

Brisbane Ranges Landcare Group

Newsletter

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Visit our website for latest news: http://brlg.org.au

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Landcare...the long read winter issue



Pam Goble tells the story of how photography gave her the eagle eye for recognising the birds of our district in all their magnificence (p2)



Trish Edwards unearths more stories of home grown goodness bringing us learnings of labour from fellow food garden landcarers (p5)



The Brisbane Ranges
Bundy is not a local
alcoholic distillation,
assures Mark Trengove,
(p10) but a new recently
described taxa of Gum tree



Long reads and long deeds: guess what Landcare action makes the perfect companion to a good read? (p11)

Plus the usual suspects...

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The Birding Bug

We all know birds are present and busy in our environment, but how much notice do you really take of these birds and what they are up to?

Like most of us, when I was busy working off farm as well as on, there was hardly a spare moment to notice more than the large and more common birds that made themselves obvious. In particular I became very familiar with a family of Whistling Kites that nested in the old Grey Box gums on our property. I loved hearing their whistling calls as I went about my farming business and particularly in kidding and lambing season when I was out and about more than usual. The other raptors around were just brown birds to me and most of the smaller ones were little brown birds, apart from the bright little blobs I knew as Robins and Wrens. That was, until I bought myself a camera with a long lens and I could suddenly see these



Galahs: (pair differentiated by eye colour: pink eyes = female and black eyes = male). A familiar bird, common throughout Australia. Part of the larger Cockatoo family

birds much more clearly. However getting good photos of these birds was quite another matter.

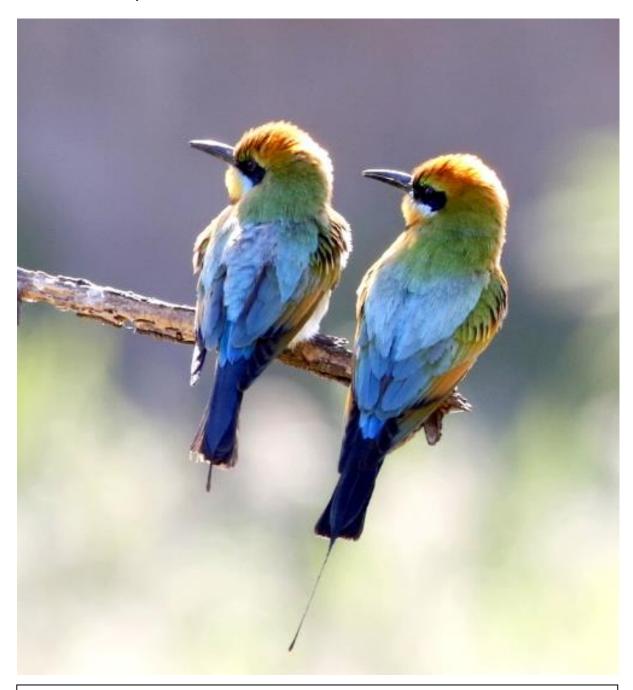


Red-browed Finch: very distinctive red brow, only observed in adult birds, not juveniles. Often present in family groups, common along the eastern seaboard.

I was spurred into action on the photographic front, after David Whelan* visited our Landcare Group a few years ago, to tell us about the raptors he was studying and photographing. I was bowled over by his beautiful photos and wished I could take similar images of "my birds". We invited David to visit our farm and in due course, he did and what amazing images he captured of a Brown Goshawk pair exchanging food on the wing, as part of a mating ritual, he explained. I was thrilled and so excited to think that such things were happening around me and I had simply not been paying attention or even aware that birds did such interesting things.

The photographic bug had definitely bitten and I was dead keen to learn how to take such photos. Little did I realise that bird and wildlife photography in general is regarded as one of the most difficult forms of photography to master.

Undaunted I started to read, watch videos, and later, signed up for a few workshops as well as joining numerous relevant Facebook Groups to share my emerging passion for beautiful birds with the many others who obviously shared this interest.



Rainbow Bee-eaters: (pair differentiated by length of tail streamers: males' are longer than females). Generally found throughout Australia (except in the arid interior) but less common in southern Victoria.

Along the way, I have come into contact with many inspirational people with extensive knowledge of birds and their role in the environment. I learned from them about the work of Birdlife Australia (BLAust) and its important role as a peak body and mouthpiece for birds in our country, as well as their conservation work. I am learning more all the time about the dire situation faced by many of our birds (and other fauna) as a result of increasing human population and consequent loss of habitat as well as threats from climate change (including wildfires, drought etc.) and other threats to their survival.

With my newly re-kindled interest in birds and bird photography, I've joined BLAust as one of their regular Supporters as well as signing up for their Birds on Farms program, designed to monitor bird species and numbers on farms throughout Australia. This latter role requires me to walk around designated parts of my farm, four times each year and note the birds that I see – tough job eh? Bird observation data collected via this and many other BLAust surveys are now available for anyone to view on their website and are used to assist BL researchers and scientists with their ongoing work in supporting our bird populations.

With my more serious approach to bird watching since 2018, I have now checked off 96 different species of bird within the boundaries of our farm in Balliang, a number that I'm amazed by, but know there will be more to come. What spurs me on with this absorbing hobby is the joy of learning more about our beautiful bird life as well as the technical challenges of doing justice to them via photographic images. However none of this activity makes much sense if the current plight of birds is ignored. I hope to be more active in the years to come, supporting the conservation and restoration work that is urgently needed, if our most threatened birds are to survive into the future.



Spotted Harrier: A beautiful Harrier (raptor) moderately commonly observed over farmland. Hunts for prey by skimming low over vegetation. Sexes only distinguished by size (female is larger). Observed throughout Australia, but more common in the North.

I hope that interested readers might consider joining the growing band of dedicated people working to support our native bird populations.

Pam Goble June 2020

*David is a noted local bird photographer and raptor specialist.

[Ed: Thanks Pam for submitting this engaging article and superb photos! For the technically minded, Pam's camera of choice for birding photographs is a Canon 7D Mark 11 with a telephoto lens Canon 100-400mm]

Small Farming Food – an emerging global /movement - land use and landcare

I look back on a decade of growing food, and the whimsical aim to produce 90% of what we eat is a lot more realistic from this end of the decade than at the start.

An unexpected dividend of this activity has been the growing network of (mostly women) gardeners who grow food on their own land. We are all landcarers/Landcarers, sharing a passion for the varied, often remote places we call home. We also love fresh, local, organic food and are enthusiastic eating cooks. We text, exchange photos, seek advice, and discuss the extraordinary range of things that preoccupy those who grow edible plants.

I have learnt a lot from sharing with these food growers from around the country, and I would like to share some of their insights with our local Landcare food growers.

Trish Edwards

Terrie farms a big chunk of her rectangular block in rural Birregurra -

When I finished university I rented a tiny cottage on a tiny block in Geelong. It came with a magnificently overgrown garden; bits and pieces spilling over paths and fences and tapping on windows. It struck me to the heart and I've had to have my hands in the dirt ever since. I found this follow-the-lay-of-the-land-and let-it-do-its-thing approach resonated with me. And visually soft chaos is much more forgiving and less time consuming than stringent rows and boarders.

It was some years before growing food became part of my gardening. But eighteen years ago we bought a cottage on half an acre in the Otway hinterland in south west Victoria. It was a bare block and ping ... visions of rows and rows of vegetables and fruit trees sprung from the ether.

But while shrubs, trees, herbs, an orchard and the more gardeny garden have thrived, the vegie garden is a constant renegotiation.

I've tried all sorts of methods for growing vegetables but the following have been



the most successful – and much less stressful than coaxing seeds into seedlings and planting out. [My failures in that regard are numerous and I've all but given up]:

- Seasonal Planting: Although in eighteen years the seasons have changed so much that I'm picking tomatoes in autumn instead of summer; planting garlic mid-autumn for harvesting at the end of spring instead of shortest day to longest day, etc. Lesson learnt to get a feel for not only the climate in general but all the micro-climates in my back yard
- Mowing Mulch: I let herbs and vegies go to seed, let them drop and sprout where they are, or cut seed stalks back, spread them out and mow them over at the same time I mow the grass. This makes great mulch and can be placed wherever I want things to grow. This is the most successful seed germinating method for my garden
- **Compost Sprouts:** Things that sprout from the compost can produce great crops not always where you want but I've learnt that if they are happy where they've popped up, let them be
- Weeds: Plantain and dandelions tell me the soil is good and I have great success with spring onions, leeks and garlic chives, kale and silverbeet in those areas. One person's weeds are another's treasure I guess and I let the weeds have space amongst the vegies. They keep the ground from drying out, attract insects and keep the soil structure. I've also learnt that psyllium husks those things you pay a small fortune for in the health food shop are the seed heads on plantain. Great for thickening when making jam or adding fibre to anything. And yet we dig these plants out or poison them!

This may sound like an unruly way to approach growing from scratch but I can tell you it takes fortitude not to intervene too much and have the patience to see what works and where. It doesn't always fit into a well-made plan and invariably things will work in areas where I don't want them.

The last couple of summers I've observed that vegies thrive under the fruit trees, seeming to need more protection from the sun. In all seasons, some vegies work well in pots, some in raised beds, some in the ground but it's not a uniform story.

Now there is COVID-19. Not so much effect on the garden but on the gardener. The pandemic has set off the urge to grow even more of my own food because the future could contain no seeds and terribly expensive produce. And while I still take joy in the chaos and single-mindedness of the garden, I stress about having no control over whether my vegies make it to a harvestable state. If it's not slugs and snails it's cabbage moth and grasshoppers, brown mould, frost or heat. I've companion planted; organically sprayed, covered, moved, protected, talked lovingly, read the riot act, feigned indifference. It seems if they want to grow, they grow and if not, nothing will make it happen.

As I look at my struggling cabbages, the pots which contained carrot tops one day and none the next, the cauliflower seedlings I'm reluctant to release from their sprouting enclosure because I may never see them again, the things that have sprouted and taken up residence of their own accord, I realise the importance of not only growing food but coming to terms with the idea of there is only so much I can do.

The pandemic has offered time to learn to look at what grows well without a struggle - for it or for me - and I always seem to find bits and pieces to contribute to a meal, though it may not be the bountiful baskets of produce seen in magazines or on gardening shows. I can recognise some edible weeds and plants, I can grow a lot of what grows easily and not have to sweat the rest too much. And for that to happen, all I have to do is be aware, work with the land and its micro climates and see what it offers up.

Claudine takes two different approaches with the small city garden in Melbourne and the open spaces and warmer climate in Heathcote.

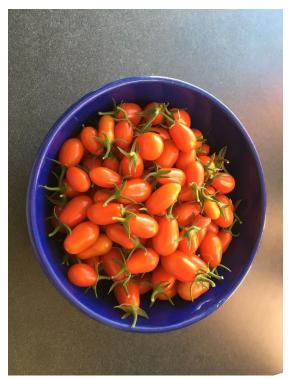
I divide my time between a suburban home in Melbourne's Northern suburbs and a rural property near Heathcote that I bought with my partner a couple of years ago. I've become more focussed on growing my own food the past few years. In part I want to ensure that I have good quality fresh produce to eat, but it's also economics, and it's the plain satisfaction of growing my own food and not being reliant on other sources. So growing food was a clear priority with the Heathcote property. My other priority was to try to achieve this with resources that were already available to us, or else available at little or no cost.

Despite the region being famous for rich wine growing soils, our property has a topsoil that is mineral rich, but due to overgrazing in the past it's pretty lacking in organic matter. It's also packed with broken rock from long distant gold mining activity, and beneath this, clay.



The best solution in the short term to produce small food crops on the property was to use planter boxes. We've built several of these from discarded shipping pallet wood, and larger ones from a discarded bullnose verandah roof. We've followed the hugelkultur method of initially half filling the beds with logs and branches, which add structure and slowly decompose, creating an abundance of micro flora and fauna. At the time this was as much because dead branches were resources at hand as it was for the longer term benefits. Where it came to topsoil I've been more creative. I've used some commercial soil to ensure some structure and ph balance, but I've mixed this with the local topsoil. I've often sought this out from areas where the galahs have already been through digging out seeds and roots. They do a pretty spectacular job of turning it over, and they've always dug a good mix of dried grass into it that makes it perfect for planting. I mix a good amount of manure into

this, and here again I've got creative. Local farmers don't always have farm manure available, but on our block we have an overabundance of something else: kangaroo manure. It turns out kangaroo poo is fabulous for veggie gardens. It doesn't need to rest before being dug in, and it breaks down gradually, giving the garden lots of organic structure over several seasons. And as luck would have it they are so productive that I can rake over a small area and get a barrow full of it in no time.



The other key obstacles we have with the property are protecting crops from the various visitors who want to eat them, and extremes of climate. I've protected the planter boxes with trusses of irrigation pipe covered in bird netting from the local tip shop. So far this has been very effective for keeping wildlife out, save for one snake we've had to untangle (we've trimmed the net now – lesson learnt).

During Summer I mulch heavily and cover the beds with "hats" I've made from used offcuts of shade cloth. I've sewn these to shape and weighted them with rocks so that they can easily be thrown on or off as required & won't blow off.

In just over a couple of years I've produced exponentially more and more food from these beds. I largely grow from seed, and wherever a crop is successful I harvest seed to store in envelopes or jars for next season. From the

initial, carefully spaced plantings, I'm now sowing densely and getting great results. I'm rotating between the beds, but adding more compost and manure as I go, so haven't had to rest any of them yet. Due to the hot Summers I've learnt to stagger crops and capitalise on early or late season maturity. We've had great results with potatoes, garlic, tomatoes, broccoli, kale, silverbeet, lettuce, rocket, spinach and herbs including basil, parsley, rosemary and mint. We've had a couple of spectacular failures too, of course, generally wallaby or heat related, but these have been informative. We rarely have the right combination of vegetables all at once to make that perfect dish, but each season this improves and now we only need to buy bits and pieces to complete what we have rather than the other way around.

We are also working on slowly reviving some areas of the property by mounding a top layer of woodchips to trap moisture and break down into rich organic matter. We're planting fruit trees into this compost and hopefully they will thrive. So far they are doing well and we have seen a couple of pieces of fruit. Hopefully next year they will thrive and we'll find a deterrent for the abundant local birdlife before this happens.

Growing food in my suburban garden has been different, and challenging, but I've gradually reached a point where I've learned to work with its limitations. The property came with limited garden space largely occupied with a pretty enviable range of well-established ornamental plants; in a modest area I have large trees, flowering climbers, roses, you name it. There was a topsoil with little organic matter and an ongoing fickle ph from one metre to the next, then clay under that. Between the fence line and the tree canopies, I also have limited sunlight. It took a few years to work out the few square metres that would attract

enough light to bring annuals to maturity, and even then there are some seasons that work and others that just don't.

I make my own compost on site, and I dig this through and mulch every year and the soil has improved enormously. I have a raised planter box for salad and greens to catch sun in a shadier area, and a number of large pots in "sun spots" with key items such as fruit trees, potatoes & lettuce. The pots have allowed me to successfully grow a number of edible crops that I wouldn't otherwise have room for, or which may have been destroyed by pests in the past. I have success year in, year out with herbs, so I've embraced this and I grow a big range of herbs so that I can add flavour to whatever I'm cooking, and dry all my own basics.



This year I followed a friend's suggestion of Spring pruning on a dwarf pear that I've had in a pot for several years and it fruited for the first time. I also had an unusual surprise from an olive tree that was in my front yard from a previous owner. I've never tended it or fed it, and never had more than a few olives, but this year, for some reason it produced something like two buckets full of huge fat olives, which I've preserved. I can't pinpoint why it happened this year, but I've pruned and fertilised the tree and will pay lots of attention to it from now on, which probably means I'll never get a good crop again.

Both gardens are an ongoing learning curve as the climate changes, and with it the range of predators and issues around feeding and protecting the crops season to season. The rewards nonetheless keep increasing with bigger yields and more of them. I think the greatest reward, though, is where I've managed to restore and improve soils and watch an abundance of worms and bees thriving. The odd failed crop isn't too disappointing when I see that new regenerative ecosystems are blossoming where they previously didn't exist.

[Ed: Thanks Trish for orchestrating this latest article in your series on local small farm food growing]

A new native tree for the Brisbane Ranges

A recently described new taxa of Gum tree, *Eucalyptus goniocalyx* ssp. *laxa*, is endemic to the Brisbane Ranges. The tree was described by Kevin Rule, the taxonomist who also described the Bellarine Yellow Gum. It is described as a 'tree to 15 m tall; bark usually rough over whole trunk, fibrous, becoming coarse and thick; adult leaves 10–20 cm long, 1.5–3 cm wide, concolorous, glossy, green'

It appears to me that it occurs in the National Park and in some surrounding properties, but not in large numbers. It is seen in damper sites such as on the sheltered south facing lower slopes. Interestingly the typical *Eucalyptus goniocalyx* (commonly known as Bundy) also grows in the Brisbane Ranges but it is confined to dryer sites. The new taxa hasn't been given a common name yet, I think Brisbane Ranges Bundy sounds right.



Adult leaves and flower buds.

As an aside Trish sees a new Eucalypt as an opportunity to discover a new dye. Here is one of her works using adult and juvenile fallen leaves.

- Mark Trengove

Long reads and long deeds! Take a break from your lounge chair and invest in some practical action

Every good read deserves a good deed for your property and the environment. Take some time to have a look around your property and put a stop to any of these unlawful international travellers.

Weed	Most Effective Control Methods	When	More info
Boxthorn	 Cut main stem and paint with undiluted glyphosate (Roundup) within 30 seconds ensuring the entire cut face and edges of cut receive ample herbicide Remove mechanically with a grab and then complete step 1 on all exposed roots. 	Anytime	Click here
Galenia, blanket weed	Pull or chip it out ensuring you get	Now, whilst it	Click here
	 the tap root. Cut it off at the tap root and immediately paint the exposed root end with Roundup (glyphosate) Spray plant with grazon or grazon extra. 	is actively growing	
Gorse	 Cut it off at the tap root and immediately paint the exposed root end with Roundup (glyphosate) Spray when plant is actively growing but not in flower with herbicide ensuring thorough coverage of all foliage to the point of run-off Slashing or mulching must be followed with spraying of regrowth when it is knee high for effective 	Anytime (but depends on control method)	Click here
	control 4. Persistence. Gorse seed can remain viable for 50+ years		
Serrated Tussock	 Spray with a glyphosate (knockdown of existing plant) or flupropinate (kills plant and prevent germination of seeds) based herbicide Cultivation Physical removal (chip out) 	From now to October	Click here

[Ed: This is repeated from our last issue. I know it is hard to fathom, but we are still seeing a few of these weeds in the district]

News and Views

Farewell to Andrew and Bernice Prime

Andrew Prime was the Brisbane Ranges Landcare Secretary from 1999 to 2005 and President from 2008 to 2012. Sadly, he and Bernice will soon be leaving the district. Stay tuned for details of an occasion to farewell them to be run in conjunction with the Balliang CFA.

SHHH... IT'S A SURPRISE!

Removing rabbits from your property: webinar

Tim Bloomfield, pest animal expert, spoke at our Landcare Group last year. Hear him again talk about how to make your rabbit control efforts 100% successful.

- · Best practice rabbit management
- How not to waste time and money
- What to do vourself, when and how
- When to engage a contractor and how to select one
- What success looks like
- · How to minimise effort and maximise outcomes

The webinar, organised by the *Port Phillip and*

Register

Westernport CMA will be hosted on Zoom on Wednesday 17th June and run from 3pm-4pm. An extra 30 mins (4pm-4.30pm) has been allowed to ensure all of your questions get answered.



Ag Vic Webinars

A range of climate upcoming climate webinars as well a wide variety of recordings of past webinars over the last four years

Click on the image to the right to view the list.



Helpful Apps for your phone

The Geelong Landcare Network has links to a range of handy apps for your phone or tablet. PestSmart, Victorian Flora, Weed ID, FeralScan, Crop Disease and Animal Disease Victoria. Click on the image to the right to check them all out.



Come join the Brisbane Ranges Landcare Team

In the next few months, we will be hosting our annual AGM (Covid-19 restrictions permitting). We are always looking for new members on the Committee and encourage a diversity of interests and backgrounds. You don't have to have any specific environmental or agricultural expertise, just a willingness to contribute and help make this group as meaningful as possible to the local community.

Please don't hesitate to speak to any of the existing committee to express interest or ask for more information.

Also, can we say a big thank you to Caz for overseeing the recent change of host for our website!





Join special guests author Bruce Pascoe and ecologists Lindy Lumsden and Ed McNabb in a discussion about cultural and animal conservation. Hosted by Trust for Nature's Ben Cullen.

FREE ON ZOOM

No need to register. Join us five minutes before the event is due to start via https://zoom.us/join

When prompted use: Meeting ID: 829 8217 1641 Password: 788907

For more information contact Ben Cullen, benc@tfn.org.au, 0407 044 821.

Managing your pastures in a changing climate (recorded webinar)

World renowned farmer, Colin Seis shares how to establish and maintain flourishing pastures while improving soil health in an ever-changing climate.

Click on the image to the right to view a recording of the webinar.





Regenerative Ag Podcasts

This is an (American) show for professional growers and agronomists who want to learn about the science and principles of regenerative agriculture systems to increase quality, yield, and profitability.

Click on the image on the left to subscribe and view a long list of past podcasts.

Grab an "iso" education with Coursera: Free online courses on all topics

Ever heard of <u>Coursera</u>? It's an online platform that consolidates free courses from universities from all around the world. Search on your topic of interest and see the array of courses you can do for free.

Landcare Resources

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I want to know about	Here is a good place to start			
Aboriginal cultural heritage	https://www.vic.gov.au/aboriginalvictoria/heritage/heritage-tools-and-			
location mapping	publications/heritage-tools.html then select "online map tool"			
Biodiversity mapping and	http://maps.biodiversity.vic.gov.au/viewer/?viewer=NatureKit			
recording	http://natureshare.org.au/			
	http://avh.chah.org.au/			
Boxthorn	http://weeds.ala.org.au/WoNS/africanboxthorn/docs/African_boxthorn-			
	national_best_practice_manual.pdf			
Chilean needle grass	https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/weeds/publications/guideli			
	nes/wons/pubs/n-neesiana.pdf			
Feral goat control	https://www.pestsmart.org.au/pest-animal-species/feral-goat/			
Fox control	https://www.pestsmart.org.au/pest-animal-species/european-fox/			
Gorse	https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/weeds/publications/guideli			
	nes/wons/pubs/u-europaeus.pdf			
Landcare networks	Moorabool Landcare Network			
11.11	Geelong Landcare Network			
Melbourne Water Stream	https://www.melbournewater.com.au/community-and-education/apply-			
Frontage Grants	funding/stream-frontage-management-program			
Rabbit management	http://www.mln.org.au/images/PDFS/rabbitactionguide.pdf			
	https://www.pestsmart.org.au/pest-animal-species/european-rabbit/			
Serrated tussock	https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/weeds/publications/guideli			
	nes/wons/pubs/n-trichotoma.pdf			
Weeds - identification and	http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/weeds/a-z-			
control	<u>of-weeds</u>			
Weed status in Victoria	http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-			
	weeds/weeds/invasive-plant-classifications			
	http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/protecting-			
	victoria-from-pest-animals-and-weeds/legislation-policy-and-permits/declared-			
	noxious-weeds-and-pest-animals-in-victoria			



