darling Basin for recreational fishing."

## Community Carp Forum

As part of the Native Fish Recovery Plan, the North Central CMA, together with VRFish, invites you to our Community Carp Forum, at the **Kerang Bowling Club** on **Thursday 10 March 5pm-8.30pm**.

Guest speakers include:

- **Ivor Stuart** (Kingfisher Research);
- **Clayton Sharpe** (CPS Enviro); and
- **Matt Barwick** (NSW DPI Fisheries).

These fantastic speakers will be presenting on the issue of carp in the Murray-Darling Basin, native fish assemblages in the Gunbower Forest and options for carp management including the proposed release of the carp herpes virus in 2017.

This event is free and open to everyone to attend. Light supper will be provided.

**RSVPs are essential.** To secure your place, call 03 5448 7124 or email [info@nccma.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@nccma.vic.gov.au) by Friday 4th March, 2016.



## CONTACT

**North Central CMA**  
Reception  
Ph: 03 5448 7124

**Anna Parker**  
Gunbower Forest Project Manager  
Email:  
[anna.parker@nccma.vic.gov.au](mailto:anna.parker@nccma.vic.gov.au)

**Ben Thomas**  
Gunbower Forest Project Officer  
Email:  
[ben.thomas@nccma.vic.gov.au](mailto:ben.thomas@nccma.vic.gov.au)



## Box Creek snags

The North Central CMA has reinstated six snag complexes in Box Creek with the aim of providing more habitat and food for native fish.

North Central CMA Project Officer Peter Rose said a study into the response of macroinvertebrates in and around the new snags has shown promising results.

“Our monitoring has shown the snags are supporting approximately three-times the abundance and 1.5-times the diversity of macroinvertebrates than control sites (without snags),” he said.

“The snags had well-developed biofilms and retained leaf packs, which are likely driving the increased macroinvertebrate production.

“As well as increasing the food supply for native fish, the snags provide important habitat complexity and cover, as well as resting points for migrating native fish.”

As part of the *Native Fish Recovery Plan – Gunbower and lower Loddon*, the North Central CMA plans to install a further 10 snag complexes in Pyramid Creek next to Hird and Johnson swamps in May.



Reinstated snags in Box Creek

## Barapa Culture

The Barapa Culture team will be out on Country soon surveying in the lower Gunbower Forest, and sharing knowledge about its rich cultural heritage.



Barapa Culture team member Clinton Jones points out a scarred tree.

Through the Barapa Water for Country project, the team will spend two weeks in the field recording and mapping cultural values such as food, fibre and medicine plants; scar trees; earth (cooking) mounds; and shell middens.

North Central CMA Project Officer Robyn McKay said the surveys are integral to improving the input that Barapa Traditional Owners have into environmental watering plans.

“One of the best parts of the field work is the sharing between generations and bringing cultural science and 'white science' together,” she said.

Archaeologist Colin Pardoe and ecologist Kate Bennetts will also be working with the team.

“To stand under a river red gum, next to an earth mound that's hundreds of years old and learn how Barapa ancestors made a living in the Forest is very humbling,” Robyn said.

The Barapa Culture team, along with Colin and Kate, would like you to join them for a relaxed evening at Tree Tops Scout Camp, Spences Bridge Road, Cohuna on Tuesday 8 March from 7pm to 9pm, or from 6pm for a BYO picnic tea. This community run event is a great opportunity to learn more about the plants and Aboriginal cultural heritage of Gunbower Forest.

The project is funded through the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

## Q&A – monitoring is the key

Our vegetation and fish ecologists have been busy during spring and summer monitoring the response of the forest to the 28.3 GL of environmental water delivered during spring last year.

Vegetation ecologist Kate Bennetts reported: “Areas of forest that were inundated (swamp forest near the wetlands) appear to have responded prolifically and still have remnant pools of water with lots of aquatic plants. Reedy Lagoon is supporting a good cover of wetland plants but not quite the diversity we saw last year after the larger environmental flow delivered via the Hipwell Rd regulator. The difference in diversity is not necessarily a bad thing, just a different response and could be due to the season it was filled.”

Carp exclusion plots were again monitored in 2015, but this time plots with floating lids were added to investigate the impacts of birds on aquatic vegetation growth.

“We’ve seen a noticeable difference in the plots where aquatic plants were protected from water birds and large carp. Water birds are unlikely to significantly affect aquatic plants in undisturbed wetlands, but in turbid wetlands full of carp the effect of bird’s grazing may be more conspicuous,” Kate said.

North Central CMA Project Manager Anna Parker is excited about the answers being discovered and the new questions being raised by the monitoring results.

“It’s critical to monitor the outcomes of these watering events so we can maximize the benefits for future events,” she said.

The North Central CMA has begun planning for environmental water deliveries in Gunbower Forest and Gunbower Creek for 2016-17. They will be talking to the Community Reference Group over the coming months on the proposals. If you would like more information on what’s planned get in touch with one of the CRG members or call the CMA.

Look out for more monitoring results in future editions of the newsletter.



Milfoil and swamp lilies in the carp and bird exclusion plot (right) compared with an unprotected area (left).

### FIVE MINUTES WITH WENDY DUCKWORTH-VEITCH

**Wendy took the time recently to tell us a bit about herself, what she loves about Gunbower Island and why she is a member of the Community Reference Group:**

I have been in the area for just over 30 years, but I’m still not called a local! I come from Gisborne which is on the east coast of New Zealand’s North Island, so where I grew up is a complete contrast to Gunbower Forest.

I spent my days at the beach and trying to surf. Never did I imagine that I would come to love the flat dusty dry forest. I love to kayak and have spent many hours

going up and down the creek. My favourite place would have to be the little spot at Major Mitchell's rest area. It is so beautiful and you are always surprised by what is around the next corner. The bird life is amazing. It is the perfect place for a short or long paddle.

I see my role in the CRG to spread the word about what is happening in our forest and to help our local community appreciate what is in our backyard.

Litter in the forest, pale yellow water lily, and carp are the issues that I am interested in finding a solution to.