

# *Landcare stories*



*from the Mount Alexander region in  
Central Victoria*

*September 2020*

## *Maldon Urban Landcare Group (MULGA)*

### **Historic gum trees of Maldon**

This story began in 2010, when the late Wendy French from Maldon Urban Landcare Group (MULGA) noticed some large pre-European settlement indigenous eucalypt trees located within Maldon, and was very interested in discovering how old they were. Wendy had studied approximately 20 trees in town and estimated their age.

Six years later, MULGA continued the work Wendy had started. Firstly, there was an original Red Box tree, estimated at 295 years of age, at an intersection that was being re-designed. Then there was a planning proposal for a retirement village to be developed on the site of a Maldon church, where there were four eucalypts calculated as aged between 185-430 years old. MULGA wanted protection of the trees during construction, and for the existing Petanque piste to not be moved closer to the four trees. These issues re-ignited the notion of protecting old indigenous trees, as MULGA discovered the trees were not listed or protected under the heritage overlay.

In 2017, MULGA members organised a field day to search for all indigenous eucalypts in Maldon that could be classified as being over 165 years old, hence existing before European settlement in 1852. With the help of Frances Cincotta, from Newstead Natives, MULGA members identified, photographed and recorded GPS coordinates for the trees, and used standardised measurements and published growth rates to estimate their age.

They identified 61 likely pre-1852 eucalypts, including Grey, Yellow, Red, and Long-leaved Box species on private and public land in Maldon. The oldest tree was estimated at 530 years old, and 80% were estimated at over 200 years old. In addition, 36 pre-1852 trees were surveyed on parts of the Maldon Historic Reserve. These trees were estimated to be between 190 and 645 years old.



Somehow, these 97 eucalypts managed to survive throughout the gold rush and population boom of the area. They are historically significant as well as being important to the ecosystem in Maldon. If only trees could talk, imagine the stories they could tell!

This is an ongoing project. Although the eucalypts surveyed on the Maldon Historic Reserve are under the protection of Parks Victoria, there is currently no protection overlay for the 61 eucalypts surveyed in other areas of Maldon. The protection of these trees is essential to preserve the natural environment and the heritage of Maldon. MULGA will continue to work with Mount Alexander Shire Council to achieve this.



Red Box at St  
Brigid's Catholic  
Church Maldon  
*Photo by Bev  
Phillips*

## *Tarrangower Cactus Control Group*

### **The birth of the Cactus Warriors!**

This story begins with Ian Grenda. He moved from Melbourne around 20 years ago to a rural property in Nuggetty (near Maldon). The property was covered in weeds, including the troublesome Wheel Cactus (*Opuntia robusta*). He then joined his local Landcare group and with his neighbours focussed on removing it.

Wheel Cactus is an introduced noxious weed, originating from Mexico. The Wheel Cactus is so named as it consists of a series of blue-green fleshy segments, which look like wheels.

Ian, his neighbours, and other members of the community wanted to come together as a group to find a way to best remove Wheel Cactus from the area. In 2005, the Tarrangower Cactus Control Group was formed by representation from three local Landcare groups (Nuggetty Land Protection Group, Maldon Urban Landcare Group and Baringhup Landcare Group). The new group's mission was to remove all Wheel Cactus from the area as it has significant negative environmental, agricultural, economic, and social impacts. The network attracted a diverse group of volunteers with the aim of creating community relationships and increasing neighbourhood connection.... calling themselves the Cactus Warriors!

The Cactus Warriors have trialled multiple approaches to figure out the best ways to get rid of this prickly problem. They've tried burning it, spraying it, slashing it and even shooting it! They finally discovered that the most effective way to kill Wheel Cactus is to inject each lobe of the plant with herbicide. With help from Parks Victoria and State and Local Government funding, they've hosted many field days to educate communities about Wheel Cactus and how to effectively eradicate it.



Twelve years later, the park and bushlands surrounding Maldon have little to no mature and fruiting plants left, because of such successful control and collaboration. However, Wheel Cactus is still growing on some private land and can easily spread. Everyone's continued help is needed to control Wheel Cactus on their properties and create a healthy landscape for everyone.



Ian Grenda injecting Wheel Cactus (*Opuntia robusta*)  
*Photo by Lee Mead*

## *Castlemaine Landcare Group*

### **A tiny frog inspires land restoration**

Castlemaine Landcare Group was formed in 2002 and focuses on restoring the natural habitat of Forest Creek and Moonlight Creek in Happy Valley, Castlemaine. They are a passionate and knowledgeable group that meet once a month for a working bee (followed by a yummy morning tea, of course).

A few years ago, Karl Just, an ecologist and Castlemaine Landcare group member, was out for a walk in Happy Valley and heard what he believed to be a Bibron's Toadlet (*Pseudophryne bibronii*), as it has a distinct call. The Bibron's Toadlet is a small, shy, ground dwelling frog that lives in dry forest, woodland, shrubland and grassland. It is a crucial part of the Box Ironbark Forest ecosystem and is listed as endangered in Victoria.

The discovery of this threatened frog in the area meant plenty of quick action – as the frog's habitat was covered in weeds, and the land nearby was earmarked for future development. In 2015, the Department of Environment, Land, Water, and Planning announced the first Threatened Species Protection Initiative to 'support immediate action on threatened species and habitat protection', and Castlemaine Landcare members took their chance to gain funding to help their new discovery. Karl laid monitoring tiles to confirm that the Bibron's Toadlet was in this area, the rains came, and one day Karl photographed a beautiful image of the toadlet as evidence.

The Landcare group did all they could to ensure this small frog had a great habitat and the best chance to thrive. They removed Gorse and Blackberry throughout the area, commissioned a local contractor to create a new pond for the frogs to breed in, and planted a variety of native plants.

Since that time, Bibron's Toadlet calls have been heard in more distant drainage lines and along local creek banks, a successful effort at providing habitat for a threatened species.



Bibron's Toadlet, (*Pseudophryne bibronii*), also known as Brown Toadlet or Brown Brood Frog  
*Photo by © Peter Robertson*

## *Barkers Creek Landcare and Wildlife Group*

### **Barkers Creek gets beautiful**

The Barkers Creek Landcare and Wildlife Group is made up of local residents who are passionate about protecting and restoring the natural environment. Their main priority is to follow up on their past on-ground works to ensure maintenance of areas where the group has worked hard to improve the local environment. Doing on-ground works and getting your hands dirty is a great way of connecting locals to the creek. The Landcare group includes members of all ages, which makes working bees a lot of fun!

This story starts at the Little Red Apple, which is a local store where you'll find premium fruits and vegies, and award winning cider. It backs onto a section of Barkers Creek that needed a bit of TLC. The owners of the Little Red Apple had the vision of creating an outdoor picnic area alongside the creek in the future and were keen to help Barkers Creek Landcare and Wildlife Group restore this area. There were plenty of blackberries and willows along the creek which were successfully removed, and multiple native plants were put in alongside the creek. The weed removal was so successful that nearby landowners got involved and did some planting on their own properties.

There were challenges along the way. Unfortunately, several times since this project began, floods have come through and washed away some of the plants and damaged the footbridge. This did not dampen the spirits of the group - they rebuilt and replanted after these flooding events, still hoping to make this area a beautiful picnic spot and create a healthy environment that will attract native wildlife.



The key to the long-term success of the sites worked on by Barkers Creek Landcare and Wildlife Group is the follow up. Returning to a site yearly for weed management and maybe more planting is crucial. This Landcare group has worked very hard to achieve some amazing outcomes. Who knows what they'll do next!



Volunteers at a Barkers Creek Landcare and Wildlife Group working bee

*Photo by Kirsten Hutchinson*

## *Sandy Creek Catchment Landcare*

### **From tip to bushland: Sandy Creek Landcare success**

This particular story started around five years ago, fifteen years after Sandy Creek Catchment Landcare Group's inception. The passionate members of the group decided to rehabilitate the area around the Old Welshman's Reef Tip, which is also near an old historical mine site.

Even though the tip was inactive and fenced, it was still being used illegally by some as a convenient location to dispose of unwanted rubbish. After successfully gaining a grant from local council, the Landcare group worked together with contractors to remove old fencing and large items of rubbish, manage noxious weeds, and prepare the ground for planting native species.

Sandy Creek Catchment Landcare was glad to team up with Maldon Primary School for planting and education days, with support from Maldon Community Bank. The children learnt all about how the plants would provide food and habitat for native wildlife, and how fun planting can be!

The group has continued to care for this site over the years, and plant many trees and understory plants. Over time, the flow-on effects of improving the health of this site will benefit the surrounding local area. 2018 was the twentieth anniversary of Sandy Creek Catchment Landcare Group, and sadly also the year the group had to cease operating due to a variety of circumstances.

The Old Welshman's Reef Tip restoration is just one example of the many amazing achievements of Sandy Creek Catchment Landcare. Over the years they worked together with the community to plant native species, tackle noxious weeds, improve waterways, and do many other things to protect our environment for current and future generations.



Sandy Creek Catchment Landcare members Linda Craig, Lois Larkman, Wendy Quirk, Daryl Quirk and Bill Barnes surrounded by established and young plants at the Old Welshman's Reef Tip site  
*Photo by Asha Bannon*

## *Sutton Grange Landcare Group*

### **Helicopters to the rescue**

The Sutton Grange Landcare Group formed in 1990 with a goal of eradicating invasive weeds and pests.

In the spring of 2016, many properties that back onto Mount Alexander Regional Park were covered with a purple carpet of Paterson's Curse (*Echium plantagineum*). This noxious weed has distinctive purple flowers. It can degrade the natural environment and is toxic to livestock. This weed is a prolific seeder, can stay dormant in the soil for several years and spreads easily. Landholders with Paterson's Curse on their properties were eager to remove it from their land.

However, the land was very steep, and weeds extensive and difficult to access. The best way to get rid of this large purple carpet was aerial spraying using helicopters. Helicopters were favoured over planes as they can target the weed more effectively.

The landholders noticed that Paterson's Curse was also on land managed by Coliban Water. Sutton Grange Landcare Group and local landholders connected with Coliban Water, who agreed to help manage this noxious weed. Contractors were used to clear Paterson's Curse and other weeds. Native plants were also planted to help the sites recover and provide habitat for wildlife.

Sutton Grange Landcare Group and private landholders were thrilled with this outcome. With help from Coliban Water they have almost eradicated the Paterson's Curse from the area. The Landcare group worked together cohesively with the landholders and Coliban Water to achieve this positive outcome, with ongoing environmental benefits. It was a 'win-win-win' situation!



Another weed that Sutton Grange Landcare Group wants to tackle is the yellow-flowered St John's Wort, which is very thick on the side of Mount Alexander. They plan to collaborate again with land managers and the local community in the hope of achieving another successful outcome.



Paterson's Curse (*Echium plantagineum*) in Redesdale  
*Photo by Asha Bannon*

## *Guildford and Upper Loddon Landcare*

### **A cup of tea to care for the creek**

Maurie Dynon has been a mover and shaker of Guildford and Upper Loddon Landcare for decades. Over the years, the group has completed many large-scale revegetation, weed control, and erosion control projects, including the legendary Jim Crow Creek project.

The four year project focused on rehabilitating the Jim Crow Creek, which flows from Shepherds Flat to the Loddon River. Waterway rehabilitation in central Victoria has significant importance following the changes brought by the gold rush and stock grazing. The banks of Jim Crow Creek had been damaged by native vegetation removal, dredging works, and the planting of introduced willow trees, used to stabilise the creek banks.

The aim of the project was to remove willow trees and other noxious weeds, and fence off as much of the creek as possible. For the project to go ahead and achieve results, Maurie needed the landowners living along the creek to be on board. He went door-to-door to meet with the landowners over a cuppa to chat about the proposed rehabilitation project.

Maurie explained the benefits this project would bring to both agricultural land and to the environment. This included thinking about the broader impacts of caring for our waterways, such as improving the quality of water downstream, all the way over in Adelaide. Some landowners saw this as a great opportunity in other ways. For example, if they had stock, the project would provide an off-stream water source as well as control over where their stock would graze.



The Jim Crow Creek project rehabilitated over 230 hectares along the creek. The scale and success of the project would not have been possible without the relationships built between Guildford and Upper Loddon Landcare and landowners over many conversations and many cups of tea.



Maurie Dynon and his Landcare ute talking landscape restoration with Bonnie Humphreys from Connecting Country  
*Photo by Asha Bannon*

## *Friends of Campbells Creek Landcare*

### **A community cares for Campbells Creek**

The Friends of Campbells Creek Landcare Group is made up of local residents who work together to protect and restore the environment in the Campbells Creek catchment area. A sewage spill into the creek in 2000 galvanised the community into action, highlighting a need for better environmental management.

A cycling and walking track along Campbells Creek attracts many people from the community. The group is dedicated to ensuring the creek corridor remains a special place for anyone to visit.

By creating a healthy and restored creek environment linked with nearby habitat, Friends of Campbells Creek has a vision to make the creek and surrounds a valued asset, actively used and cared for by the community. Their volunteers tackle weed removal and revegetation of native plants alongside 5 km of the creek. A healthy creek habitat helps wildlife such as platypus to survive and thrive.

There are usually ten formal field days per year, plus working bees for Clean Up Australia Day and National Tree Planting Day. These are great opportunities to meet new people, learn something new and enjoy the environment. The group has a great emphasis on involving community, especially the younger members. Friends of Campbells Creek Landcare has worked with three nearby primary schools to show kids how special this creek is, educate them on what they can do to help, and get them involved with activities like decorating the nest boxes located along the creek.

Friends of Campbells Creek Landcare are a great example of what a big difference a small number of people can make to the environment and local community.





A working bee in lush revegetation along Campbells Creek  
*Photo by Friends of Campbells Creek*

## *Taradale Landcare Group*

### **The restoration of Taradale Landcare**

Taradale Landcare Group came together over twenty years ago over their shared passion for walking in the bush, managing the land, and learning about native flora and fauna. After many years of committed work, eventually the group lost momentum and folded in 2012.

Following a meeting to gauge interest, several prospective new members and a sprinkling of original members reformed Taradale Landcare in 2016.

Things started slowly with meetings and discussions to learn about the member's priorities and interests, as well as doing the 'house-keeping' needed to re-establish the group's organisation and accounts. The Back Creek alongside the Taradale Mineral Springs Reserve, near the centre of town, has become a natural focus and base. The group has resurrected earlier restoration work by treating weeds, uncovering the now maturing plantings, and replanting to fill in the gaps. In 2018, a roadside weeds grant from Mt Alexander Shire encouraged the group to implement sensitive weed control along the best roadside remnant vegetation - a process expected to continue for several years.

The group's walks and talks encourage Taradale's many new residents to explore their adopted town's historical sites including the Channel, Barkly Park, Cemetery and Quartz Battery, which each have important ecological values that could be enhanced. The group has also conducted seed collection (under permit) for propagating wildflowers, grasses and trees, in consultation with the Cemetery trust.

A theme of the newly emerged group is to engage and have a presence at local gatherings, while ensuring the group's own events



have a social as well as ecological outcome. Shared meals encourage the sharing of ideas to continue long after the 'real' work has ended.



Taradale Landcare members at Barkly Park in Taradale  
*Photo by Brian Bainbridge*

## *Elphinstone Land Management Association (ELMA)* **Arboretum comes to life in Elphinstone**

Elphinstone Land Management Association (ELMA) works on public and private land to enhance biodiversity, carry out land restoration, offer advice on best practice land use, and manage pest plants and animals.

The Elphinstone Arboretum is a great example of a shared vision coming to life through community engagement, teamwork and dedication, in the true spirit of Landcare. As the brainchild of Neville Cooper, former member of ELMA, who saw an opportunity to enhance and develop a half-acre site dotted with mature Silver Banksia and eucalypts at the Recreation Reserve in Elphinstone, the arboretum has become an important part of our local landscape.

When established in 2010, aided by a grant from the Mount Alexander Shire Council, the project captured the hearts of ELMA members and has been the most successful of our group's planting days and working bees. With assistance from native plant guru Frances Cincotta from Newstead Natives, indigenous plants were carefully chosen and planted according to habit, with many species grouped together to allow for greater visual impact and easy identification. Over 400 seedlings have been planted over the years to showcase trees and shrubs indigenous to the area, encouraging visitors to learn about native plants and how to use them on their own properties, while providing habitat for native wildlife.

Some years later, when the plants had become well established, ELMA was successful in obtaining a grant for signage through the North Central Catchment Management Authority. In 2017 we installed fixed full colour signs with photos providing information on habit, flowering, and cultivation of over 25 different plants including various species of acacia, eucalypts, correas, melaleuca, and hopbush, to name a few.



The arboretum is an ever-evolving space. Although we've lost a few plants along the way, we've gained knowledge in which species have thrived under the local conditions and have planted more of those species, ensuring that each year it grows in abundance.

Not only is it a wonderful asset for our community, it's a celebration of our botanical heritage and an example of how we can make a positive impact on our environment. We hope that visitors to the Recreation Reserve can enjoy the arboretum, not only to admire its beauty but as a botanical and educational reference for many years to come.

The Elphinstone Arboretum is located behind the Elphinstone Hall in Olivers Lane, Elphinstone VIC.



Elphinstone Primary School students learn all about the arboretum

*Photo by ELMA*

## *Muckleford Catchment Landcare Group*

### **We plant, we look, we learn, we share, we cycle**

Muckleford Catchment Landcare is made up of a vibrant group of landholders who are interested in being sustainable and want to know more about protecting their local environment.

We help each other out, share information and get together to plant trees to increase habitat connectivity. We hold workshops and events and are active around protecting our roadsides and native species. We monitor nest boxes once a year at the Walmer Conservation Reserve and have an annual bike ride. We leave weed control to contractors, and concentrate our time on activities that are enjoyable, interesting, and social.

Once a year we get together and plan our activities for the following year: looking at someone else's property, workshops on something we want to know (like how to retain water in the landscape or turn a dam into a wetland), and where we can plant habitat for strategic connections in the Muckleford landscape. We also look to partner with Connecting Country and other local groups on projects that will benefit our members.

We wanted to do something different – something fun that we could make an annual event for members to look forward to. We use the bike lane beside the railway line, starting at the Muckleford train station, going through Maldon and ending up at a local pub for lunch, before we return. We attract new members to this event. They often bring friends and family members of all ages and interests to get involved, and we love it.

Muckleford Catchment Landcare aims to:

- Improve water quality in the Muckleford Creek and its tributaries.

- Conserve soil in the Muckleford Creek catchment.
- Create a healthy and viable balance between farming and biodiversity.
- Encourage discussion, debate, participation, and co-operation between landholders within the catchment.
- Harness local knowledge and expertise to improve the environment and productivity.
- Assist landholders to access funding for land improvement projects.



Annual Muckleford Catchment Landcare bike ride  
*Photo by Muckleford Catchment Landcare*



## Acknowledgements

The stories in this booklet were written by the following volunteers:

- 'Historic gum trees of Maldon' - Sarah Edwards and Bev Phillips
- 'The birth of the Cactus Warriors!' – Sarah Edwards and Lee Mead
- 'A tiny frog inspires land restoration' – Sarah Edwards and Christine Kilmartin
- 'Barkers Creek gets beautiful' – Sarah Edwards and Daryl Colless
- 'From tip to bushland: Sandy Creek Landcare success' – Sarah Edwards and Lois Larkman
- 'Helicopters to the rescue' – Sarah Edwards and Christine Brooke
- 'A cup of tea to care for the creek' – Sarah Edwards and Maurie Dynon
- 'A community cares for Campbells Creek' – Sarah Edwards and Thea King
- 'The restoration of Taradale Landcare' – Brian Bainbridge
- 'Arboretum comes to life in Elphinstone' – Sue McLennan
- 'We plant, we look, we learn, we share, we cycle' – Beth Mellick

Connecting Country would like to thank everyone who dedicated time to help us put this booklet together and share some of the many Landcare stories out there.

These stories cover just a small portion of the amazing work done by Landcare and Friends groups in the Mount Alexander region of central Victoria. If you'd like to learn more, visit

[www.connectingcountry.org.au/landcare](http://www.connectingcountry.org.au/landcare)

## What is Landcare?

Landcare is about caring for your land and your local area so it continues to support our community and natural resources for generations to come. This volunteer movement began in Victoria in 1986 and there are now over 600 Landcare groups in Victoria, with around 30 in the Mount Alexander region surrounding Castlemaine.

Landcare and Friends groups care for our land through practical actions like revegetation, weed and pest control, erosion control, improving water quality, and helping farmers be more sustainable. They also engage and support community members through workshops, interpretive signs, recording history, building walking tracks, and more.

## Get involved

Joining a Landcare group is a great way to actively help your local environment and get to know local people. You can get involved at any level, from dropping into a working bee occasionally to taking a management role.

Find your nearest group's contact details in the *Landcare of the Mount Alexander region* brochure, or on the Connecting Country website: <https://connectingcountry.org.au/landcare/wheres-your-nearest-group/contact-a-group/>

