



the He Ho Herald

Newsletter of the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater Inc.

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Image © Krystii Melaine

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Est. 1989

Summer 2011 Edition 92 Vol 23. No 4

Peter Menkhorst's AGM talk *by Sue Tardif*

Peter has been Chair of the Helmeted Honeyeater Recovery Team since its inception in 1989.

What have we achieved and where to from here?

Peter started by giving some background about the Helmeted Honeyeater (HHo). It is one of four subspecies of Yellow-tufted Honeyeater. HHo's *Lichenostomus melanops cassidix* always had a very restricted distribution from the Upper Yarra Valley through to Westernport, but is now confined to a 4.5 km strip of floodplain forest in Yellingbo NCR, 50 km east of Melbourne. DNA analysis (microsatellites, 5 loci) indicates that the genetic distance between ssp *cassidix* and the other subspecies is great. Although a sub-species, its genetic difference qualifies it for protection under legislation. An intensive recovery program began in 1989 and has continued for 22 years, with annual funding from the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments.

Currently, using the IUCN system the HHo ranks as Critically Endangered (although as it is a subspecies, you will not find it formally listed), as its area of occupancy is less than 10 km² with a continuing decline in its area of occupancy, the area and quality of habitat and the number of mature individuals.

Peter highlighted the long history of ornithological observation, research and concern for HHo's, with records dating back to 1910. In 1965 Yellingbo Wildlife Reserve was proclaimed to protect the bird. In 1983 'Ash Wednesday' fires wiped out small colonies at Cockatoo and Upper Beaconsfield and in 1988 Ian Smales reported that

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Some members of the 2010 Helmeted Honeyeater Recovery Team.

Image source: P. Menkhorst

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New Members

The Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater would like to welcome to the group our **new members**:

I. & E. Haskins - Forest Hill, **H. Reid** – Lockwood, **T. Konstantinidis** – Croydon, **J. Frazer** – Tecoma, **P. Noyes** – Seaford, **G. Deering** - Catherine Hill Bay, **N. Bradsworth** - Glen Waverley, **M. Rook & A. Reina** – Berwick, **N. & R. Shankly** – Yellingbo, **S. & N. Jones**, **K. Robinson** – Warburton

Donations to community education /depot upgrade –

I. & E. Haskins, **D. Moolenschot**, **P. & T. Miskin**, **N. Bradsworth**, **K. Nicholas**, **N. & R. Shankly**

Donations (habitat plants)

L. & A. Thomas, **N. Bradsworth**, **M. Rook & A. Reina**,

Donations In Memory of M. Dear

P. Dunstan

Thank you for your support

Gift Membership

Brand Family (M. Preston & R. Mullen)

Perhaps you would like your donation to be 0.5% of your shopping spend at IGA stores. Just ask for a community benefits card at IGA and they will process the funds to us.

This newsletter is published on 100% recycled paper.

Thank you to the Shire of Yarra Ranges for their assistance with the postage.

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Thank you to the many people who continue to send us stamps & corks, most of which come to us anonymously. Proceeds from the sale of stamps benefit threatened species conservation at Zoos Victoria, home to the captive breeding program of Helmeted Honeyeaters, whilst the corks benefit the elephants. Thank you!

A View from the Swamp

editorial comment

The year has come and almost gone so quickly, with many highlights for the Friends. And it could have not been done without you, our members. Catch up with old and new Friends at the Members' Day in November.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed articles & photos for the newsletter and provided help & support with those 'last-minute' hiccups during the year. I could not have done it without you.

Hope you enjoy relaxing and reading the Summer HeHo Herald over the Summer break.

Sandra



What's on – Calendar of events

December		January		February		March	
Date	Activity	Date	Activity	Date	Activity	Date	Activity
Thurs 1 st	Nursery	Tues 3 rd	Nursery	Thurs 2 nd	Nursery	Thurs 1 st	Nursery
Sat 3 rd	Nursery sales	Thurs 5 th	Nursery	Tues 7 th	Nursery	Sun 4 th	Reveg
Tues 6 th	Nursery	Sun 8 th	Reveg	Thurs 9 th	Nursery	Tues 6 th	Nursery
Thurs 8 th	Nursery	Tues 10 th	Nursery	Sun 12 th	Reveg	Thurs 8 th	Nursery
Sun 11 th	Reveg	Thurs 12 th	Nursery	Tues 14 th	Nursery	Tues 13 th	Nursery
Tues 13 th	Nursery	Tues 17 th	Nursery	Thurs 16 th	Nursery	Thurs 15 th	Nursery
Thurs 15 th	Nursery	Thurs 19 th	Nursery	Fri 17 th	Newsletter deadline	Tues 20 th	Nursery
Tues 20 th	Nursery	Tues 24 th	Nursery	Tues 21 st	Nursery	Thurs 22 nd	Nursery
Thurs 22 nd	Nursery	Wed 25 th	Committee meeting	Wed 22 nd	Committee Meeting	Sun 25 th	Members' Day (to be confirmed)
		Thurs 26 th	Nursery	Thurs 23 rd	Nursery	Tues 27 th	Nursery
		Tues 31 st	Nursery	Tues 28 th	Nursery	Wed 28 th	Committee Meeting
						Thurs 29 th	Nursery

Revegetation activities are held at differing locations around the Yellingbo Reserve and area.

Activities may include tree planting, seed collecting or works around the nursery or reserve. Meet at the **Yellingbo Ranger's House, 1217 Macclesfield Road, Yellingbo** (Melways Map 305 Ref. G11) at 10am. BYO Lunch. Most equipment is supplied. **For further information call Richard Case on 9720 4062.**

Nursery activities days are held at the Rangers House (see above). They run between 9am and 3pm, with (BYO) lunch. Work mainly involves the potting up of young seedlings. **For further information contact our Nursery Manager, Michelle Faram on 5964 8341**

On Saturday Dec 3rd, the Nursery will be open from 9am -12. It is the last time until Saturday sales start again in April 2012.

The nursery is closed on all public holidays and days of total fire ban.

The President's report *by David Howell*

It's HeHo breeding season and great to hear from Bruce, Emma and the volunteer feeders that a number of birds have been seen carrying nesting material, while others already have nestlings. Great news indeed!

This month a HeHo survey was held at Labertouche (Bunyip State Park) it was extremely gratifying to see over thirty volunteers in attendance. Some HeHos gate-crashed the pre-survey briefing, as if to say "here we are", just in case we didn't know what they looked like.

We all need to try and encourage more people to become members and to get involved in HeHo activities, especially the younger members of the general community. So if you have friends or relatives looking for a healthy outdoors interest then The Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater might be the answer.

I had a friend's daughter lament to me that she was finding it difficult to get a job because potential employers told her that she had no experience. I listened to her story and then asked if she'd thought of voluntary work, she replied, "that's not work"! Her attitude changed when I managed to enlighten her on all the job skills and experience she would gain through volunteer work. I explained that many people have gained employment via volunteer experience. It gives a good impression to potential employers about initiative, commitment as well as job experience. If you know anyone needing to get work experience then perhaps HeHo volunteer work, at the nursery or on members' days, might help.

The Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater continue to be active on a number of committees and work closely with other community groups aimed at improving habitat. Visiting parts of the Yellingbo Reserve two months apart and it was amazing to see all the new spring growth, following long period of flooding.

Bob Anderson, Bruce Quin and I have offered to assist Melbourne Water record data from bores installed in the Reserve to monitor ground water. This will help determine what the water table in the Reserve is doing and hopefully provide information to assist with habitat regeneration and recovery.

On Sunday 27th November there will be a **Members' Day** end-of-year event at the newly refurbished Depot shed on Woori Yallock Creek in Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve.

This day is for everyone.

Come and enjoy the day, meet the Committee and other Friends.

Enjoy a walk in the Reserve and see our revegetation areas.

12:00 noon start - 4pm finish

BYO: lunch, plates, cups, cutlery, cold drinks - this is a no rubbish event

Tea and coffee will be provided

NB. This event will be cancelled on a day of extreme weather conditions.

Peter Menhorst AGM talk *(continued from front page)*

only 50-60 birds remained, all in Yellingbo. In 1989 the Recovery Team (RT) formed, Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater (FoHH) formed and Healesville Sanctuary began the captive breeding program. In 1991 the first recovery plan was published.

A RT is a multi-disciplinary committee with representatives of the major agencies/groups with an interest in the taxon and its conservation. It is charged with recommending a wise course of action, facilitating its implementation and reviewing its progress. Peter advised that it is not a formal entity, neither is it the font of all knowledge about the taxon, but should co-opt strategic expertise. A successful RT is truly collaborative, science based, reflective, focussed, bold, decisive and prepared to take calculated risks.

Twenty-two years of endeavour has seen HHO habitat surveyed, mapped, described and enhanced. An understanding of the population demography and genetics has been defined and managed. Captive breeding has been established to ensure an insurance population and source of birds for release. Re-introduction programs have been established. 2 PhDs, 2 MScs & 12 BSc Hon. theses have been supported.

The role of community groups, Peter said, such as FoHH is vital. In the RT's case, community groups undertake the important roles of habitat rehabilitation, surveys for dispersing birds, community education and lobbying. FoHH take on much of this work.

Peter then discussed the beginnings of the release program, with trials in 1995. The two core aims are to create new populations and to reinforce existing populations. The first question however was what makes a suitable candidate? Research gives us a list that includes: Sedentary. Territorial and aggressive towards potential competitors. Territories are clumped into colonies. A degree of communal defence of colony area. Long-lived. Potentially high reproductive output – multiple clutches through an extended breeding season. High survivorship after fledging. Immature females disperse to a different colony. The critical question is, does the HHO tick these boxes? Answer is an emphatic, yes.

The releases at Bunyip SP began in 2001 and have continued annually. A total of 141 birds have been released across 4 release sites. Breeding by released birds began in the 2nd year, and the number of breeding attempts increased steadily, with a setback to the population in the 2009-10 breeding season. It is unclear why. Drought has certainly compromised habitat, but is this the whole story? The population is still too small to be considered self-sustaining. (*Ed note: See Bruce Quin's 'In the Field' report for population details*).

What are the current problems we are managing? Peter described 4 major issues.

Habitat quality, quantity and dispersion in the landscape. Is it changing & how? Eucalypt dieback is a major habitat management issue.

Climate. Rainfall records for Yellingbo dating back 104 years show that 1997 was the driest year, and all years up until 1996 (when the data shown stopped) had below average rainfalls. Is Yellingbo drier now? Is this drier outlook the new norm?

Small population problems. The Recovery Program began with just 50 birds.

Predation. Any predation on a small population is significant.

What is the way forward for our wild HHO populations? Peter described this as a key question for the RT.

For Yellingbo NCR: continue to reinforce with captive-bred birds, increase stream flows and flood events and trial small ecological burns to regenerate tea-tree thickets and Mountain Swamp Gum.

For Bunyip SP: we must establish a second population – Bunyip State Park is, in our opinion, the best option. Let the birds determine the best habitat and locate release sites accordingly.

Do we control nest predators? This has its positives and negatives. More fledglings are raised, but are we attracting predators to nest sites?

What is the way forward for our captive HHO populations?

Peter reinforced the need for Zoos Victoria to be acknowledged and praised for their long-term and substantial contribution to the program. They continue to make a substantial financial investment in the program and the species. Captive breeding for release is essential but our capacity to breed is low. Only 14-16 pairs can be accommodated resulting in small numbers for release. We need other contributing institutions and we need to improve survival after release. What do we need to do to 'condition' captive bred birds for release? More work needs to be done.

Lessons learnt

Peter summarised by saying that monitoring health, breeding and dispersion is labour-intensive and costly. Nest predation is a major factor constraining population growth. The environment is never

static. There are many uncontrollable factors such as vegetation succession, drought and wildfire. Supplementary feeding is a 2-edged sword. Feeding gets birds through the vulnerable times, but is the population able to be self-sustaining? Captive-breeding is difficult, expensive, and may require years of refinement. The captive colony has never produced enough birds to allow an experimental approach to release, therefore we are learning-by-doing. The best breeders are over-represented. We need to continually manage pairings to optimise the gene pool. We need to embrace a whole-of-catchment land and water management strategy to reduce threats from beyond the reserve boundaries - sediment, nutrients, plant and animal pest species. This requires a commitment from the entire community.

But, in the end Peter said, it all depends on getting the best people! We have a great team of people working together.

The Friends thank Peter for taking the time to be at our AGM and share his insights into the HHO Recovery Program.

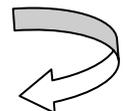
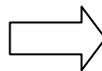
Coordinators' Column *by Sue & Bruce Tardif*

"Wow! I'm really proud of myself for doing that!" Alissa, talking about the depot walls she helped paint.



The last couple of weeks have seen us complete our revegetation activities for the year, start on the reporting back to our funding bodies for the grant monies we've spent to put habitat in the ground and then write new grant applications for the 2012 year. It's all happening! Some quick stats for the year: 25 community talks, 16,688 habitat plants planted (equating to \$54,094 of in-kind volunteer works), 1,742 people actively engaged in our education programs & 15 weed management, painting and/or propagation activities by school/community groups.

Amongst all of that, the most exciting thing we've been doing lately is transforming the depot. A HUGE thank you to all of our members and Knox Environment Society who have generously donated money toward the upgrade of this space where we base our education & revegetation programs. The depot is an old farm shed on Woori Yallock Creek, acquired with the land when the reserve was proclaimed in 1965. The depot is a huge asset, albeit humble, in great need of a spruce up. The following images illustrate the beginnings of its metamorphosis into a truly useful and safe space to host school and community group visits into the future. To the make most of our budget, and 'walk-the-talk' we are using recycled and re-used materials where possible to lessen our ecological footprint.





Next steps?

Heating, storage cupboards, power into the room, interpretative signs, poster display area, bag hooks... again, THANK YOU for making it possible!

Watch this space.

Member profile – Sandra, the Editor

How did you first hear about Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater?

On my first teaching day at Yellingbo PS in 1991, the Friends held the official launch of their education kit. The Victorian Premier Joan Kirner, a number of specialist people involved in the Recovery, the Friends and the media were all there too. It made a real impact. The school has a very close relationship with the Friends so we were always doing something about the Helmeted Honeyeater.

Why did you join the Friends?

It just happened. I became involved with the Friends through their connection with the school and joined the Friends along the way. I enjoyed being part of their activities with the children and supporting them in any way we could so it just followed that I make it official.

You and your husband Ray have both volunteered at different times. Tell us how you both got involved and why.

When you see that a job needs doing, you just offer to do it. I have always been interested in creating documents on my computer so when the Editor's job came up I offered to do it. Becoming a Committee member gave me a far greater understanding of the behind the scenes operations of the Friends and what difficulties they constantly have to overcome. Ray has always supported my interests so he offered to help the Friends out when they needed a Treasurer.



*Sulphur-crested Cockatoo flying high over the Steels Creek Valley
Image: Sandra*

When you're not editing the *HeHo Herald*, what are the other things you enjoy doing?

We have a rural property, a flock of sheep, alpacas and a million jobs on our 'to-do' list. Steels Creek is a wonderful community to belong to and to be involved in. SC Landcare group is active and has had planting days and related activities to attend and learn from. Having retired from teaching, I am now able to spend time relaxing, doing spinning and weaving projects that I never had the time to do. And I have my beautiful goldens to take for walks.

What or whom inspires you?

Bob Anderson has been an important part of the last 20 years of my life - a wonderful role model to encourage people to get involved. The children at YPS love having him pop in and give a quick hello, talk about plants and always leave no doubt that they are important and valued by the Friends. Bob inspires people by his own example.

If you had 10 minutes with a State or Federal Minister, which one would you choose and what would you say?

The slogan of the Friends says that 'the Helmeted Honeyeater needs friends for life – that there needs to be ongoing, long-term commitment or there will be no He Hos left. So get on board.

It is said that people tend to fall into 6 categories of what interests them the most - people, places, things, activities, information & time. Which category do you think suits you best & why?

I think people and places are both incredibly important to our wellbeing and peace of mind. I love the people who are in my life and the place I am in.

What do you think is the one thing that anyone can do to help our environment?

If you like what you see when you look around – look after it. If you don't like what you see, think about how you can change it.

How could Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater do things differently to make your membership or volunteering role even better?

I think the Friends offer every member opportunities to be involved and to participate in their own way. They are very welcoming and supportive. Volunteer to help them. You will be very welcome.

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He Ho Merchandise

Summer stock available	size	number	\$
Steel Blue <i>He Ho</i> Polo Shirts - <i>most sizes</i>			\$25 each
Blue Polar fleece vests			\$35 each
Green Polar fleece jackets <i>l-xl-xxl-xxxl</i> <i>with He Ho emblem – more sizes on order</i>			\$35 each
Green Canvas Hat 8" brim <i>sizes 57, 61cm</i> <i>with He Ho emblem</i>			\$18 each
Cards - <i>Margo Heeley - epacris, greenhoods, E. fulgens,</i> <i>E. campohora</i>			\$2 each
<i>J. Flinn and D Williams He Ho (circle choice)</i> with envelopes for all occasions			\$2 each
Books – <i>Yellingbo A Special Place</i>			\$14 each
<i>- Hilton Hunts for a Home</i>			\$12 each
Name :			Sub total \$
Address:			10% P&H
..... P/code.....			TOTAL \$

Or 6 for \$10

Nursery News *by Michelle Faram*



What a busy year it has been in the nursery. With volunteer numbers down on last year and a more difficult growing season, due to the cool wet weather, we have still managed to send out over 50,000 plants for orders and planting days since May. The majority of plant orders have come from Melbourne Water, for the Stream Frontage Program and The Yarra Ranges Council, for the Ribbons of Green Program. Large numbers of plants have also gone out for Yarra4Life's ten planting days, on the 3.2 ha site on Woori Yallock Creek. The plantings have been undertaken by the Conservation Volunteers and a number of corporate groups including Kraft and the National Australia Bank. Bruce and Sue were also busy again this year with the school's planting program getting a lot of plants in the ground, despite the damage caused by the floods earlier in the year and the inclement weather during the planting season which made access to the Reserve difficult. John's Hill Landcare was also busy, taking a large number of plants, which the nursery has been growing for them.

The nursery gardens have been especially lovely this year with the extra rain and the continuing hard work of Bob Anderson to keep it pruned and weed free. Bob has also had some assistance this year with the Green Corp group coming in over a number of weeks to assist in shifting mulch, weeding and planting out more areas. They have also added some rabbit proof wire netting to the nursery's boundary fence. A number of school groups have also been involved with the revegetating the entrance to the Reserve, which looks fantastic.

With the nursery looking somewhat empty and orders still going out the nursery crew will be very busy over the coming months to ensure that we have plants ready for next year's Autumn orders. A big thankyou to everyone who has helped out in the nursery over the past year, with a number of our regulars out long term others helped to cover their loss. I wouldn't have been able to get things done without this help and I am very grateful for your assistance.

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Out in the Field *by Bruce Quin*



It has been an eventful first half to the 2011/2012 breeding season for Helmeted Honeyeaters. Fledglings have been produced from four out of 28 completed nest attempts to date. However, a higher success rate is anticipated for the second half of what is likely to be a long breeding season. Consistent rainfall prior to and during the 2011/2012 breeding season should prolong food availability for the Helmeted Honeyeaters during summer months.

Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve 2011/2012 Breeding Season

Breeding at the reintroduction site at Cockatoo Swamp in Yellingbo has been closely monitored and management actions taken place; key outcomes to date are as follows:

- 7 breeding pairs and 5 fledglings confirmed (4 fledglings still surviving).
- 4 nests protected; 2 produced fledglings and 2 still active (one with a captive-bred chick).
- 2 abandoned nests subjected to "egg rescues"; one rescue successful.
- 2 nests from a pair with closely related members subjected to egg substitutions; one nest producing a fledgling, the second still active and containing eggs rescued from an abandoned Tonimbuk nest.
- 2 adult birds died due to severe respiratory conditions.

The successful rescue of two abandoned eggs is indeed a rewarding and significant outcome. Emma Campbell found the eggs and rushed them in a portable incubator to Healesville Sanctuary. The eggs were placed in a more sophisticated incubator and the two chicks that hatched from the eggs were hand-raised by Karina Cartwright and Bronwyn McCulloch. Karina reported that when the youngsters were placed in an aviary after 'fledging', a female Yellow-tufted Honeyeater in an adjacent aviary showed interest in the fledglings, which were then placed in with the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater who took over the parenting role. She will raise them to

independence and they will be used as captive-breeding birds because their biological mother has some genetic distinctiveness.

The events that led to the abandonment of this clutch of eggs are intriguing. The wild female's mate died early in the 2011/2012 breeding season bird because of respiratory illness, leaving her temporarily widowed. However, an already paired male from an adjacent territory began 'courting' her as well as his own mate. One nest was produced by the 'widow', but abandoned and then a second nest was produced with two eggs. It appears that the male and his mate from the adjacent territory displaced the widow from her territory, resulting in the abandoned clutch of eggs. The displaced female has relocated in the territory of the pair that pushed her out of her first territory and she currently sits on at least one egg; the identity of her new mate has not been determined yet.

On at least four prior occasions during the past two decades abandoned eggs have been successfully rescued. The shorter the time after laying and obviously the lesser the length of time that the egg has not been incubated, the greater the chance the embryo has of surviving. Therefore, not all abandoned eggs have viable embryos. An egg from another abandoned nest of the 2011/2012 breeding season was cold and wet when found and the embryo died. Occasionally, we also need to rescue abandoned nestlings.

Four breeding pairs have been confirmed at the last naturally-occurring colony at Cockatoo Swamp in Yellingbo to date, but this number should increase once more territories are re-visited. Successful nesting has not been recorded at this site yet. However, two clutches have been taken from territories of this colony to promote genetic diversity in the captive colony and three fledglings with wild origins have been produced at Healesville Sanctuary. This management action is supposed to be done as egg or chick swaps between wild and captive nests were possible so that neither colony is 'taxed'. The captive eggs or chicks from the first swap were apparently predated in the wild nest. In the second case, two dummy (plastic) eggs were initially placed in the nest after removal of the real eggs to keep the female incubating while her eggs were transported to Healesville and the captive-produced eggs taken to the wild nest. However, upon returning to the wild nest, it was apparent that the female had abandoned the nest and the captive eggs were taken back to Healesville Sanctuary. The dummy eggs were not immediately removed from the wild nest, and a week later, it was discovered that a predator had presumably raided the nest and taken the dummy eggs! Note that dummy eggs had already been successfully used to keep females sitting after their real eggs were removed during this and past breeding seasons. In fact, dummies were used in one nest of the current season to 'protect' captive eggs from potential flood waters; the captive eggs were given to the wild female once the flood threat had abated.

Overall, 32 nest attempts have been found at Yellingbo, with 25 of these attempts finished. However, in 10 cases nests were abandoned during building, perhaps because of unsettled weather conditions.

Bunyip State Park 2011/2012 Breeding Season

Two pairs of Helmeted Honeyeaters occur at one of the Tonimbuk release sites; the other two release sites and the private property used by Helmeted Honeyeaters at this location in the past and the 2010-2011 release area near Gembrook do not currently have Helmeted Honeyeaters. One of the two pairs at Tonimbuk has produced two fledglings. The second pair's first nest contained one nestling which was not confirmed as fledging. The second nest was abandoned following the application of a nest protector. The two eggs were initially taken to Healesville Sanctuary and then placed into a Yellingbo nest once the embryos were determined to be alive (see earlier). It is hoped that the Yellingbo female will tolerate an exceptionally short period that she is required to incubate these eggs because they are approximately a week older than her own.

One of the two Helmeted Honeyeaters taken from Tonimbuk into captivity because of a respiratory complaint earlier this year was re-released into the wild on 18th September. He was released at Labertouche North because the rest of his group had shifted after the winter to that location. He appears to be have re-adjusted to life in the wild without any problem – a satisfying outcome for all concerned, including Healesville Sanctuary Veterinary staff who treated him for weeks. The older bird will remain in captivity because her lungs were permanently damaged by the infection and she would not survive in the wild.

At the Labertouche North sites, monitoring is being conducted by remote cameras at mostly empty feed stations established by Emma Campbell and area searching. There appears to be at least one pairing at both locations, though a nesting is yet been confirmed. In the near future, unbanded birds at one of the sites will be caught for banding and DNA-sampling. A major survey on the 16th October organised by Emma, attracted 33 people, including members of Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater, Birds Australia and Wildlife Victoria. Strategic placement of people at the sites allowed for identification of individual Helmeted Honeyeaters and a greater understanding of their distribution at the sites. Thank you to all those people who participated in the survey.

The Helmeted Honeyeater Recovery Team has recently received a report by Dr Paul Sunnucks and colleagues at the School of Biological Sciences and Australian Centre for Biodiversity (Monash University) on work investigating the genetic discreteness and diversity of the Helmeted Honeyeater. Their work confirms the genetic distinctiveness of the Helmeted Honeyeater from the other three subspecies of Yellow-tufted Honeyeater. There has been some loss of the genetic variation from contemporary wild Helmeted Honeyeaters relative to those DNA samples collected from individuals prior to 2001. However, the level of genetic diversity in contemporary wild Helmeted Honeyeaters is not alarmingly low. Also, the level of genetic diversity in the captive colony has declined only marginally in the past 20 years. These findings demonstrate that actions conducted under the direction of La Trobe University Geneticist Dr. Neil Murray to maximise genetic diversity in the captive and wild populations have been working, but that we will need to keep implementing them.

Another update will be provided in the next edition of HeHo Herald. The help and support from the many volunteers during 2011 has been extremely appreciated. Stay safe and all the best for 2012.

From Bruce, on behalf of the Helmeted Honeyeater Recovery Team and Operations Group.

Reveg Rambles *by Richard Case*

This season has seen us busy with seed collection and weeding, following up on old patches and finding new ones.

Our first stop on the 14th of August was to collect from Red Stringybark, a difficult tree as the seed is mostly carried high up and out of reach. It was a sunny, still morning and a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles soared across the valley. Gang-gang Cockatoos worked over the trees where we had stopped and a Brown Goshawk floated across the flank of the hill. We managed to collect enough Red Stringybark for our needs and moved on.



Next, we visited the Macclesfield Creek Bushland arm of the Reserve. Here we wandered the upper section, looking for and collecting Silver-leafed Stringybark. Four Eastern Grey Kangaroos inspected us warily from a distance before bounding off. The bush was warm and still and smelled beautifully of gum trees. A dreamy morning.

After a late lunch, we headed off for a tour of the north of the Reserve. We looked for more Silver-leafed Stringybark but didn't find any that was ripe or within reach. Our final stop for the day was on Woori Yallock Creek at the Plantathon '99 site. Here we pulled out all the Inkweed we could see (six bags). We had come across this weed in July, another invasive plant that had quietly caught up with us.

The 18th of September began cloudy and looked like rain. We heard, then saw a Swamp Harrier high above the Nursery, flying toward Cockatoo Creek. Shining Bronze-Cuckoos were quite common, calling from the bush. We set out to check the progress of some Tree Tobacco which we had treated with herbicide last year. A small part of the first patch had re-sprouted. We removed the flower heads and moved on, planning to return on a dry day to finish the job. We heard a Brown Goshawk chanting, then we saw it fly out from the Manna Gums on the creek line and away. I'm happy to report that the second patch of Tree Tobacco is now quite dead.

Heading upstream, we dealt with a large woody weed that I'd been watching but never quite got around to fixing. From here, we turned back downstream, looking for any more infestations of Inkweed that might have sprung up. As we approached the big farm dam we saw an adult Nankeen Night-Heron fly up from the Reserve, out over the dam and then back into the Reserve. We found a big patch of Inkweed on the other side of the billabong from the one we had removed in August, so we started pulling this out.

Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were everywhere and very active. A pair of Little Corellas flew past and a small flock of Rainbow Lorikeets came and went. On the dam were White-faced Heron, Dusky

Moorhen and Purple Swamphen. A Peregrine Falcon perched in a dead tree, out in the paddock. It sat there for ages, unmolested and then suddenly was gone, without any alarm calls from the smaller birds to tell us. The weather became warmer and clearer as the day progressed, a very pleasant day.

After lunch, we spent a few minutes on Shaw Road, pulling out the small amount of Angled Onion that grows there. Then we returned to the Inkweed. As we passed Shaw Road Wetland, a Great Egret flew up and eyed us cautiously. On the dam now were Pacific Black Duck, Wood Duck and one male Hardhead. As we worked away, a party of Yellow-rumped Thornbills fossicked along the fenceline while a Pallid Cuckoo called in the distance. Finally we checked the nearby Forget-Me-Not patch we have been controlling but only found a quarter of a bag. So we loaded ourselves and 17 bags of weeds into the car and headed for home.

A cool, still morning with intermittent rain greeted us on the 9th of October. We headed off but didn't get far before reaching a dead tree across the track. We cut this up and moved on, again, not far before reaching a rather large Manna Gum across the track. This was a bit beyond us so we grabbed the tools and walked. Our first job was to continue the search for Inkweed. We picked up from where we had removed the large patch in September. Spreading out, we worked slowly downstream, disturbing the Swamp Wallabies as we went. We came to the Montpellier Broom patch and gave that a thorough going over but only found an eighth of a bag. We continued the Inkweed search as far as the Big Fence but found none.

Returning to the car, we had just turned around when Peter spotted a patch of Tree Tobacco, the third we had found in the Reserve. This was near the now dead second patch. We cut the stems and painted them with herbicide, removing a quarter of a bag of flower heads.

After lunch, the weather fined up and we wandered down Shaw Road, following up on the Angled Onion and removing another quarter of a bag of it. We then went to the Depot 3 Aviary site where we had a very pleasant time wandering around looking for Forget-Me-Not. I had expected a lot of it after the rains we have been having but we only managed to find two bags of it.

We finished the day back at the house, combing the southern fenceline for Ragwort. A quarter of a bag of it for our troubles. Despite the good growing conditions, the areas we are controlling are producing less and less weeds. It's a really good feeling to see what we are achieving.

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