

SILVERLEAVES CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION INC.

Reg.no 0015325J

NEWSLETTER

June 2021



SCA PRESIDENT REPORT

AGM March 2021 Report

As I write, Melbourne is again in lockdown and travel is uncertain. Being confined heightens the focus on the natural world. I have been inspired by global conservationist David Attenborough who in his recent book *A Life on Our Planet: My Witness Statement and a Vision for the Future* talks about the importance of bringing back the wild places to the world. We are fortunate that in the corner of the world that is Silverleaves on Phillip Island wildlife habitat still remains and with it, some wild spaces and significant indigenous vegetation.

Yet our untouched corner is under attack each time we see an application for a development or demolition in the area.

AGM March 2021 – thank you Jarvis Weston!

Environmental protection was a key theme at the SCA AGM held in the Silverleaves Reserve in March. We were delighted to elect new members to the Committee and to thank retiring Correspondence Secretary Jarvis Weston for his tireless efforts of the past decade. Though he moves onto to new pursuits, thankfully, Jarvis will continue to help us at working bees and share his outstanding knowledge of the local shorebirds and vegetation. The SCA owes him an enormous debt and thanks him for his vision and commitment.

Loss of Natural Assets – Banksia Focus

The indigenous under storey, shrubs and trees, swamp ground covers and native grasses of Silverleaves are being chipped away and removed piece by piece. It is very disturbing to see how many banksias have been lost in the last decade. The *Banksia Integrifolia* is vital to the flora and fauna of the area. The nectar they produce from the flowers are an important source of food for animals, including a wide range of insects and many species of bird including the New Holland Honeyeater and wattlebirds.

We want to protect and maintain as much of the 'wild' in Silverleaves as we can. That includes not just the possums, lizards, snakes, echidnas, and wallabies that live here but equally the insects, butterflies, birds, including shorebirds, and microbats. That is why we are working hard to strengthen protections for the vegetation and landscape that is their home through lobbying Bass Coast Shire Council and battling for ongoing strategies to fight against inappropriate development and protect the unique Rhyll Inlet wetlands, to weed and to plant native plants and to monitor and protect shorebirds including the endangered Hooded Plover.

Clearing vegetation for new houses.

Of concern recently was a block in Bruce Road which was the subject of a number of objections. After four reviews a house development was given the green light several months ago. Many concerns had been raised about the vegetation removal on this site and the problem with the development given its location in the Rhyll Inlet. We understood the plans included retention of a number of shrubs and trees. I and other objectors did not accept the arborist's report claiming some mature trees were okay to be removed. We requested to view the associated landscape plan we understood was required from the owners. Last time we enquired it was not available. I have had many emails and calls from local residents who, like me, have seen the clearing on this site and are very concerned about it.

SCA has been fighting for many years to protect the vegetation of this fragile environment at Silverleaves, abutting as it does an internationally recognized Ramsar site and experiencing the effects of climate change and the human footprint.

I reiterate the point that Silverleaves is situated on the Rhyll Inlet which is a Ramsar Wetland. It has recently been declared a distinctive area and landscape (DAL) under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, to better protect its unique cultural, environmental, social, and economic values - and to guide the growth and development of local communities.

We are hopeful that the Distinctive Areas Landscape strategy will support strengthening of vegetation protections – in particular, vegetation destruction where the so-called '10-30 Rule' is invoked. In addition, we want to lock in our town boundaries under State Legislation.

In addition, we note that migratory birds who travel to the Rhyll Inlet are protected under the Australian Government's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. Silverleaves is a part of the Rhyll Inlet wetland and the Western Port Biosphere and should therefore be given special protection.

For these reasons, we are launching a 'Protect our Banksias/Plant a Banksia campaign for the coming year. We ask everyone to join by monitoring and planting.

More to come on this theme and suggested actions.

M.A. Johnston - SCA President

PLANT STALL

Sunday 13 June 10.00am - 2.00pm at the Silverleaves Store

Plants indigenous to Silverleaves will be available. Prices range from \$2.00 to \$10.00.

Information about suitable plants for Silverleaves, advice on how to remove weeds and find alternative native plants, and tips for successful planting will be available. Do drop in and have a chat and meet other SCA members.

WORKING BEE IN THE SILVERLEAVES RESERVE

In March, a small group of dedicated SCA members documented the weeds in the Silverleaves Reserve and notified Bass Coast Shire. As a result, a work team from the Shire removed a large infestation of Cape Ivy and sprayed Kikuyu grass around the small wetland area which was greatly appreciated and our thanks to the Department of Buildings and Open Space for their assistance.

SCA COMMITTEE MEETINGS 2021

- **Saturday 12 June at 3.00pm**
Koala Conservation Centre meeting room
- **Saturday 18 September at 3.00pm**
Koala Conservation Centre meeting room
- **Sunday 21 November at 11.00am**
Silverleaves Reserve

PLANT STALL 2021

- **Sunday 13 June 10 am – 2 pm**
Silverleaves Store

SCA WORKING BEES

- **Saturday 12 June at 10am**
Weeding/planting along foreshore. Meet at Silverleaves Reserve
- **Saturday 10 July at 10am**
Weeding/planting along foreshore. Meet at Silverleaves Store
- **Saturday 15 August at 10am**
Tidy up of Silverleaves Reserve. Meet at Silverleaves Reserve

AGL GAS TERMINAL REJECTED

The good news is the AGL proposal for a 300-metre-long floating gas terminal off Crib Point in Western Port Bay has been rejected by the Victorian Government as it would have had unacceptable environmental effects in Western Port. The plant would have been adjacent to an internationally recognised RAMSAR wetland and 12 kilometres from the closest marine park.

AGL's gas plan involved dumping millions of litres of toxic chlorinated water back into the sea each day. Dozens of 300-metre-long ships would pass through the narrow entry to the Bay every year. Burning the gas AGL wanted to import would have caused over 8 million tonnes of climate pollution every year – locking us into decades of gas instead of helping accelerate Victoria's clean energy transition.

AUTUMN FUNGI SEASON

Autumn has been fungal season and the perfect time to wonder at mycological magic. Their growing parts are incredibly fine threads in the soil, and it is only around autumn, when it rains, that the fruiting bodies appear.

But these are just the tip of the fungal iceberg. Below the surface are threads weaving through the soil, breaking down leaf litter and other organic material and actively assisting plants to take up nutrients. Without fungi, most trees and other plants could not survive.

TREE MULCH

Organic tree mulch provides year-round benefits to your garden, offering protection and nourishment to a wide variety of plant species. It keeps the soil moist enabling plants to keep growing and conserving water, and it protects the roots from extremes of heat, cold and heavy rain.

It provides a steady stream of nutrients, particularly nitrogen and as the mulch breaks down, it improves the soil structure and worms, and fungi proliferate. As well, it creates habitat for bugs which attract birds and lizards and other foragers.

To achieve the full benefits, mulch needs to be around 7 cm deep. This depth stifles weed growth but is not overbearing to the plants. Mulch is great for trees but piling mulch too high and covering a tree's trunk, also known as "volcano mulching," can cause decay.

PLANT SUGGESTION FOR YOUR GARDEN



Image Source: <https://vicflora.rbg.vic.gov.au>

Coastal Saltbush (*Atriplex cinerea*)

This small shrub is a hardy shrub for coastal gardens, and you will see it growing along the foreshore. It has lovely silver-grey leaves and interesting flowers. The shrub grows to 1-2 metres high and spreads to 2-3 metres wide. The shrub is useful for stabilising the foreshore and providing protection for birds and other wildlife. Coastal saltbush has both male and female plants. The male flowers are pinkish purple and growing in a group at the end of the stems, whereas the female flowers are a creamy colour growing in clusters along the stem.

HOODED PLOVERS

A total of 11 Hooded Plover chicks fledged in the 2020-21 breeding season on the island, but sadly many others were lost due to nests being disturbed, or dogs and other predators. The community plays an important part in their ongoing survival with simple acts like putting dogs on a leash and keeping clear of fenced off nest areas on the beach.

WEED OF THE MONTH



Image source; <https://wikipedia.org>

Forget-me-not (*Myosotis sylvatica*)

This small plant is increasing in numbers around Silverleaves, and it has the potential to become a real problem to the environment because it spreads so easily. The species was given the second highest risk rating for environmental weeds in Victoria. You may be familiar with it when you walk through a patch, because of its sticky seeds, which are exceedingly difficult to get out of your clothing. It is for this reason it is readily dispersed from gardens into the bush by animals (and people). Plants are easy to remove by hand but will re-appear if there are seeds in the soil.

Be vigilant and if you find any Forget-me-nots in your garden pull them out or if you see them in the foreshore or anywhere at Silverleaves please contact the SCA and tell them the location. silverleavesconservation@outlook.com

MASKED LAPWING



Image Source; Masked Lapwing - eBird

Have you noticed an increase in numbers of the Masked Lapwing, particularly around road verges and open grass lands near the Rhyll Inlet? Sometimes referred to as the Spur-winged Plover because each of its wings is armed with a yellow spur at the 'elbow' (or carpal joint) — Indigenous people used to say that the birds were carrying yellow spears. The birds have a range of beautiful calls which carry across some distance.

BANDICOOTS NUMBERS INCREASING



Image source; Eastern barred bandicoot - Wikipedia

Keep an eye open for the Eastern Barred Bandicoot. In 1989 the Eastern Barred Bandicoot became extinct in the wild due to fox predation and the loss of habitat. In October 2017, conservation workers released 67 Eastern Barred Bandicoots at Churchill Island and Summerland Peninsula and the population has now grown to over 300 and they are thriving. It is hoped they will eventually find their way to Rhyll Inlet and Silverleaves, the perfect habitat for them. They will be a welcome resident here after near extinction, a success story to celebrate.

The Bandicoots grow to about 40 centimetres in length and weigh about 800 grams. They live a solitary, secretive life foraging in open grasslands at night and resting in a shallow nest during the day. They are difficult to spot, and the only sign of their presence is their small foraging digs. They feed on invertebrates in the soil, such as beetle larvae and worms.

Phillip Island Nature Parks are asking you to report any bandicoot sightings (alive or dead) at www.penguins.org.au/bandicoots, helping researchers to monitor and care for this endangered species.

FORESHORE ENCROACHMENT

Foreshore along Cowes West and Ventnor, where private homes have encroached onto foreshore public land, will be planted with 10,000 indigenous trees and plants by Bass Coast Shire. This is part of a program to clamp down on foreshore property owners furtively extending their front yards into the foreshore including, clearing vegetation, and extending lawns, stairs and sheds. Our foreshore is prone to the effects of erosion, storm fronts and the effects of climate change. Foreshore vegetation is vital in protecting these areas to these ongoing threats as well as providing habitat for native animals and birds.

Bass Coast Shire's Foreshore Encroachment Officer can be contacted on 1300 226 278 or email basscoast@basscoast.vic.gov.au

WHALE SEASON BEGINS

May to October is the time when Humpback and Southern Right Whales migrate from Antarctica along the Victorian coastline up north to warmer waters off Queensland for calving, before returning south to Antarctica in Spring. They have occasionally been seen off our very own Silverleaves beach over the years and are an amazing sight.

SCA MEMBERSHIP FOR 2021

Your annual subscriptions make a vital contribution to the conservation activities of our organisation. We encourage you to renew or join and support the preservation of our beautiful area, its wildlife, and vegetation by joining the SCA.

Complete a membership form with your cheque and send to: The Secretary Silverleaves Conservation Association Inc
P.O. Box 9037 Cowes, VIC 3922

Or make a direct deposit online:

Bendigo Bank

BSB 633 000 Account 132 984 592.

Please include your name on your transfer for our records, otherwise we cannot identify payments made.

To request a membership form, or to let us know your email address, or if you have a query about your membership contact the SCA Secretary. silverleavesconservation@outlook.com

THE SCA NEEDS YOUR HELP

Apologies to those who tried renewing their membership last year through our website. We are looking for assistance maintaining and updating with our website, Facebook page and membership database. If you have any of these skills, we would love to hear from you. Please contact the SCA if you can help. silverleavesconservation@outlook.com