



# Friends of Pallisters Reserve Inc.

Pallisters Reserve is a 254 ha wetland reserve at 457 Masons Road, Orford, owned by Trust for Nature, and managed by the Friends of Pallisters Reserve Inc. Established January 1990

Nov.  
2023



## Next meeting: Sunday, November 26, 2023

10am: Working Bee

noon: Lunch

1:00pm: Meeting

### November Meeting Objectives

- Koala count.  
– *Bring binoculars.*
- Install bookcase cabinet donated by Anthony Leddin.
- Clean up fallen tree and re-align path.  
– *Bring chain-saws.*

Annual pre-Christmas barbecue.  
Bring meat or food to grill, drinks,  
and something to share.

Tea and coffee provided.



**Feather-Horned Beetle (Budj Bim)**  
Wendy Black



### **Popoto – Milkmaids** (Burchardia Umbellata)

Widely-distributed over much of Victoria, Koori exploit the tuberous roots of Popoto as bush tucker.

Long-time printmaker and Friend of Pallisters, Wendy Black's screenprint of the feather-horned beetle was selected as a final contender for the 2023 WAMA Environmental Art Prize. An exhibition of selected submissions concluded recently at Ararat's TAMA Gallery. The contest is biennial.

Currently being established at the edge of Grampians National Park, WAMA explores the interconnection between art, science and nature and aspires to be Australia's National Centre for environmental art. The site spans 16 hectares of woodlands, wetlands and botanic gardens,

For further information about WAMA see <https://wama.net.au>.

*Nick Glover's photograph of a Feather-horned beetle at Pallisters appeared in the March 2023 newsletter.*

Pallisters Reserve lies in the traditional country of the Gunditjmarra and Eastern Maar peoples, who never ceded their sovereignty of the land. We are indebted for their past and ongoing custodianship.

Meetings are held at the Reserve; usually every fourth Sunday except July and December.

Co-leaders: Julia Schlapp 0427 778 265 & Anthony Leddin 0408 333 046 Sec./Treasurer: Trevor Kennedy 5565 8692;

Minute Sec.: Nick Glover; Newsletter Editor: Ross Hicks ([pallisters\\_newsletter@proton.me](mailto:pallisters_newsletter@proton.me)).

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## Increasing grassland biodiversity – Presentation by David Brennan

During the October 2023 Pallisters Open Day we were pleased to welcome David Brennan, Natural Assets Project Officer of Wannon Water. David presented results from a decade-long study made on grasslands surrounding Wannon Water's Sewage Treatment Plant at Dunkeld. The research site covers 27.5 hectares of Plains Grassy Woodland, a rare and endangered habitat in the Victorian Volcanic Plains Bioregion, and home to important native species like Plump Swamp Wallaby-grass, Growling Grass Frog, Striped Legless Lizard, Button Wrinklewort, and Hoary Sunray. However, as with other Victorian sites – including Pallisters Reserve – the native system is compromised by the presence of exotic pasture grasses.

In 2012 Wannon Water commissioned the Glenelg–Hopkins–Dunkeld group to develop a 10 year management plan aimed at improving the biodiversity values at the Dunkeld Grassland. Low-temperature periodic burns were identified as a promising means for achieving this outcome, the hypothesis being that having evolved with recurrent fires, native flora would ultimately out-compete non-native plants, which may be less fire-resilient.

Some sections of the Dunkeld grasslands were burnt annually, other sections on a 2-year cycle. In addition to the controlled burns – conducted by the Dunkeld CFA – other measures were also investigated, including pest controls and sowing native flora seeds.

Detailed plant surveys were conducted annually by scientists from La Trobe University and the results have recently been reported in the thesis of a graduate student, Matilda Alvarez.

These results provide some evidence that the less frequent – biennial – burns increase in the number of native plants – though not necessarily the variety of native plants – while more frequent – annual – burns favoured non-native plants. Disappointingly however, the differences are not large: for the Dunkeld situation the effects of the periodic burns on the native and exotic vegetations are qualitatively similar.

Ms Alvarez suggests that any future burns might be more effective if they were smaller and more focused. Perhaps protecting existing natural features, such as old red gum trees and endangered species, would, in the end, be more successful at restoring the site biodiversity.

The Dunkeld investigations are relevant to the former sheep- and cattle-grazing portions of Pallisters Reserve. It should not necessarily be assumed that a program of periodic low-temperature burns at Pallisters would show long-term effects identical to the Dunkeld experiences: subtle environmental and

climate differences may come into play. Nevertheless, pursued in the hope of increasing the biodiversity, a long-term program of scheduled cold burns at Pallisters would require long-term commitment and much effort. And the Dunkeld results are not encouraging.

Of course, there remains another strong reason for conducting scheduled controlled burns at Pallisters. By some measures, the Reserve is overgrown and the effect of a high-temperature bushfire could be devastating. Reducing the bushfire fuel load is a proven means of reducing this impact.

In addition to Wannon Water's work at Dunkeld, David also described his restoration efforts at two other Wannon Water sites, both threatened by invasive – *native* – pest plants: Coastal Wattle and bracken. Rather than pressing a large-scale assault, David has opted for what he describes as a “mosaic” approach for rehabilitating these sites: he identifies small pockets rich in native species and pest plants in these confined areas are eliminated directly by mechanical means, blow-torch, and spot application of herbicides. Over a period of time the small native floristic communities expand, and with perseverance, should eventually merge.

We are indebted to Wannon Water and David Brennan for this presentation. Unfortunately, due to the stormy weather on the day, attendance was limited. But those present benefitted immensely. The Dunkeld grasslands have much in common with the former grazing portions of Pallisters Reserve, so David's well-formed presentation strongly connected to our evolving Reserve Management Plan. In particular, his “mosaic” technique seems well-suited to our capabilities and manpower resources.



**Banksia marginata**  
at Pallisters.  
(Photo: Nick Glover)

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## Bird Observations

Mainly due to bad weather during the survey, there was a 50% drop off in the number of bird species Peter Bolte observed in October. This month – November – there has been a return to a more typical number of species, 34, including species seen off-site.

White-naped and Yellow Honeyeaters were seen at the most sites, 4 out of 5. Peter's Site 3 along the western boundary of the Pallister bush block had by far the most species – 16. This follows a trend with this area having the most species in most months for the past year.

Species seen by Peter at Pallisters during his November count are:

Superb Fairy Wren	Brown Thornbill
Grey Fantail	Olive-backed Oriole
Golden Whistler	Rufous Whistler
Grey Shrike-thrush	White-throated Tree-creeper
Striated Pardalote	White-eared Honeyeater
White-naped Honeyeater	Yellow Honeyeater
Red Wattle Bird	Australian Magpie
Grey Currawong	Starling
Crimson Rosella	Eastern Rosella
Galah	Long-billed Corella
Red-rumped Parrot	Gang-gang Cockatoo
Fan-tailed Cockatoo	Sacred Kingfisher
Pied Cormorant	Sacred (white) Ibis
White-faced Heron	White-necked Heron
Black Duck	



day), Magpies (16, usually in the morning), Grey Currawongs (7), and a number of less frequent visitors – Red-browed Finches (4, including the first appearance this spring from this nomadic species), White-naped Honeyeater (2), Crimson Rosella (2), Red Wattlebird (2), Grey Fantails (2), a probable Striated Field-wren (2), a Buff-banded Rail (2, not seen before at the water tanker), and a number of single visitors: a Grey Shrike-thrush, a female Golden Whistler(?) and a Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo (also a first visit).

The remotely recorded photos of the candidate cuckoo and rail are shown. Image quality is compromised by the necessity of cropping from a large-field of view. Nevertheless, let Trevor Kennedy know how you feel about his tentative identifications.

A semi-permanent observation site has been set up with a water tank that drips into a blue saucer. This arrangement acts as a year-round water source for our mammals, birds and reptiles, whose visits are remotely recorded using a trail camera. Located along the northern boundary of the Pallister bush block near the Brolga Swamp, it is situated adjacent to Peter Bolte's most prolific birding transect Site 3, begging the question of whether access to water has increased the bird numbers Peter sees in his area.

In October the water tank had 4 visits by reptiles – 3 by Blotched Blue Tongues and 1 by a Tiger Snake, resident for the past 2 months.

Swamp Wallabies were the most frequent mammals, visiting 12 times usually in the early morning. There were also Red-necked Wallabies (7), Eastern Grey Kangaroos (1), Echidnas (2) and a single Koala visit.

Fifteen bird species visited. Most common by far were the blue wrens with 61 visits, followed by White-browed Scrub-wrens (27), New Holland Honeyeaters (28), Little Ravens (17, throughout the