

North Central chat

JUNE 2017

A message from the Regional Landcare Coordinator

Hi everyone,

I hope you're rugged up with a warm drink as you read this edition of the Chat. The winter weather has snapped in, this week predicted to be the coldest of the year thus far.

The winter weather doesn't slow things down across the catchment with sowing now in full swing. Legumes, cereals and canola have made their way into freshly tilled soils or between the stubble cover from the summer harvest.

Lambing is also well underway, which is always one of my favourite times of year, as I get to drive across the region visiting landholders and watching their happy little lambs growing up.

The wetter conditions, supported with environmental water, have provided in the perfect conditions it seems for endangered Australasian bitterns at Lake Cullen. Ecologist, Damien Cook (*Rakali Ecological Consulting*) observed about 16 birds on the lake recently, which are of the highest density of birds at one site he has ever recorded. Read more about this wonderful species and the farmers supporting their population recovery on Page 2

On May 6 & 7 I attended Booktown in Clunes, the only internationally recognised Booktown in Australia. The event, now in its 11th year, can attract more than 18,000 people to the unique fair, which boasts an entire street of book traders. The event was a wonderful way to showcase the work of Landcare locally and regionally to a new audience. I was very thankful to have the support of Paul and Cathie Haw of Boort fame, who drew a crowd to our little sustainability zone with their Aboriginal rock display and Paul's book '*Footsteps across the Loddon Plains- a shared history*'.

A suite of events are coming up in recognition and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

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people throughout National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week (July) which you can read more about in the events section of the Chat.

Enjoy the read,

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News...

Bitterns booming

Lake Cullen is a wetland within the internationally recognised Kerang Ramsar Wetlands site.

Since the site received natural inflows from spring flooding and has since received environmental water in March, bird breeding was incredibly successful, only to be trumped by the arrival of an unprecedented gathering of Australasian bittern.

The bitterns are an endangered species, sometimes referred to as the Bunyip Bird. Wildlife ecologist Matt Herring has been working with rice farmers in NSW Riverina on the well-recognised, *Bitterns in Rice project* which aims to help farmers best support a greater number of fledglings to increase the 'bittern yield' without impact on their growing regime.

The presence of bittern at Lake Cullen indicates there is sufficient food and habitat resources available for them. Like other heron species they prefer to take cover in tall wetland vegetation feeding at night on frogs, small fish, yabbies and insects.



Source: Bitterns in Rice Project

National Reconciliation Week (NRW) 2017

Reconciliation Australia announced that the theme for #NRW2017 is 'Let's Take the Next Steps'.

National Reconciliation Week (NRW) runs annually from 27 May – 3 June. These dates mark two milestones in Australia's reconciliation journey: The 1967 referendum and the historic Mabo decision, respectively.

"In 2017, we reflect on two significant anniversaries in Australia's reconciliation journey – 50 years since the 1967 referendum, and 25 years since the historic Mabo decision. As we commemorate these significant milestones, we ask all Australians to be a part of the next big

Meet Darren Bain, Regional Landcare Facilitator (RLF)



Darren joined the Landcare team this month, taking on the Australian Government funded Regional Landcare Facilitator role, previously held by Mandy Coulson.

Darren has worked at the CMA since 2010 starting out as the Project Officer for the Farming for Sustainable Soils program and has a wealth of experience working with our regions' community groups, scientists, land managers and farming community.

Darren is passionate about farming, soils, community led action and efficient production systems. Outside of work he has a property in Tandarra establishing a small area of cut flower production. Darren grew up in Bendigo and still lives in town with his two sons and wife Kylie.

In his own words, Darren said; *"I hope to keep building on the relationships I have developed with the rural community and build on the excellent work Mandy Coulson delivered over the past 18 months."*

Funnily enough, Darren was my first desk buddy when I came to the CMA back in 2010, so it's wonderful to have him by my side again as we deliver the North Central Landcare Program together over the coming years.

To get in touch with Darren, contact:

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steps in our nation's reconciliation journey."

Local events are likely happening near you and some are listed in the Events section of the Chat.

Campaspe Cultural Canoe trip

Robyn McKay and Angela Gladman, CMA Project Managers.

Over three days from April 26, the North Central CMA brought Traditional Owners together along the Campaspe River to explore, share and learn with each other, waterway managers and scientists about the river and its rich culture.

Each day the group was welcomed on Country by the relevant Traditional Owner group – Dja Dja Wurrung Clans at Redesdale, Taungurung Clans at Barnadown and Yorta Yorta Nations at Echuca. Participants walked up Barfold Gorge, and canoed key stretches of the Campaspe River. At different stages during the event landholders and the community were invited to participate; ranging from a yarn over lunch, sharing cultural stories of properties, hearing more about the riparian work of the Dja Dja Wurrung works crew (Djandak) within the town of Elmore and presentations on geology, cultural heritage and environmental flows.



The experience connected deeply with those who participated, building trust, mutual respect, new friendships, cultural networks and shared understanding. For some of the participants, this was their first real opportunity to experience the Campaspe River on their traditional Country, some having travelled 3 to 4 hours to participate. Farewells on the last day were emotional with people saying it meant a great deal to feel government support for reconnection back to Country. Participants overwhelmingly expressed

that they would like to see the event held again.



Two public events were well attended at Redesdale and Rochester. The event was filmed by upcoming Aboriginal film maker, Timmy Church Films, with a five minute video product containing participant interviews to come.

The event was funded by the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme and Victorian Government's Regional Riparian Action Plan.

Not your everyday nest box event

In last month's Chat we promoted a next box event happening near St Arnaud and Rob Youl has provided an update with some amazing photos of how it went.

Many Wimmera landowners enjoy seeing wildlife and want more habitat on their properties. Accordingly, St Arnaud's two regional Landcare networks encouraged Rob Youl and Alison Harris to run a workshop for 20 people at Slaty Creek.

Young St Kilda naturalist Gio Fitzpatrick led a farm walk showing how small timber nest boxes, hollow branches, woodheaps, dead trees, piles of stone and stone-filled postholes attract animals. Moreover, piles of ground litter (natural, not man-derived), especially eucalypt bark, quickly build up populations of beetles, worms and skinks, which soon become food for predators higher up the chain, especially birds and bats.

Gio covered some of his own fascinating research on favourable temperatures inside hollow trees, and under roofs and artificial structures, relating it to assisting desirable Wimmera wildlife species.

Coupled with this, small waterholes, excavated by local contractors and planted with reeds and sedges, create further niches for animals on the Youl-Harris land.

The highlight was a possum-proof nest box made by Gio from a large wheelie-bin, for use by owls,



ideally threatened powerful owls ranging across the Pyrenees and nearby plains. Positioning necessitated Lindsay Ezard's cherry-picker.



Local Landcare and conservation management network co-ordinators, Kevin Spence and John Boadle, both greatly appreciated the day and the keen St Arnaud and Stawell landowners present. 'There's no doubt simple and cheap ways exist using natural and recycled materials to encourage birds, bats and small marsupials like sugar gliders and antechinus to flourish,' they agreed.

A cuppa with a cause at the Campaspe High Tea

Angela Gladman, CMA Project Manager

Forty women from the Caring for the Campaspe project area attended a relaxed High Tea on Sunday 28 May at Bridgeward Grove, Goornong.

The area, between Axedale and Rochester, currently has no active Landcare group but a strong network of farming families. While the Caring for the Campaspe project seeks the participation of all interested landholders, we don't often have the opportunity to connect with the busy women along the river. Hence, this event aimed to share the understanding of how the river is being managed and how they can get involved.

There was strong interest for more information regarding fencing incentives available through the project to improve riparian habitat on their properties in alignment with the Victorian Government's Regional Riparian Action Plan.



There were plenty of conversations between like-minded women, all interested in NRM, who rarely have time to get together. One guest, who is participating in the 2017 Loddon Murray Community Leadership Program, said the event has provided the networks to establish a women's group in the area with a focus on NRM and community.

The event may just be the first step towards the formation of new Landcare group!



Hello everyone,

May has been lots of fun! Sophie and I launched the River Detectives state-wide pilot program at Malmsbury Primary School with Mary-Anne Thomas the Member for Macedon, all the wonderful students from the Malmsbury Ramblers group and their coordinator Chris Bromley. The event received some really great media coverage including local WIN news and a radio interview. It's a very exciting space for us to be working in and collaborating with staff from other regions across Victoria.

The results are in! Saltwatch Week was celebrated during May and the sites we received data for are telling us that most of our waterways salt content is pretty good. Only six sites in the north central region were reported as high. You can read more about Saltwatch Week on page 6.

Peter Rose and I have been out and about



collecting macroinvertebrate data from almost 20 sites across the lower Loddon River, Box-Pyramid Creek and Gunbower Creek systems. While we haven't analysed the data as yet, we have almost completed our very first Waterwatch and Native Fish Recovery Plan's Annual Snapshot Report Card 2016.

June brings with it the cold snap and a quiet month ahead in terms of events. Most of us become office bound to keep up with the paperwork. During this time, I will do my best to get out and about with our community volunteers to catch up, check monitoring equipment and make sure everyone is enjoying their volunteer experience.

Please stay warm and enjoy the read,

Cass Davis

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Extreme Citizen Science delivers "Vanessa"

Article from the Australian Citizen Science Association - Enews May 2017 edition

ACSA's very own Paul Flemons recently lead an Australian Museum expedition to Balls Pyramid, the tallest volcanic stack in the world at 560 metres high, to hunt for signs of one of the world's rarest creatures.

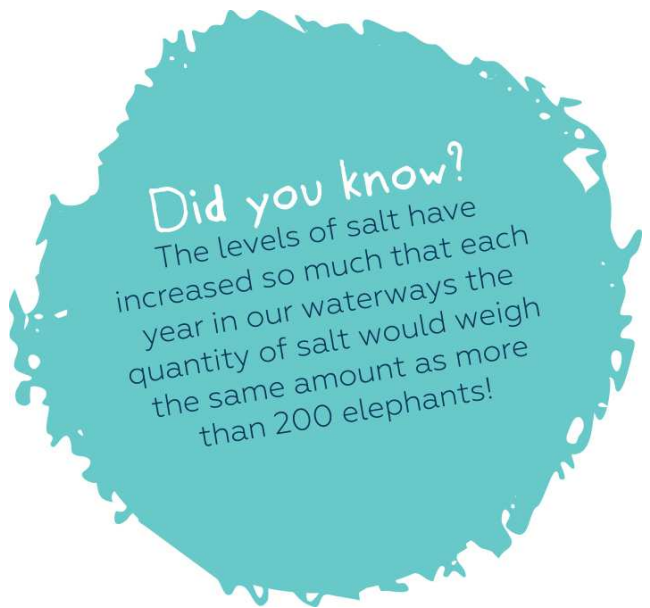
The Lord Howe Island stick insect or phasmid (*Dryococelus australis*) was once thought to be extinct, before being discovered by chance on Ball's Pyramid several decades ago. Among Paul's expedition team were six volunteer climbers whose job it was to search for the elusive phasmid on melaleuca bushes high up on the sheer cliff face of Ball's Pyramid...at night! Suspended on ropes, in the dark, with sheer vertical drops of 400m beneath them, scrabbling in the scrub and dirt for the nocturnal stick insect - this was extreme citizen science at its best!

In a great result for the Australian Museum and citizen science, a total of 17 phasmids were found across the island, and a pregnant female phasmid - named "Vanessa" after the climber who found it - will join a captive breeding program at Melbourne Zoo designed to bring the species back from the brink of extinction.



Congratulations to Paul and your team on a fantastic expedition.

You can read the full story on SMH online: <http://www.smh.com.au/interactive/2017/Riddle-in-the-Pacific/>



Check out more information about salinity in our waterways by visiting www.riverdetectives.net.au and downloading the salinity poster in the Resource River Bank section.





River Detectives state-wide pilot project is launched

On Thursday 18 May Member for Macedon Mary-Anne Thomas on behalf of the Water Minister, helped us to launch the River Detectives state-wide pilot at Malmsbury Primary School.

It was a great day to celebrate the collaboration between CMAs across the state, and the great work of the North Central CMA in developing the program and coordinating the pilot.

Chris Bromley, a Landcare member who volunteers his time at the school to run the program, helped take the students through some water-quality testing and also looked at the macroinvertebrate (waterbug) diversity much to the excitement of Mary-Anne who thought it was great to have the students connect with waterways.

Thanks to Chris and Carolyn and the Malmsbury Ramblers for helping launch the pilot for the state.



Mary-Anne Thomas MP with Matthew and Sylvie of Malmsbury Primary School at the launch. Image: Cass Davis

Stop the press it's a Salty issue!

Collecting samples from local creeks, rivers or streams provides vital information about the health of the region's precious waterways. Creeks, rivers and streams provide important cultural, recreational and economic benefits to local communities. Their health is important to future users.

Overall, sites across Victoria were considered to be in the good to moderate range for salinity. Five sites were assessed as having high salt content higher than 2,500 μ /cm with Tea Tree Creek at

Elaine-Morrison's Road Bridge Crossing reported with highest result in this range of 8290 μ /cm. A further six sites tested were very high, above 10,000 μ /cm, all six sites being within the North Central CMA region, Richardson's River at Raseigh's Ford recorded a whopping 33,900 μ /cm. For more information about Saltwatch Week go to: www.vic.waterwatch.org.au

Courses and Resources...

Draft Wimmera Mallee Water Resource Plan Summary Report

On Tuesday May 9, the Minister agreed to the release of the comprehensive plan and index table to the MDBA to begin the review process.

The public release of the plan and the summary mark the beginning of a three-month consultation process, ending 18 August 2017. Documents are accessible through the Engage Victoria website (engage.vic.gov.au) and this will be the main platform for people to keep updated on the consultation process

Victoria plans to lodge the final Wimmera-Mallee Water Resource Plan with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority by the end of 2017. The Northern Victoria draft Water Resource Plan is planned to be released early 2018, and a final by the end of 2018. By 1 July 2019, all Water Resource Plans are expected to be completed in line with the Basin Plan. At this time, sustainable diversion limits come into effect.

Resource Smart Schools

Is your school part of the Resource Smart Program? If you would like to find out more about being involved please contact Ellen at



resourcesmart@lmwrrg.vic.gov.au or visit www.resourcesmartschools.vic.gov.au/ for more information



Events...

World Environment Day - June 5

The 2017 World Environment Day campaign is asking everyone to 'explore, enjoy and celebrate your favourite natural places'.

With this year's theme of "Reconnecting you to nature" in mind, throughout June, go outside and show us that you're #WithNature. Breathe in the beauty and remember that by keeping our planet healthy, we keep ourselves healthy too. This theme mirrors the 2016 Chicks in the Sticks theme, so is a great reminder to us all to look around and take a moment to really reconnect to our sense of place.

There are lots of ways to join in and participate or simply view and enjoy what is happening globally to mark the day. Visit <http://worldenvironmentday.global/en#howto> or check out the #WithNature and #WorldEnvironmentDay through social media.

National Reconciliation Week event



NRW events are taking place across the state this week. Coming up locally is a presentation and panel discussion featuring Uncle Jack Charles in Castlemaine on June 22.

This event is a part of the Sorry Day and Reconciliation Week event series being run by Nalderun Upper Loddon Events Group.

When: Thursday June 22, 5.30 pm-7.30 pm

Where: Castlemaine Library, Mechanics Lane.

RSVP: Contact Kath Coff 0432 656 007 or Mount Alexander Shire Council 5471 1700.

Community Events Free All Week

You, Me & Biodiversity Talk; Brush-tailed Phascogale

Wombat Forestcare will host the nest *You, Me & Biodiversity* talk which will be presented by Jess Lawton, PhD candidate at Latrobe University who will discuss her project, which focuses on the conservation biology and landscape ecology of the brush-tailed phascogale.

Jess has been conducting motion-camera surveys, including in the Wombat Forest. This promises to be a really interesting presentation about this rarely seen threatened marsupial.

When: Saturday, June 24 at 1:30 PM

Where: Trentham Neighbourhood Centre
Cnr High and Market Streets, Trentham, Victoria

RSVP: info@wombatforestcare.org.au . Gold Coin donation



North Central CMA will be inaugural stallholders in the Careers and Technology Hub marquee from July 14-16.

Landcare and CMA Sustainable Agriculture program staff will be on hand to showcase current CMA programs, promote Landcare and soil health as well as assisting visitors with soil sample testing on site during the course of the show.

The Sheep and Wool Show organisers are featuring a '*Soils makes Sense*' seminar in the same marquee, so it'll be a wonderful occasion to take some free practical tips and resources, including our Soil Health Guide, back to the farm setting.

If you're a Landcare group with materials to promote, please get in touch. Otherwise stop by and say hello during the course of this hugely popular event.

For more information and tickets, visit: http://www.sheepshow.com/default.asp?_Home



Funding opportunities...

Community Grants - North Central Victoria

The North Central CMA Community Grants application period closes June 23.

Applications are appearing via SmartyGrants slowly but surely. I have had a steady stream of enquires and trust that if you or your group needs assistance you will get in touch with either myself or your local Landcare facilitator depending on your usual point of contact.

I'm really looking forward to reviewing your project applications for the 2017-18 year.

Joan Kirner Young and Emerging Women Leaders program

The Joan Kirner program will enable up-and-coming female leaders to obtain the critical skills, networks and experiences required to advance their leadership careers. It will empower women to progress as influential leaders in their communities, sectors and areas of interest.

Applications are open until Monday 3 July 2017. For full details for this scholarship opportunity visit: <http://www.vic.gov.au/women/women-s-leadership/joan-kirner-young-and-emerging-leaders-program.htm>

Stronger Fishing Clubs - Defibrillator grants program

The Victorian Government's Target One Million plan to get more Victorian's fishing more often includes a 'Defibrillators for Fishing Clubs program'.

As a part of the Stronger Fishing Club grants program eligible angling clubs will be provided an opportunity to acquire an automated external defibrillator (also known as AED).

Round 1 of the Defibrillators for Fishing Clubs grants program will be open from 15 May 2017 until 15 September 2017. All clubs in existence since 1 January 2015 are encouraged to apply via <http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/fisheries/recreational-fishing/target-one-million/stronger-fishing-clubs-defibrillator-grants-program>

Feature:

Fungi are flourishing



Fungi have been are flourishing in the autumn weather and the keen eye of a Wombat Forestcare member spotted this delight and shared it with the world via the fantastic [Wombat Forestcare Facebook page](#).

*"This stunning pink fungus was on the edge of a track near Trentham. I have never seen one before but think it may be *Hygrocybe cheelii*. *Hygrocybe* are commonly known as waxcaps."*