



Malmsbury District  
**Landcare**

# Newsletter

## January – March 2021

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### What's On

4<sup>th</sup> Feb. Member's Meeting – Greater Gliders with Sophie Bickford from Biolinks Alliance  
Venue – Lauriston Hall at 7.30pm.

4<sup>th</sup> Mar. Committee Meeting  
Venue – Lauriston Hall at 7.30pm.

First week of March. Autumn Platypus Survey

8<sup>th</sup> Apr. Public Meeting - UCLN Pollinator Project with Dr. Mark Hall from Western Sydney University  
Venue – Malmsbury Town Hall at 7.30pm

6<sup>th</sup> May. Committee Meeting  
Venue – Lauriston Hall at 7.30pm.

### News from the Committee

Our planned activities for 2020 were all unfortunately cancelled, however we still managed to achieve a great deal on the administrative front.

We are now incorporated which strengthens our group and opens opportunities to a wider range of funding sources. Our strategic plan has been reviewed and updated and we have a clear sense of purpose to help guide us in our activities over the next few years.

While our project work will continue, we also want to provide more opportunities for our members to attend events and interesting activities. We have therefore decided to alternate our normal committee meetings with member's nights with guest speakers and public meetings. We will refine the agenda of our committee meetings to ensure we can cover the important business such as event and activity planning and minimize basic reporting of projects.

Between meetings we would also like to hold property walks or field days on topics of interest and I think there is room in the schedule to hold a couple of bush picnics where we combine a short walk to a local scenic spot or wildflower patch with a kids-friendly family picnic.

While the change to an incorporated association has forced us to formalize our committee structure, please remember that all group members are welcome to attend our committee meetings and provide input to our discussions and management.

The committee recently decided to hold our future meetings at the Lauriston Hall. It has all the facilities you might want now that the renovations are complete and has a greater capacity than most other local halls. It became our temporary home during 2019 while work was being done at Drummond. Recent changes in the hiring arrangements at Drummond Hall and a greatly reduced capacity in Covid times have informed our decision to stay at Lauriston.

### February Member's Meeting

We are pleased to advise that our guest speaker at our Feb meeting is Dr Sophie Bickford. Sophie has had a long association with Landcare, and, as the Malmsbury Landcare representative, I worked closely with her to establish the Coliban Connections concept in 2015-16.

In her professional life Sophie is a conservation ecologist. After completing her PhD. she spent seven years with the CSIRO researching distribution patterns of biodiversity and later lectured on biogeography at Monash University. Sophie has been the Executive Director of the Biolinks Alliance since its formation in 2010 and is building a strong organization that is now engaged in several conservation projects across central Victoria.

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Dr Sophie Bickford, image from the Biolinks Alliance website.

Sophie will discuss some of the recent research that has been undertaken on the Greater Gliders as well as the importance of the glider population in the Wombat State Forest (WSF). Recent work by Malmbsbury Landcare along with the Wombat Forestcare group has confirmed there is a strong population of these cat-size gliders in the northern extremity of the WSF near Kangaroo Hill at Denver. Sophie will tell us about planned on-ground action by Biolinks Alliance to help protect and enhance this habitat, both in the forest, and on the adjacent properties of several Malmbsbury Landcare members.

This will be a wonderful opportunity to learn about our local population of this threatened species and also a chance to catch up with our Landcare community over a cuppa and a bikkie for the first time in a year.

## New Members

We extend a warm welcome to new members, John and Jean Slack from Drummond, Grant and Paris Kirby from Lauriston, Lucy Wise and Mischa Herman from Malmbsbury, James Foster from Kyneton, Heather and Ashley Bourke from Drummond and returning members Joslin Moore from Malmbsbury and Duncan and Christine Rolley from Drummond.

## Are we just digging a hole for ourselves? Some observations on tree planting. (by Sue Walter)

Malmbsbury Landcare's regular participation in Tree Project serves to provide its members with a source of cost-effective tree seedlings. These are grown to order by volunteers from seed collected by our members from local indigenous trees. Of course, this is not the only means by which members of our group can source trees, but long before we buy plants, or even place an order, we should determine why we want the trees and where they will be placed, and consider the consequences of doing so. While many of us will not live to see these trees come to full maturity, our decisions today will impact on people, animals, plants and the landscape of our district in the future. This article considers some of the questions we could ask, and answer, before planting commences.

### Why trees?

Let's ask that important question early and be ready to reveal some inconvenient truths. While some plantations are wood lots to provide firewood, a long look around the district will reveal that many established clusters of trees are planted near our dwellings or along fence lines or driveways. This might make the view towards our house enticing, uphold the romantic sense of country life, or offer some privacy or shelter from wind and driving rain, but this is a very human-centric use of trees. These vital organisms have much more to offer. The photo below shows that other seek out trees for much the same purposes, but what good are the trees around the home paddock or along the driveway if others cannot access the benefits?



These sheep seek the shade of the pine trees, even on an overcast day.



Will the CFA come to assist if a tree-lined driveway inhibits access by their trucks, and will the trees around the house, or unbroken roadside hedges become a fire hazard anyway? If we are honest in answering these questions, we would probably admit that convenience in watering and maintenance also play a role in determining where we plant them. But if we are going to spend that time, money and effort in the first place, would it not be better to get the best overall benefit and minimise the disadvantages?

**Where?**

It might seem obvious, but do we really ask ourselves why trees are planted in lengthy rows along fence lines? Long boundary fences provide a convenient edge to a confined area which enables livestock to be kept out while trees grow. Nothing wrong with that, but let's think outside the square. Can hedges or shelterbelts be easily maintained in such spaces? Will a hedge on a southern boundary genuinely provide any real shelter from what inevitably seems to be the incidence of longer and hotter summers (though they can provide shelter for drivers stopping to use mobile phones)? A hedge on an eastern boundary provides shelter only in the morning, and western hedges only late in the day. Will livestock have to leave shelter to find food and water? While it is vital to protect gullies where the risk of soil erosion is high, trees in moist gullies entice livestock to congregate and increase the risk of erosion. Wouldn't shelter belts within the paddocks and near water points allow livestock to move to the shady side when they need it and reduce their stress levels?

Trees on the top of slopes encourage livestock to leave manure at the tops of hills where the nutrients can slowly move downhill. Is there really any point in creating a hedge like the one shown in the next column only to have contractors come and mutilate them to both protect the rest of the community from fires and minimise the risk that we all lose power for weeks during a major incident? The power

poles shown were recently moved several meters away from the trees at what must have been a considerable cost, not to mention several days of the power being cut off to residents. We all bear the cost of this type of plantation one way or another. Some of the benefits of these trees, including the essential raw materials incorporated in them, are being removed from our landscape forever when the prunings are shredded and carted away.



This hedge has been previously pruned by Powercor who recently moved the poles to a new alignment away from the hedge.

**Which trees?**

While the seeds used in our Tree Project orders are sourced locally, some have come from trees which have been a part of the landscape for generations, while others may be sourced from more recent plantations. How adaptable are they to a changing climate? In parts of western Victoria there has been widespread death of old cypress hedges and the lack of diversity in these hedges means entire shelter belts now need replacing. We can all find examples of paddocks with the scattered old mature trees, like that shown on the left, where grazing, sheltering livestock and a lack of protection prevent the next generation from emerging. These trees have survived in what is clearly a microclimate or environmental niche that enabled them to germinate and grow in the first place. Recognising and acknowledging



Where is the recruitment beneath this magnificent old Redgum?

these factors may help us make wiser decisions about the “what” and “where”.

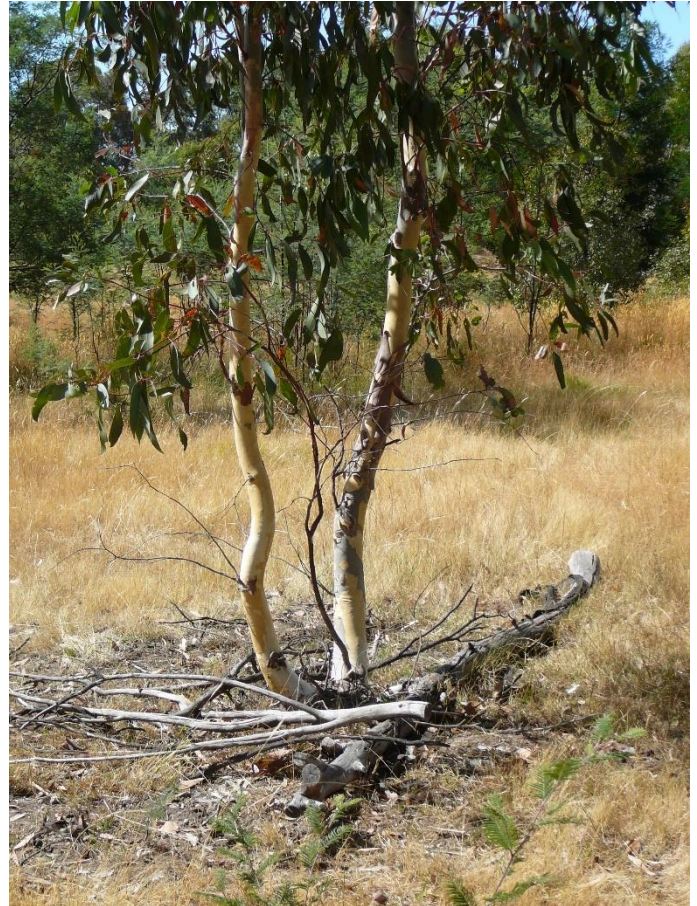
We also need to understand that nature abhors a vacuum. Isolated trees are less likely to survive than when they are part of a mixture of layers including shrubs and groundcovers and let us not forget that weeds will thrive wherever they can get a foothold. By including plant species that are recognised as pioneer plants that help our landscape to regenerate, e.g. wattles and other leguminous plants, we can fill some of that vacuum. The wattles may not last long, but they can restrict opportunities for less desirable plants, such as gorse and broom to take hold, while providing habitat and food for pollinators and niches for other parts of the ecosystem. Add some paper daisies and native grasses to the plot and you will support a wider range of beneficial insects. The weeds can also be an important indicator of the types of microclimates we have on our land. Some will signify moist places, and some will indicate high fertility. Others will show where our animals prefer to seek shelter, for they often grow where other species cannot survive the high manure levels of a stock shelter site or the intense grazing and trampling often found in other areas.

### **Protecting your investment.**

As mentioned above, fenced areas along boundary fences do permit the exclusion of livestock while your trees grow and mature. While these fences can be costly, they are often less expensive than fencing a mid-paddock shelterbelt due to the need for more end assemblies. However, given the increased benefit to your livestock of having all-round shade and shelter, you might find that the return quickly covers the additional fencing expense.

Even if you don't have large livestock, kangaroos can still damage your young trees once they have outgrown conventional tree guards. The careful placement of broken branches or prunings of other trees around the base of such plants can prevent them from being damaged during boxing sessions and male dominance marking activities. They can also produce a protective microclimate and encourage natural regeneration of other local species by offering a safe harbour from grazing. As a bonus, the rotting wood helps to feed the saplings (which is better than humans burning it as firewood).

This article has been designed to encourage some deeper thinking about tree planting. We live in an area that has been seriously disturbed by past human activities such as mining, clearing and timber harvesting. We should all be able to plant some trees for us to nurture and enjoy, and any new trees will go a long way to healing the scars, so why not make the most of our investment.



Kangaroos repeatedly smashed down this Snow Gum (and it's neighbours) once it got to two feet in height. After several years of this, we placed some wattle prunings around the base and within a year the Snow Gums were over six feet tall and were safe from the kangaroos.

### **Platypus Surveys**

One activity we were able to complete in 2020 was a spring survey of the platypus in the Coliban River at five sites between the viaduct and just below Ellis Falls. While this survey shows a population increase back to numbers recorded prior to the millennium drought, some researchers were simultaneously calling for the inclusion of the species on the threatened species list and they are now officially listed as vulnerable in Victoria.



Geoff Williams from Aust. Platypus Conservancy leaving the river after setting nets below the falls.

Landcare grants has been increased this year to partially make amends for the deferment of the scheme in 2020. This should allow us to seek funding for several smaller projects in the upcoming round so please give some consideration to what projects might be suitable in your area and let the committee know. We have a gorse control project in mind for the Kangaroo Creek area to the south of the Lauriston Road and our recent willow control work at the Malmbsbury Common will require some follow up activity but I am hoping we can take on one or two smaller projects as well and make the most of the available funding opportunities.

We now have an opportunity to repeat this survey in March thanks to some support from the North Central Catchment Management Authority. The autumn survey will provide some data in relation to juvenile recruitment from the spring breeding season. It will also allow for an assessment of the overall population size at Malmbsbury given that some females may have been in nesting burrows when our survey was done last October.

Members are once again invited to assist in either the setting up of the nets during the day or assisting with the net inspection and animal retrieval process in the period before midnight. The actual day of the survey is dependant upon the weather, but it will be sometime in the first week of March 2021. The ideal day is a daytime max of below 30 degrees (for the comfort of the people) and a night-time max of below 20 degrees (for the comfort of the platypus).

Please contact John Walter on 0410 598 252 if you would like to be involved. There will also be an opportunity to view any captive animals early in the morning after the survey before they are released back into the river.

## Projects Update

We have recently completed some follow up spraying work on both our Lauriston and Chinaman Track project sites and all project grants are now either acquitted or will be acquitted in coming weeks. I have received advice that the funding pool available for

## Update on Membership Renewals

We will be sending out our membership renewals shortly which will involve some changes after our recent incorporation. Under the rules we must now follow, all members need to apply for membership and then be formally accepted as members by the committee. As we have not had this level of formality in the past, we will need everyone to complete a simple application form when doing their renewal (for this year only) and we will bring our records up to date. Membership renewals next year will be a return to the old system where you just update any changes necessary to your contact details etc.

We also made changes at last year's AGM to the way family memberships are treated and how the membership fees are applied in order to bring the group into alignment with best practice. Starting with this year's renewal, all members of a family membership must provide their own contact details and be approved as a member by the committee. Each family member associated with a family membership must be aged 15 or over and will have the same full and equal rights as any other member of our Association.

The membership fees remain unchanged for single memberships and for the first member associated with a family membership however each family

member thereafter will be charged a \$5 fee to be added to the initial membership fee. This is the first change made to our membership fee structure in over 20 years! To put it as simply as possible, a single membership remains at \$20, a family membership of two people will be \$25 and a family membership of three would be \$30.

### Editor's apology

Sue has offered to try and keep me on track this year and we are both committed to producing a quarterly newsletter for the group. I did manage two issues last year but then circumstances changed and the rest of the year just slipped by. I will also look to increase posts on our Facebook page as our group activities and events start to move forward again.

### New Gate Signs Available

The group has gate signs available for members to fix to gates or fences. These provide a way to express your pride of membership and to publicise Landcare to your neighbours.

The signs are of high quality and should last for decades. They measure 600 mm wide by 200 mm high. The signs are made of sturdy Colorbond steel with two pack automotive enamel lettering and logo in the current official colours - \$35.00 each. Please contact Adrian Robb if you wish to purchase one.

### Malmbsbury Landcare Equipment

Our most used equipment is our 500 litre trailer-mounted weed spray unit which is available to members for just \$10 per day. We also have two electric powered 100 litre sprayers suitable for mounting on a utility or carry-all. Other equipment includes a Rabbit Fumigator/Smoker used to identify all the outlets of a warren system prior to treatment of the occupants, and tree planting tools. Please call Bob Newton to make arrangements on 5423 9387

### Wildlife spotting...

The Malmbsbury District has some of the most beautiful birds and wildlife in Australia, and we want to showcase it here. So, what native wildlife have you seen in our area lately? Send your photos in.

In this issue we feature a photograph from Rob Burdett to follow up his article on the White-winged Choughs. Rob reports that he now has four nests near the house with a new nest being prepared each year and the mob successfully raised two more chicks last spring.



The two juveniles have the red open gape.

### UCLN Pollinators Project

Thank you to those members of Malmbsbury Landcare who responded to the UCLN call for research sites as part of their Pollinator Project. This project has been met with great enthusiasm across the network and we now have over fifty sites participating in the pollinator survey, including seven from Malmbsbury district.

As the project develops there will be opportunities for everyone to become involved regardless of whether your property is a research site or not. We are in the process of gathering data on pollinator species from as far afield as Newbury and Trentham in the south, through Glenlyon, Malmbsbury, Taradale and Metcalfe and across to Bald Hill and Black Hill and Barfold and Glenhope, then south through the Cobaws and Newham, Woodend, Mount Macedon and New Gisborne and back through Ashbourne to East Trentham. It is a project on a mammoth scale and we hope it will provide a substantial and lasting benefit to our region.

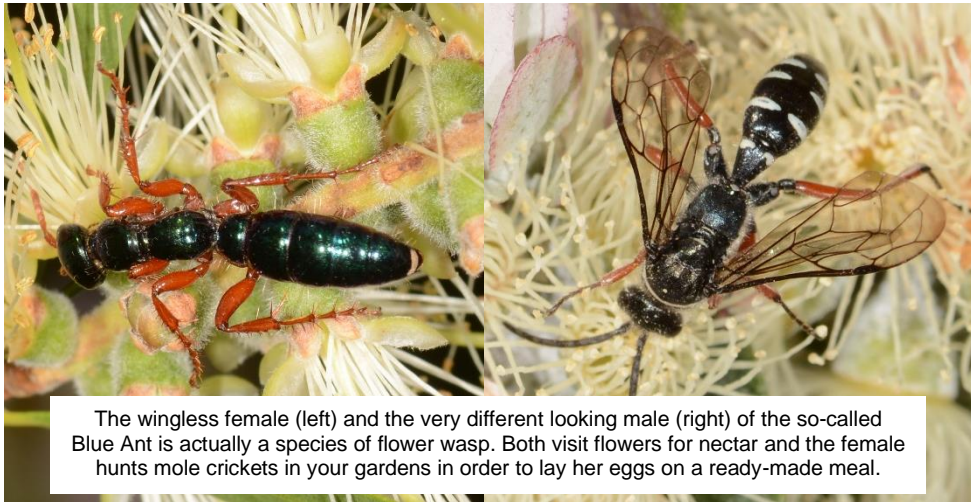


Our project scientist Dr Mark Hall will be on hand to deliver a lecture titled “The value of pollinators in the landscape” at the Malsbury Town Hall on April 8. While this will be our Malsbury Landcare April meeting, it will attract interest from across the region and bookings will be essential to ensure we meet any health restrictions that may be in force at the time. Please email me if you are interest in attending and I will secure your access on a first come first served basis.

The remainder of this page has images of just a few of our local pollinator species for your enjoyment.



This tiny native bee (*Hylaeus euxanthus*) is a wasp mimic.



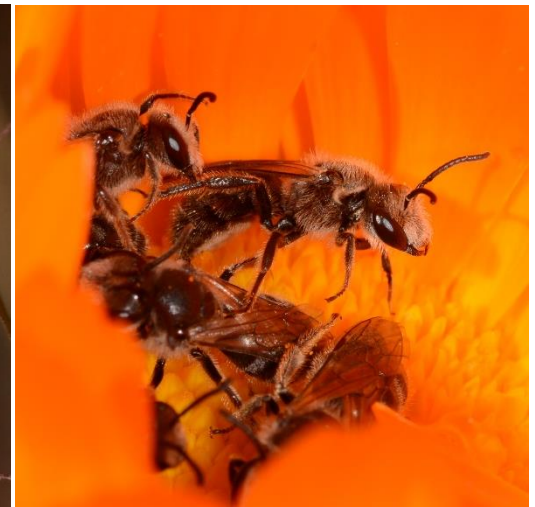
The wingless female (left) and the very different looking male (right) of the so-called Blue Ant is actually a species of flower wasp. Both visit flowers for nectar and the female hunts mole crickets in your gardens in order to lay her eggs on a ready-made meal.



Above: Common Brown Butterfly.



Above centre: Red-eyed female *Megachile* bee taking home a petal to use in her nest construction.



Above right: Part of a group of male *Lasioglossum* bees warming up after sheltering overnight in a *Calendula* flower.



Left: Male *Megachile* bee take a refreshment break before resuming his hunt for females.