

# Friends of Organ Pipes National Park



## FOOPs donate to Blaze Aid



**FOOPs convener Terry Lane (left) hands over the auger to Blaze Aid representative Ryan Jones**

Last year the Friends were able to purchase an auger to be used of planting in the Organ Pipes National Park through the Federal Government's small equipment grants scheme.

However, due to safety concerns from Parks Victoria that the 71cc motor was far too powerful to be used on the park's rocky terrain, on suggestion of member Robert Irvine we decided to donate the auger to Blaze Aid.

Blaze Aid is a voluntary organization born out of the Black Saturday bushfires in February 2009. After losing 3km of his fences on that day, Kilmore farmer Kevin Butler set about organising volunteers to replace hundreds of kilometers of fencing that had been razed to the ground .

The response was tremendous with people coming from all over Australia and overseas and within ten months the re-fencing program was finished, but Blaze Aid has not, having been contacted for help in WA and NSW after recent fires and floods.

To help Blaze Aid with volunteering or donations contact Kevin Butler at:  
[blazeaid@gmail.com](mailto:blazeaid@gmail.com)

# Mammal survey finds no trace of Sugar Gliders

At the request of FOOP member Robert Irvine, on 15 May the Mammal Survey Group of Victoria, under the leadership of Andrew McCutcheon conducted a survey of Organ Pipes National Park. The aim was to try to establish whether there are any remaining Sugar Gliders in the Park. Many thanks to Andrew for the following detailed report of their findings.

**WEATHER:** Fine with no wind and mild temperatures well into the evening.

## DESCRIPTION OF FOREST SURVEYED:

The site surveyed was Organ Pipes National Park located off the Calder Freeway, Keilor North opposite Calder Park (Melway Map 3 C-D 3 and C-D 4). Since the park was declared in 1972, a great deal of work has been done to restore the indigenous vegetation to the area, and more recently to introduce Sugar Gliders in 1989. Work by volunteers, most notably The Friends of Organ Pipes has played a major part in the restoration of the park, and establishment of vegetation much of which was planted out about 30 years ago.

Organ Pipes National Park, best known for its set of basalt columns collectively called the 'Organ Pipes' covers 121 ha of gorge country cutting through the basalt plains along Jacksons Creek in the Maribyrnong valley.

Within the park there are three landform zones – plains, escarpment and riparian. It is on the lower escarpment and riparian zone in Jacksons Creek valley where Sugar Gliders were introduced and have been recorded until 1995. The lower section of the escarpment supports woodland consisting of Yellow Gum and Yellow Box which form a canopy over wattles and other shrubs. In the riparian zone along the river flats and banks of Jacksons Creek the dominant trees are River Red Gum, Manna Gum and Blackwood.

In 1989, 13 Sugar Gliders were released into the Organ Pipes National Park followed by a further 24 animals in 1990, a total of 37 released over the two year period. As there were no natural tree hollows due to most trees being no more than 30 years old, 24 nesting boxes were installed over a 10 ha area along Jacksons Creek prior to the release. In June 1993, 43 Sugar Gliders were trapped and in May 1995 were trapped and released with 'electronic chips' to find out more about the animals movements. Some were found to be nesting in boxes specifically designed and put out for bats. Since that time there has been no further trapping to confirm whether Sugar Gliders were still thriving or indeed surviving in the park.

The Friends of Organ Pipes have put in a request for MSGV to undertake a mammal survey in the park to find out whether the Sugar Gliders *Petaurus breviceps* are still present. The survey method used was spotlighting in the early evening over the entire area of River Red Gum and Manna Gum woodland along Jacksons Creek within the boundaries of Organ Pipes NP. Over a total of 7 spot hours using 3 spotlights no Sugar Gliders were recorded. Other mammal species however were recorded during our spotlighting survey; fifteen Common Brushtail Possums, six Common Ringtail Possums, one Black Wallaby and four Eastern Grey Kangaroos. The kangaroos are part of an estimated population of over 100 animals in the Jacksons Creek valley.

In the late afternoon three Black Wallabies were seen browsing on shrubs. They are part of an estimated population of 18 animals in the national park.

We believe there are three possible reasons for the decline or complete disappearance of Sugar Gliders from Organ Pipes National Park. They are:

- Black Wattles *Acacia mearnsii* which were abundant in the park at the time of Sugar Glider release have matured and almost completely died out due to senescence and pressure from the prolonged drought over the last 12 to 13 years. The gum produced by Black wattle and other wattle species is an important food source for Sugar Gliders that is available throughout the year.
- The eucalypts alone would not be able to consistently provide in all seasons enough blossoms or support enough insects for Sugar Gliders to survive on. This especially applies in periods of drought when blossoming is less prolific and frequent, and in winter when very few insects are about. At the time of the survey only two Yellow Gums were found to be in flower.
- Most of the nest boxes were found to be in a very poor state of repair with lids and panels missing. One nest box with a missing lid was found to be housing a Brushtail Possum which managed to squeeze its self in. As almost all the existing eucalypts in OPNP are not mature enough to provide suitable nesting hollows there is little in the way of natural shelter required for Sugar Gliders to be able to survive and breed. Brushtail Possums, which were abundant, would compete for any available hollows that may naturally occur in some of the old original red gums that existed prior to the park being proclaimed.



With so little food and shelter available it appears that Sugar Gliders would have an uphill battle to survive in the Organ Pipes National Park. An influx of macropods, Swamp Wallabies and Eastern Grey Kangaroos, plus rabbits as well as the abnormally dry conditions as severely impeded regeneration of food trees necessary to sustain a population of Sugar Gliders.

**CAMP COMMANDANT:**

Andrew McCutcheon

**HOST:** Robert Irvine

**PERSONNEL**

Jill & Allen Poynton

John and Dianne Olden

Ann Williamson

Tim, Morwenna, Inga and Josh Griffiths-Hunt



# Working Bee Reports



**24 April 2010**

**By Terry Lane**

It looked as if it was going to be a wet day for our working bee, but the rain stayed away and it turned out quite nice. This month we went off to the St Albans Rail Reserve as we do about once a year and the team comprised of Maelor, Neil, Kevin, Claude, John Bradford (Land Management Officer with Brimbank Council) and me.

FOOPs have a good working relationship with Brimbank, we have worked with them at the Organ Pipes, Sydenham Park and Waterwatch, but it is the first time we have worked together at the St Albans Grassland Reserve.



**John Bradford**

John brought along the council ute and with mine we figured we could get rid of the inevitable rubbish that we would find there. On arrival, John dished out the red safety vests that are required to work in the area plus some bags and a sharps container, and with gloves on we set off, Maelor and Claude on the east side of the tracks and the rest of us on the west.



In past years we have found everything on the reserve, from the remains of dogs, tyres and anything else that people have thoughtlessly discarded for others to remove. Within two minutes my ute was starting to fill up with odds and sods. It was sore on the back picking up the little bits of rubbish and we found bricks, a suitcase, plastic bags of grass clippings, bottles, cans and even a bed! Fortunately no needles.





**An Icon for volunteering. FOOPs longest serving member Kevin Jones. 32 years and still going strong.**

After a short time, and only working in two sections of the three narrow strips our vehicles were full. We then set off to the council depot to get rid of it all. But in all honesty, clearing the site of rubbish is not the main aim of the Friends Group. By spending hour after hour picking up rubbish every year we have not time for our real objective of removing weeds.

These grassland reserves are probably the best in Brimbank. Grasslands are the most threatened ecosystem in Australia, once covering 10% of Victoria (somewhere in the region of 21000sqkm). Now there is probably only a few thousand hectares left, so sites like this one are extremely important. These are wonderful grasslands with Flax-lily, Bindweed, Rice Flowers and various daisies. To quote Robert Bender “it is places such as this that enable one to experience the beauty of Australian grasses.”



What is needed at St Albans is an ongoing regular rubbish removal program, a badly needed burn and FOOPs to preserve its grassland status.

# 27 March 2010

By Robert Irvine

Neil Duncan and I decided to spend the afternoon checking last years plantings along Jacksons creek so we ambled cross country from the house (now that the fences have been removed). Down at Costa's we had a look at Gerry's square plots with the kangaroo wire on top, they looked effective in that we couldn't see any eaten inside the enclosure. Closer to the creek were very surprised to see all the plants looking very green and healthy. (We do need to have a workday here tidying up & removing all old green plastic guards and if necessary using huge chicken wire frames). Further downstream were even more surprised that the newest plants on the north side of the gully were all alive and looking healthy too. It certainly looks like the drought is over!



**The Rolls Royce of planting frames?**

We continued on to check out the Melbourne water frames across the creek they sure are "Rolls Royce" construction with galvanised star pickets and professional wiring clamps around the perimeter and each of these was topped with a single plastic strand to keep the kangaroos away. They all had follow-up weed spraying in between the new seedlings. Neil & I continued downstream waving to our neighbour on the ploughed flat area as he drove past in his big F350 Ford ute. The creek water looks unusually muddy but there was a constant flow. We returned upstream opposite the park checking all the Melbourne Water enclosures and crossed the creek as we followed a kangaroo track through a tunnel in the reeds. Further up we found some very healthy looking fig trees bearing fruit and after Neil picked as many as he could I put some roundup on these introduced plants.

Into the Keilor land all the plants were long established and both Neil and I commented on how easy that site had been just planting and forgetting. Up the hill from here along the cliff edge and up we found some Calitris seedlings near death from kangaroos eating them. Luckily I was able to use some obsolete chicken wire frames to protect these three. Again up to the scoria gully where we scared away two energetic Swamp Wallabies then back to our cars about 4:30 and a very satisfying day.



# 10 July 2010

By Robert Bender and Terry Lane

We had an overcast but dry day. Robert Bender started off photographing bat boxes on Main Flat and noticed much Bridal Creeper expanding with the soil moisture. He filled a bin with the stuff and probably got only 1% of what was there. A task for the next workday?



**Bridal Creeper on Main Flat**

Robert then walked down to Costa's Block and found the team at work setting up a fenced plot in which to plant two trays of shrubs and Matrush supplied by Ian Taylor. The plot design was dictated by Melbourne water whose teams had set up several plots on the other side of Jackson's Creek. The size of the plots is thought to discourage kangaroos and wallabies from entering. It will make our lives much easier if it works!



**One bin-load went into the dumpster by the works centre.**

Meanwhile Terry had arrived at the park this time without his ute. Together with Neil, Claude and Maelor, he loaded star pickets, tools, clips and wire that Neil had purchased last month from Bunnings into the Parks Vic ute and were driven down to Costas by rangers Hayden and John. They quickly unloaded and found a good spot to erect the fence. The ground was lovely and moist and driving the pickets in was easy. They were later joined by Karen and Robert Bender and the fence was soon completed and plants in the ground.



There was quite a lot of flourishing *Einadia* in the plot. Neil had brought along fencing tools, star pickets were in and chicken wire was being pinned to the ground and stapled to guide wires. Meanwhile another team chopped out multitudes of weeds – onion grass, Oxalis, Serrated Tussock etc and dug planting holes.



Just after 1:30pm the last wire was tied and the plot was done. Tools loaded back into Neil's car and back to the park office. Neil stayed for lunch and said he'd take some weed killer down afterwards and knock out some of the dense mats of weeds. The plants spread over the slope have either been killed by the drought or sculpted by wallabies and roos. Inside the plot they have a better chance.



# Next Working Bee:

**Saturday August 28<sup>th</sup> 2010**

Weeding on Main Flat and follow-up  
planting at Costas Block

## **New items on the FOOPs website:**

Barry Kemp's letter about his visit to Organ Pipes  
with a 25 year overview.

Joy MacDonald's research paper on Sugar Gliders



### **Friends of Organ Pipes Committee**

**Convener: Terry Lane**

**Treasurer: Robert Irvine**

**Secretary/Grants: Neil Duncan**

**Website: Maelor Himbury**

**Newsletter: Karen Reid**