

Friends of Organ Pipes National Park



Organ Pipes NP through the eyes of a day walker

Rod Lambert describes himself as a retired 'Joe Public' who hikes to keep fit. After hiking through about 40 Victorian national parks, he became upset by the state of neglect of so many of them. He decided to start documenting what he saw with photographs and preparing reports for DSE, Parks Victoria and the VNPA. He first came to FOOPs attention when he sent his report on Organ Pipes NP to our convenor Terry Lane. After reading the report, *Organ Pipes: A Hiker's Perspective*, Terry commented that it "brought home...that we do have a problem." He invited Rod to speak about his report to FOOPs at our Annual General Meeting on 19 August 2011.

Rod's presentation was intended (and received) as constructive criticism of the state of the Park, and much of what he had to say was already well known to FOOPs. Many of us were however, surprised to learn that the Park is rated as a high priority by Parks Vic in relation to 'Level of Service' criteria, but that the funding does not match criteria. (continued on page 3).



Guest Speaker Rod Lambert addresses the FOOPs Annual General Meeting at the Jack Lyale Learning Centre on 19 August 2011

Friends of Organ Pipes NP Committee

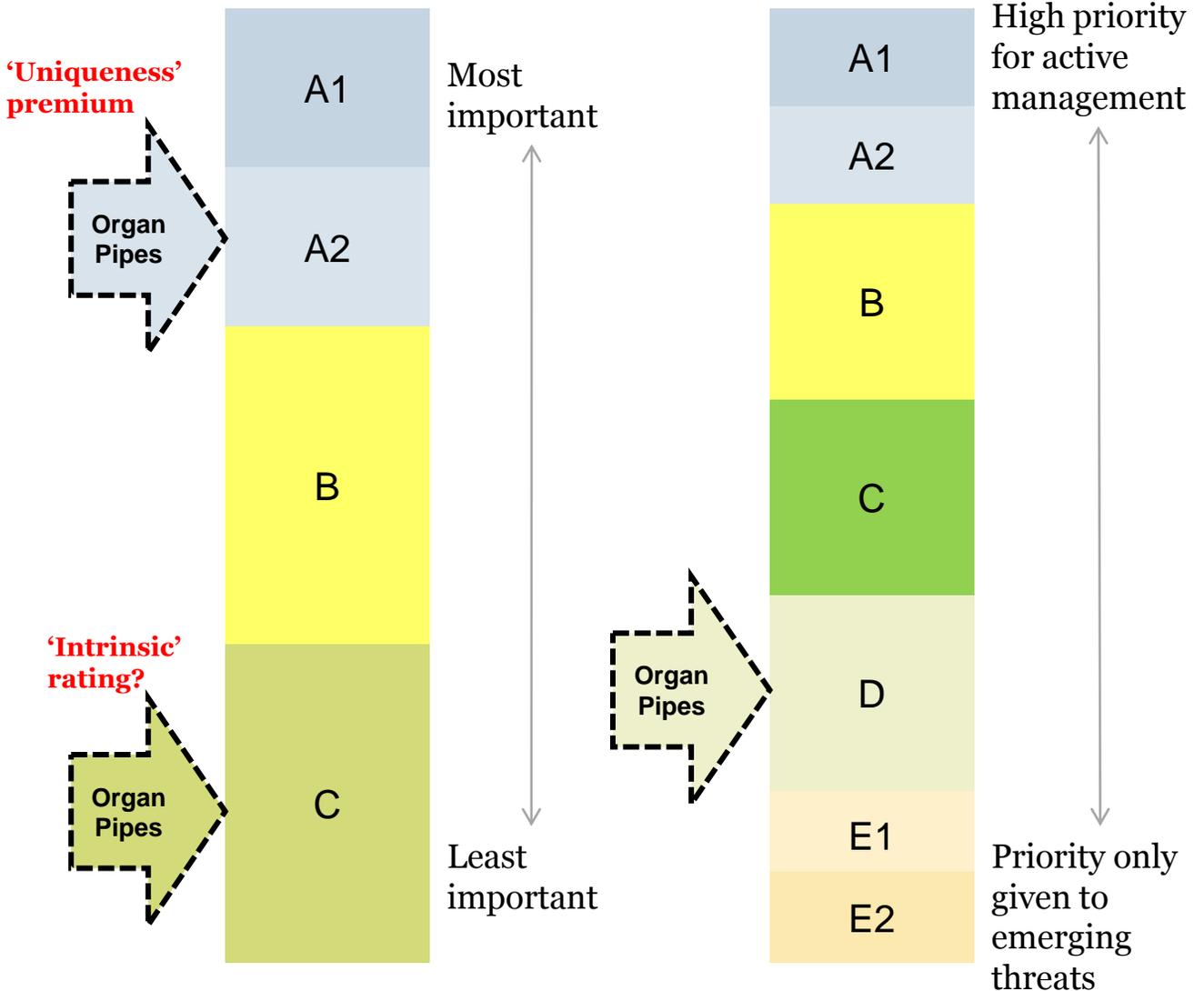
Convenor: Terry Lane
Secretary/Grants Manager: vacant
Treasurer: Robert Irvine
Website: Maelor Himbury
Newsletter: Karen Reid

Park priority (PV perspective)



Levels of Service (visitor services, asset management)

Levels of Protection (biodiversity conservation, management of natural values)



An interesting postscript to this story is that Robert Bender met the new CEO of Parks Victoria (Bill Jackson) at the recent Friends Network Conference and learned that he had not seen a copy of Rod's report. Robert immediately arranged for a CD of the report and Rod's AGM powerpoint presentation to be sent directly to Mr Jackson. Robert has subsequently received an email from Mr Jacksons PA that he has now read the report and was surprised by its contents. Robert does not know what action will be taken, but we are confident that something positive will come of it. We thank Rod Lambert for his efforts on behalf of Victoria's Parks and hope this encourages him to continue the good work.

Organ Pipes Sugar Gliders make some new friends

By Robert Bender

On Tuesday morning, 20 Sept, Terry met up with two Deakin students, Kara Humphrey of Bacchus Marsh and Asha Bannon of Castlemaine, and me, to introduce the young women to the Glider boxes and their problems, and prepare them for taking on a monitoring project.



We inspected about 15 boxes of various vintages and designs. Some were the old rectangular boxes with tube entrances dating from the 1990s, like this one, MF7.



Terry with Kara and Asha

It had a large honeycomb hanging from its lid, and at least two Gliders curled up in a nest below. The plywood lid is quite rotten, barely intact.



Other old boxes had rotten lids, too. This one (photo over page) had come away from the nail holding the lid in place, which I had wedged under the nail to keep it in place.



Two boxes had unoccupied eucalypt leaf nests in them, which had Gliders last time I looked, a few weeks ago, and still seem to hold their shape so may have been used recently. One box had an abandoned nest recently used by a Ringtail – much less skill used in its construction as Ringtails are less fussy than Gliders about architecture.



Abandoned Ringtail nest in lidless Glider box



Two of the new glider boxes I installed last month had large ant nests in them, so were propped open with big sticks to induce the ants to leave. Looks like they will have the same problems as the bat boxes.



Another new box with an even bigger ant nest. The ants all swarmed out onto the exterior surface and the tree, carrying their eggs and young, as soon as the box was opened, and it should have been empty fairly quickly.

One lidless old box had a Brushtail in it, which showed it was prepared to defend its little space to the last drop of blood, extending its claws and baring its teeth in defiance against an animal 35 times its weight.



Courageous (desperate) Brushtail in lidless Glider box



The last box we opened had a stack of what seemed to be four Gliders inside including a fairly young one at lower right.

So a mix of box conditions – all the old plywood fairly rotten so the boxes really needing to be replaced, one of them hanging off its tree at an angle of about 45°. Two boxes were lidless, one with the primitive nest, the other with the Brushtail. Two boxes had families of Gliders and the new boxes are obviously susceptible to ant invasions. All this will make quite a handful for Kara and Asha to manage.

We will be paying for and replacing any boxes they decide should go, but it will be their job to obtain the needed permit, and set up a monitoring program, complete the survey of remaining boxes, assess the population size and notify us of any need to replace boxes.

The sky was very overcast but we had a fairly rain-free two hours after a couple of days of rain.

Working Bee Report , September 24, 2011



By Karen Reid

A slightly chilly spring morning greeted the small group that gathered at the Park for this month's working bee. Rather than planting, Terry suggested that we use the day to do some long overdue maintenance and weed control on Main Flat. With the help of Neil, Maelor, Claude and to a lesser extent, me, Terry loaded the ute with recycled wire tree frames and some tools and we set off.

On our way down the management track we stopped off to look at the Casuarina site. We were surprised to find that some of the saplings have really shot up in the last few months and we were able to remove the tree frames from them. We then put those frames back to work on some of the struggling specimens. In the meantime, Claude and Neil turned their attention to the increasing problem weed, Bridal Creeper. I wasn't aware until today of just how extensive their tuber system was. As Claude remarked, for a straggly little plant above ground it's got a heck of a lot going on under the ground – it's easy to see why it has become such a tenacious weed.



Before - Struggling Casuarina in its tiny cage.



After – plenty of room to grow in its new wire frame.



The massive tuberous root system of the Bridal Creeper

When we got to Main Flat, we were all very heartened by the state of regeneration there. Many of our new Acacias and Goodenias have well and truly outgrown their tree frames and we removed a heap of them. Some of them are also in their first flush of flowering and it's looking very pretty. Neil and I found a young Gold Dust Wattle (*Acacia acinacea*) in flower as well. At first we couldn't figure out where the seed would have come from, but later in the morning Neil spotted a mature specimen on the Flat which was probably planted there decades ago. The Wirildas (*Acacia retinodes* – although Neil thinks it may have had a name change recently) had not only put on an amazing growth spurt, but were also bursting into flower. We were also surprised to find an expanse of Cotton Fireweed (*Senecio quadridentatus*). My *Flora of Melbourne* informs me that this species is able to withstand very dry conditions by dying back to its woody rootstock only to re-emerge after rain. The *Senna artemisioides* (Desert Cassia) is also in full bloom. It certainly lifted our spirits to see Main Flat responding so beautifully to the milder weather and rainfall.

But it's not all fun and games. Claude didn't have to try too hard to fill a large plastic bag with Bridal Creeper. He's not convinced that simply digging them out is going to have much effect – not unless we have someone working on it full time anyway! Neil reminded me about our past attempts at biological control. We tried releasing a fungal control a few years ago at Burns Paddock, and a leaf hopper was tried somewhere on the other side of the creek. Unfortunately neither was successful. According to Neil the organisms simply didn't cope with the hot dry weather experienced during the noughties. One wonders whether we should try again now that the climate is into a different cycle.



Left: Terry gets ready to unload the ute on Main Flat.

Below: Claude and Neil survey the flowering Wirildas and the emerging Cotton Fireweed



Left: Gold Dust Wattle. Above: Wirilda.



Left: Maelor liberates a healthy Goodenia from its straight-jacket



Above: Rocky outcrop on other side of valley from main vehicle track covered with daisies (*Rhodanthe anthemoides*?)

Left: Dessert Cassia in full bloom

Around lunch time we called it quits, all well satisfied with a good morning's work.

If you haven't been to the Park for a while, now would be a good time – it's looking very good.