

2014 Annual Report



**Christmas Hills
Landcare Group**

Christmas Hills is the place we care for

Christmas Hills is rich in environmental values – part of a major wildlife corridor linking Kinglake National Park and Warrandyte State Park, home to many threatened plants and animals, and Watsons Creek is one of the best condition tributaries of the Yarra River

The Christmas Hills Landcare Group in its current form has existed since 2006

The group boundary encompasses an area of 2550 hectares comprised of 248 land parcels, but with probably no more than 180 land owners

Christmas Hills is traditional country of the Wurundjeri people

Melbourne Water owns 56 land parcels (blue) within the Christmas Hills Landcare Group area – some are licensed, the rest are managed for conservation

The Christmas Hills Landcare Group

The Christmas Hills Landcare Group in its current form came into being following a community gathering in October 2005 designed to assess the level of interest in forming a group.

The level of interest was good and at the first CHLG event in March 2006, a number of people put their hand up to help run the group. Other than a Treasurer, specific 'office bearer' roles were not defined and an informal committee of Rob Shackleton (Treasurer), Mark Gardner, Wayne O'Donovan, Margo Heeley, Phil Styles, Bridget Bainbridge and Doug Evans was formed.

Probably as a consequence of the informality of this committee, they rarely met, yet over time the Landcare group continued to grow in profile and membership, projects became increasingly ambitious in scale and complexity, and multiple projects were on the go at once.

In December 2010 the group held its first official AGM to elect a management committee for the group, with Doug Evans, Rob Shackleton, Nicole Noy, Ross Coupar, Mark Gardner, Kylie Moppert and Tina Keene duly elected onto the inaugural committee for 2011.

Each year the CHLG seeks to deliver a series of events and projects that aim to engage landholders in Christmas Hills, connect them to our local natural environmental values, develop their understanding and skills to manage these values, remove obstacles to action, and connect them to each other socially.

Through partnerships of various types the CHLG is also developing its relationships with other Landcare groups, the shire and other agencies to extend its influence and leverage.

We do all this to help Christmas Hills landholders protect and enhance the rich diversity of natural environmental values we are custodians of here in Christmas Hills.





Strategic pathways

To fulfil our mission effectively we need to:

1. Understand what our environmental assets are, why we value them, what threatens them, and what needs to be done where to protect and sustain them. How?

- Access existing information on environmental assets of Christmas Hills
- Access existing expertise on environmental assets of Christmas Hills
- Conduct community-based research to fill information gaps as required
- Document in a map-based plan

2. Engage all the landholders that have a role to play in protecting and sustaining these assets. How?

- Build the profile, respect and trust of the group in the community
- Regular promotion and communications with clear and consistent messages
- Recruit new and retain existing members
- Establish and strengthen personal connections through social activities
- Be inclusive - hold events that appeal to members and non-members alike

3. Help each landholder understand what needs to be done and work out how they can integrate this with their own aspirations for their property. How?

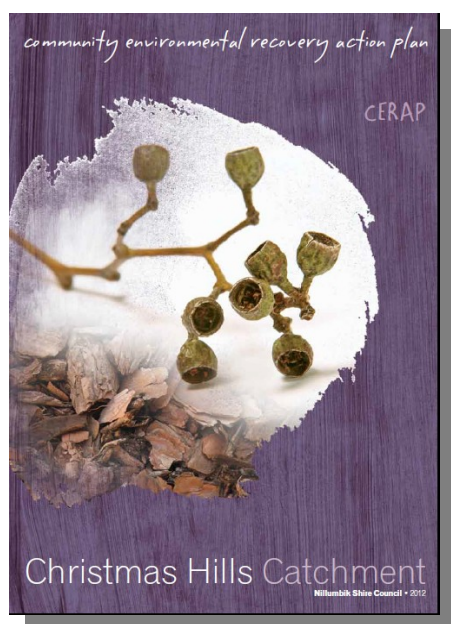
- Communicate the map-based plan of Christmas Hills environmental assets, threats and required action to landholders
- Translate and interpret the group's objectives and action priorities from the plan to property scale

4. Coordinate and support landholders to take action on their property. How?

- Develop landholder knowledge and skills through guest speakers, demonstrations, training, etc.
- Develop and deliver projects to remove obstacles that prevent landholders taking action (such as insufficient time, skills, funds, etc.)

5. Integrate our efforts, and collaborate with others who have a shared interest in the environmental assets of Christmas Hills. How?

- Communicate the map-based plan of Christmas Hills environmental assets, threats and required action to potential partners (eg Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, Nillumbik Shire, Yarra Ranges Shire, Wurundjeri, university researchers, prospective sponsors)
- Establish mutually beneficial partnerships with those that can help us



The Christmas Hills Community Environmental Action Plan consolidates information on the environmental assets of Christmas Hills and also guides landholder action in a map-based format.



Caring for injured wildlife (and AGM)

The first event for 2014 was held at Chris and Tina's in February and following recent tradition included the AGM.

First up we heard from Jackie Brown, President of the Australian Wildlife Assistance Rescue and Education Inc. (AWARE), a not-for-profit, volunteer wildlife rescue and rehabilitation group that operates out of Frankston.

We learnt the steps AWARE volunteers take from receiving a call, through rescue, rehabilitation and finally release, as well as what each of us can do in the event that we find a wild animal in need. A number of people purchased a Wildlife Rescue Bag that includes basic animal first aid materials, artificial pouches for orphaned animals, and an information booklet.

We then moved onto the AGM which started with a reflection on the 2013 year, ably assisted by copies of the 2013 Annual Report. Members were asked to share their Landcare highlights of 2013 and what they would like to see changed. This was followed by our annual group 'health check', discussion on a draft program of events for 2014, and the election of the management committee for 2014. Finally we got to sample the culinary fare provided by the 2013 committee.



Helping neighbours with weed control

With weeds considered by the group as one of the major threats to the natural environmental values of Christmas Hills, helping our neighbours in a practical way to manage weeds on their property through weeding working bees has become a regular feature on our annual calendar of events.

These events help members to recognise key weed species, and learn how to treat them, often using tools from the Christmas Hills Tool Trailer. This approach, in conjunction with the woody weed control project, aims to build the capacity of landholders to be able to better manage weeds on their own properties.

Two events on the 2014 program saw us weeding on the properties of two of our members.

In July, 9 people helped Sally Corrigan tackle Burgan and Spanish Heath on an otherwise high quality grassy woodland area on her property in Scholz Road.

In August, 4 people helped Tom Browning tackle weeds such as Sweet Pittosporum, Sallow Wattle and other species, particularly those threatening the population of Round-leaf Pomaderris, on his property in Muir Road.



Firescape workshop 1

Firescape, a pilot program developed by the CFA and based on the NSW Hotspots program, is designed to assist private landholders consider the use of fire in management of their property. CHLG saw this program as an ideal opportunity to build knowledge and skills in ecological burning, and to develop a program of planned ecological burns for the Christmas Hills landscape.

The Firescape program involves three key elements - two community workshops and a demonstration burn. With the Christmas Hills Fire Brigade (CHFB) a key partner in the local rollout of the program, and interest from the Bend of Islands community, the focal area of the program encompassed the whole brigade area, bringing together Christmas Hills and the Bend of Islands in the planning and delivery.

The first workshop was held on the 18th May at the Christmas Hills Hall, and attracted a crowd of about 40 people. This workshop covered fire ecology and behaviour, risk management and local assets and issues.

We heard from the Firescape program (Mike McStephens), a fire ecologist (Kate Bennetts), Parks Victoria (Dave van Bockel), Melbourne Water (Justin Jemmeson and Tony Scherl), CFA (Ron Cole), as well as the Bend of Islands community (Gavin Masters and Kay Hawkins), CHLG (Doug Evans), and CHFB (Di Simmons).

Attending local landholders were then invited to nominate their property to be assessed for potential inclusion in a long-term burn program for our local area. 13 candidate properties were nominated.



Dave van Bockel (far left) and Ron Cole (far right) lead participants through the use of DSE's 'Overall Fuel Hazard Assessment Guide'

Firescape workshop 2

After the first Firescape workshop Ron Cole (CFA), Dave van Bockel (PV) and Justin Jemmeson (MW) were involved in inspections of the nominated candidate properties.

Consideration was given to:

- Vegetation types
- Time since last burnt
- Tolerable Fire Intervals (TFIs) for the different vegetation types
- Landholder objectives
- Potential for joint burn with adjoining public land (MW and PV)
- Fuel loads, slope and access
- Suitability for the demonstration burn

Properties with Grassy Dry Forest that haven't been burnt since 1962 emerged as high priority (above the maximum TFI for this vegetation type)

Two properties were identified as potentially suitable for the demonstration burn, with Doug and Pip's place in Dean Road eventually selected by the planning committee. As a result, the second workshop was held at Doug and Pip's place on the 26th October, with 19 people attending.

After recapping what was covered in the first workshop, and the selection process for the demonstration burn site, this workshop focussed on what is involved in preparing and undertaking a planned ecological burn.

Participants were taken to the proposed burn site where they heard about the ecological objectives of the landholders, as well as their concerns, and then were stepped through the process for planning a safely conducted burn for this site. This site will host a demonstration burn in autumn 2015.



Practical orchid management

Karen Lester, Senior Biodiversity Officer with the Department of Environment and Primary Industries, was our guest presenter at an event in October designed to help Christmas Hills landholders manage native orchids that may occur on their properties.

Ten people attended this event at Gad and Kylie's place and benefited from Karen's ten years of experience working on DEPI's rare and threatened orchid program. We learnt about the use of cages and fences to protect orchids from larger herbivores, and some of the associated issues such as dealing with weed growth and smaller invertebrate pests.

Karen also showed us some of the equipment, often makeshift, used to protect and monitor orchid populations, as well as collect seed (using tea bags for example!).

Following the talk and demonstration, and ably assisted by the expertise of Dean Rouse and Helen Richards (new member who is also a long-term member of the Australasian Native Orchid Society) who were also there, we went on a brief walk around this and an adjacent property, observing no less than 15 species of orchid.



**Karen Lester (DEPI)
demonstrates a variety
of orchid cages and
monitoring equipment**

Vipers, videos and venison

30 people gathered at Mark Gardner and Kylie Moppert's place in December to learn about some of the snakes and lizards that can be found in Christmas Hills.

Michael Alexander of Black Snake Productions provided a display of live snakes and lizards (as well as spiders, a centipede, a turtle, a Tawny Frogmouth and a Barn Owl) to accompany his talk on the habits, ecology and conservation needs of some of our local reptiles.

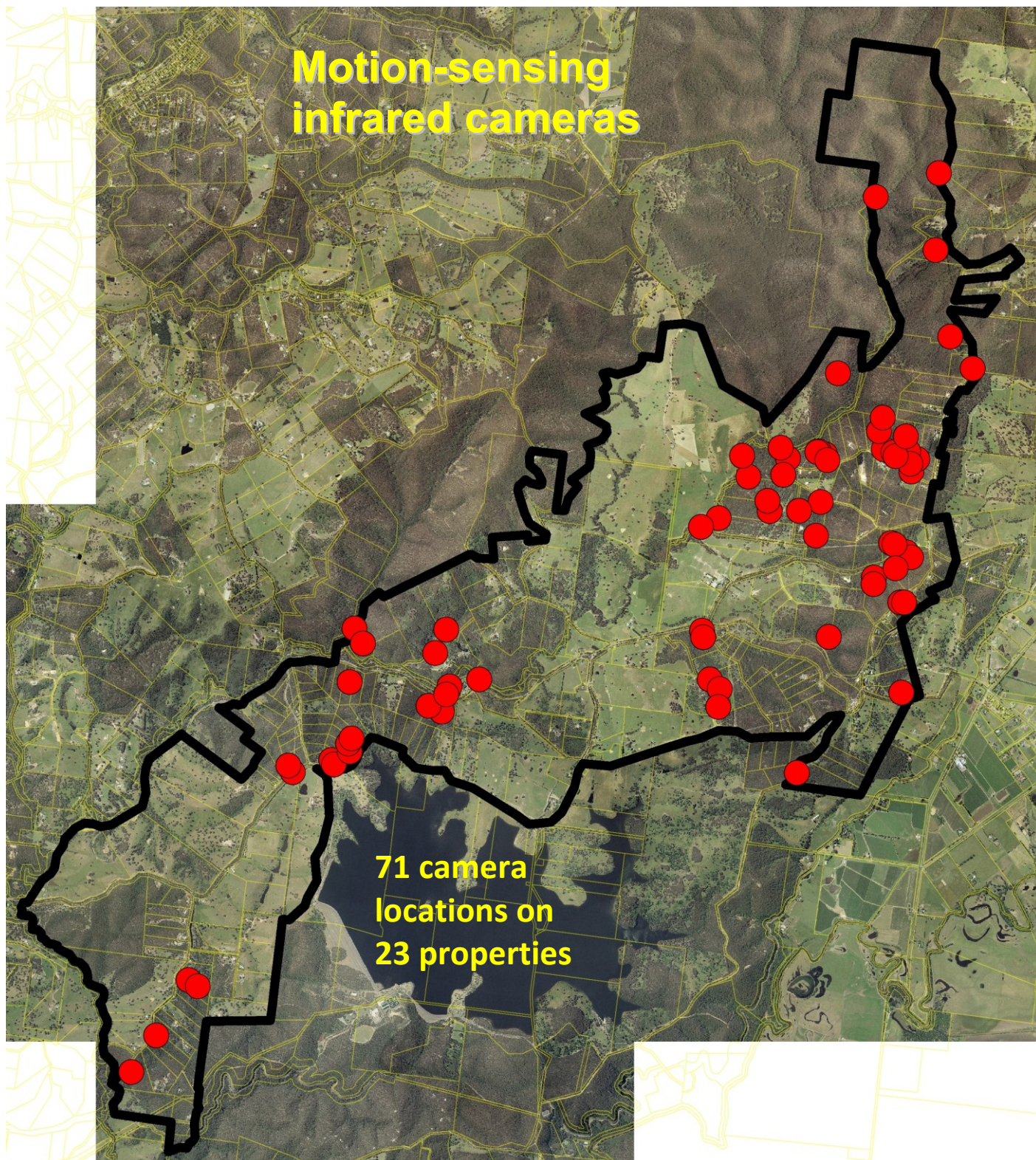
The presence of live snakes and lizards proved to have plenty of appeal to the younger people of Christmas Hills, who made up 12 of the 30 attending.

Doug followed this up with a selection of short videos that summarised what the CHLG motion-sensing cameras had captured on private properties during 2014, which proved to be a bumper year with 42 different fauna species captured (18 mammals, 21 birds, 2 reptiles, 1 amphibian)

The event was then topped off with a fine feed of spit-roasted pork (alas the hoped-for supply of a local deer did not eventuate) accompanied by a selection of salads and sides brought by those in attendance.



Tayla and Jordan Keene share a 'ssssspecial' bond



Community fauna monitoring

At the centre of the Christmas Hills Landcare Group's Community Fauna Monitoring program is the set of 20 motion-sensing infrared trail cameras we own. These, along with scent lures to attract fauna, are provided to participating landholders to help them find out more about the fauna that occurs on their properties.

In 2014 their use by landholders was locally coordinated by Nev Ragg, Kevin Heeley, Kay Armstrong, Sally Corrigan, Nicole Noy and Doug Evans, with cameras used on 23 different properties in 71 different locations. This included partnering with the Nillumbik Conservation Corridors project to set up some of their cameras on Melbourne Water-owned properties in Christmas Hills in January.

All up the cameras detected 42 different fauna species - 18 mammals (11 native), 21 birds (20 native), 2 reptiles and 1 amphibian.

A number of species were captured on camera for the first time, most notably the Common Dunnart (*Sminthopsis murina*), but also 7 bird species including the Bassian Thrush. The Brush-tailed Phascogale and Agile Antechinus were both captured in 20 different locations - equal fourth for all species in terms of most locations where captured - a heartening indication of the health of their local populations.

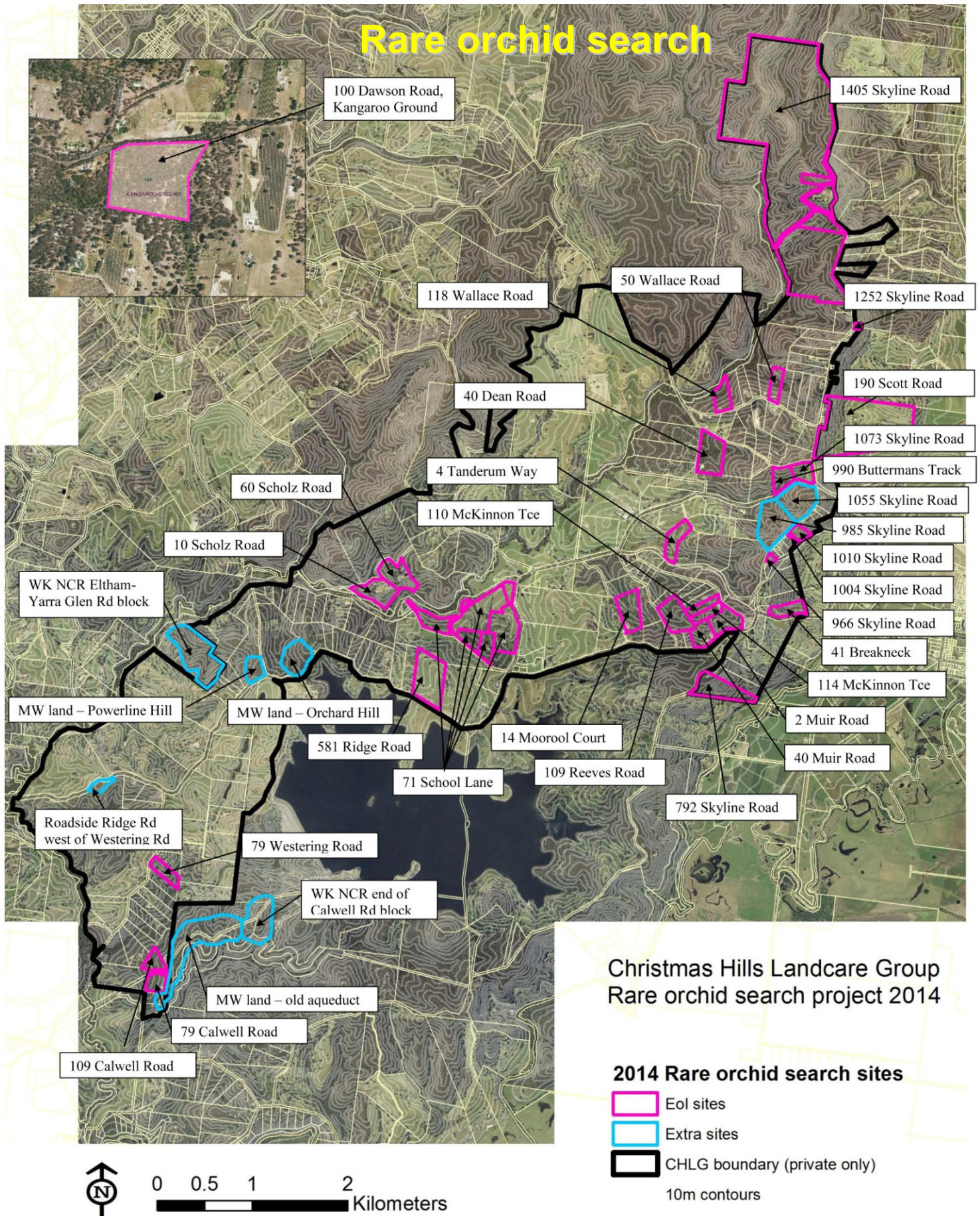
Kay Armstrong continued to coordinate the use by landholders of a megaphone geared to play the calls of six owl species, to see what response they can get – either a return call or attracting an owl close enough to identify it. In 2014 five landholders used the equipment and detected the presence of Barn and Southern Boobook Owls, and possibly a Masked Owl (an owl was attracted by the call of this species, but a good look was not possible to confirm).

Peter Homan from RMIT spent a day in April assisting Mark (Gad) Gardner with an inspection of several dunnart nest boxes and pavers. 18 boxes/pavers were checked with 2 frog species and the scats of a small marsupial (antechinus or dunnart) found.

The following grainy pictures are stills taken from actual videos captured by the cameras.



Rare orchid search



Rare orchid search

In 2014 CHLG engaged the services of Dr Dean Rouse, a respected orchid expert, to search for rare orchid species on 28 participating properties. Following discussions with Dr Rouse, the target list was settled at 11 species:

<i>Caladenia amoena</i>	<i>Caladenia rosella</i>	<i>Pterostylis biseta</i>
<i>Caladenia concolor</i>	<i>Calochilus therophilus</i>	<i>Pterostylis smaragdina</i>
<i>Caladenia flavovirens</i>	<i>Corybas fimbriatus</i>	<i>Pterostylis striata</i>
<i>Caladenia oenochila</i>	<i>Prasophyllum pyriforme</i>	

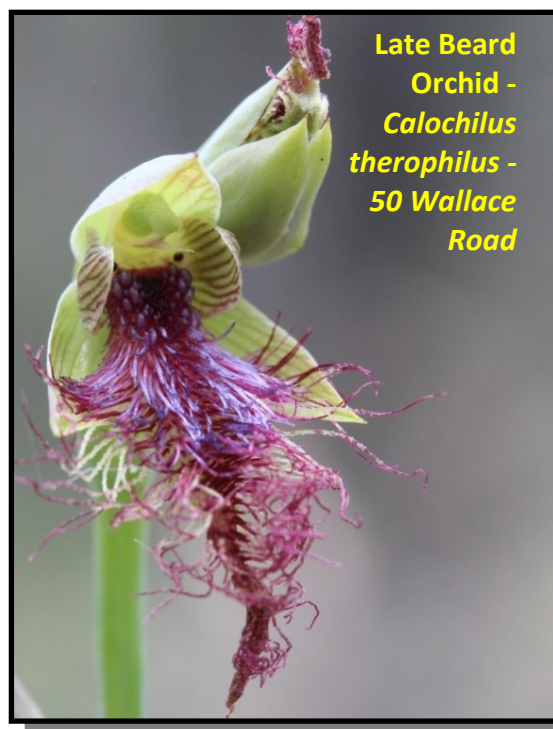
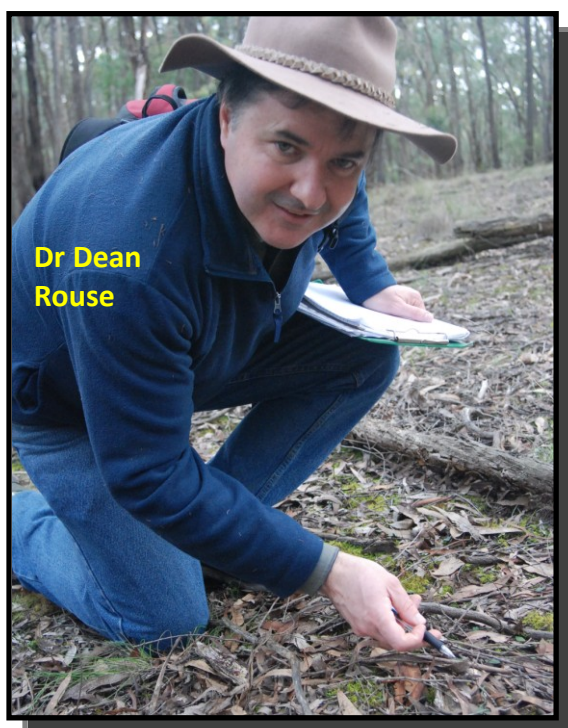
Searches were conducted during 2014 over four separate periods - June; August/September; October; and November. All orchid species observed were recorded so that individual lists for each property could be produced.

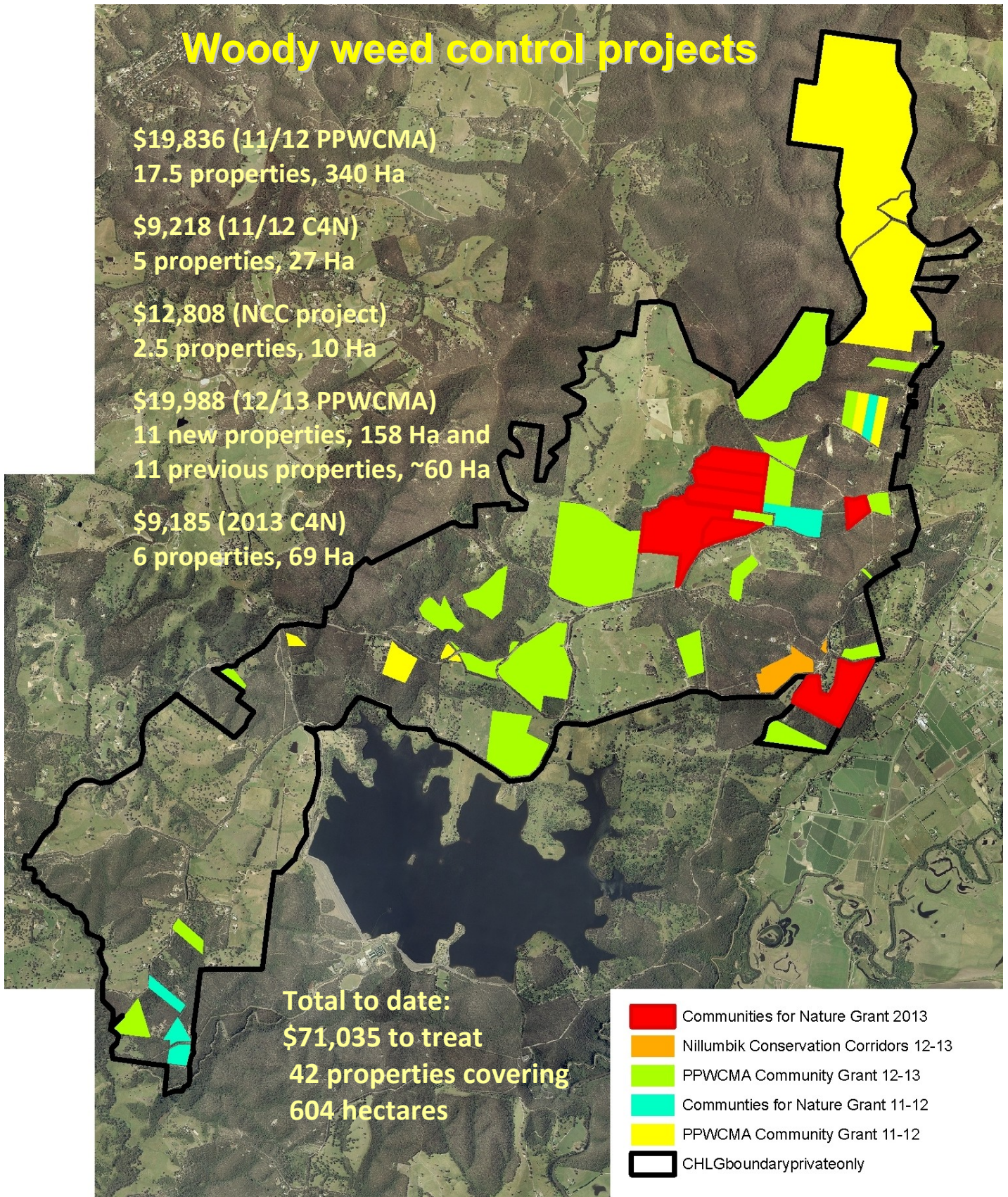
Dr Rouse also searched 2 additional private properties (on advice from a neighbouring landholder), and a small number of local sites on public land, observing 55 species overall (including one introduced species). In addition to the individual reports, an overall report has been produced and will be available on the CHLG website.

One of the target species, *Calochilus therophilus*, was discovered on 5 different properties, and another, *Pterostylis striata*, was not observed but reported by the landholder as having been present on their property before the 2009 bushfires.

Pterostylis plumosa was found on one public land site and *Caladenia oenochila* on another (this species had previously been recorded at this site).

This project was funded by the Victorian Landcare Program through the Port Phillip and Westernport CMA Community Grants.





Woody weed control

The CHLG views the invasion of native vegetation by woody weeds as one of the major threats to the quality of flora and fauna habitat in Christmas Hills. Species such as Blackberry, Boneseed, Sweet Pittosporum, Cootamundra Wattle, Sallow Wattle and Radiata Pine can form dense infestations preventing natural regeneration of native species and altering fauna habitat.

The Christmas Hills Landcare Group helps landholders tackle these weeds in several ways – seeking funds to engage a skilled contractor to do larger scale weed control works, holding weeding working bees with the Christmas Hills Tool Trailer to help neighbours, and developing landholder skills in weed identification and simple control methods.

This is an ongoing program that leading into the year had undertaken weed control work on 36 properties covering 535 hectares. During 2014 Indigenous Design Environmental Services were engaged to do weed control work on 6 additional properties covering 69 hectares. This was funded through a grant secured through the Victorian Government's Communities for Nature program.

The involvement of additional properties to help fill the gaps is typically sought through an expression of interest process.



Management committee

At the AGM held on the 23rd February 2014, the 21 members in attendance voted in 7 people to the Management Committee for 2014:

Doug Evans – Chair

Nicole Noy – Secretary

Kylie Moppert – Treasurer

Mark Gardner – Vice Chair

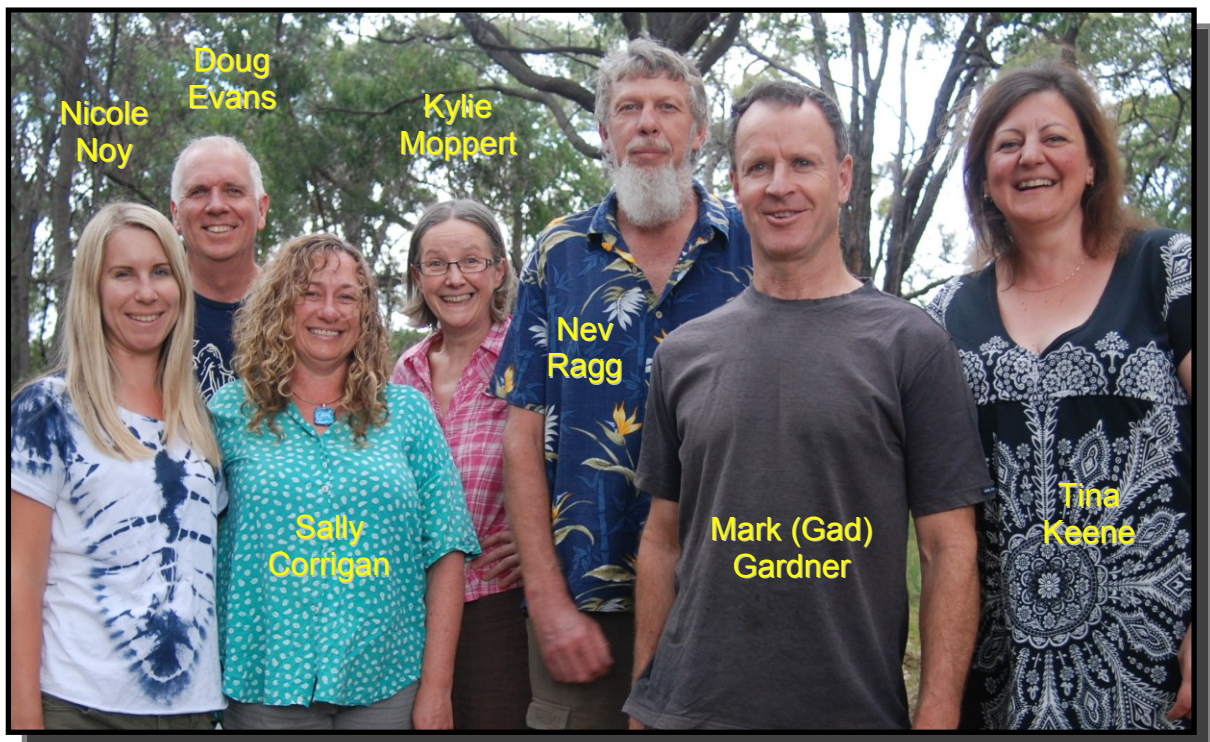
Tina Keene – Membership Officer

Nev Ragg and Sally Corrigan – ordinary Committee Members

The committee met seven times during the year and its decisions are guided by the group's vision, mission and strategic pathways established in August 2011.

In 2014 the committee focussed on:

- organising the 2014 program of events
- assessing funding opportunities and determining projects to pursue funding for
- progressing development of a habitat corridors project concept
- financial management
- strategies for recruiting new members
- training committee members in use of the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas
- working closely with the Nillumbik Landcare Network
- working closely with the Nillumbik Conservation Corridor project
- having a say on the Old Post Office Renewal Project



Membership

Tina Keene was again appointed as our Membership Officer for the year. 2014 is the first year we have not managed to recruit any new members. This, combined with a small number of 2013 members not renewing during the year, led to a drop in memberships to 46, down from last year's high of 50.

The following are the financial members for 2014:

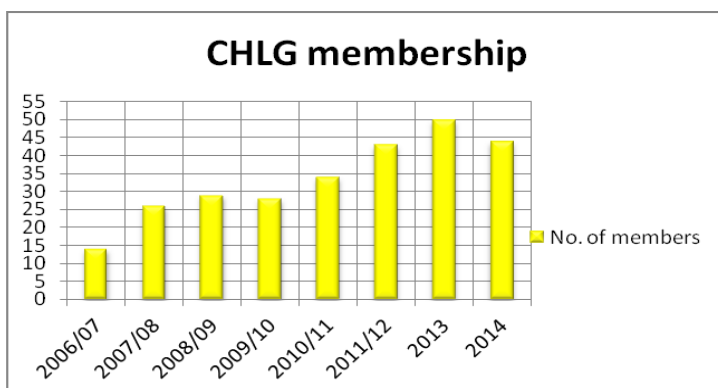
Angie and Greg Macmillan	Jane and Peter Russ	Nicole Noy & Ross Coupar
Astrid Burt and Boyd Fletcher	Joanne Sharman and Tomas Clark	Paul Danelutti
Bridget Bainbridge and Niki Spala	John Devling	Peter Benda and Sonja Pedell
Chris and Tina Keene	John and Moira Robertson	Rob Shackleton and Linda Joyce
Colin and Denise Berry	Judith Ellerton	Robyn Adams & Dianne Simmons
Darren and Narrelle Trippett	Kay and Rod Armstrong	Sally Corrigan
David Lang and Joan Stephens	Kaye and Hugh McRae	Sarah Hammond & Rhys Morgan
Deb Wadsworth	Kevin and Margo Heeley	Shaun and Nicole Batchelor
Diane and Ray Marsh	Kylie Moppert and Mark Gardner	Simon Gilbert and Jill Scott
Doug Evans and Pip Charlton	Liz and Peter Laver	Tanja and Nick Bird
Douglas and Helen Bell	Michael Shead and Nicole Vallack	Tony & Brigid Bell
Garry and Mandy Lovell	Mick and Suzanne Craine	Veronica Holland
Helen and Barry Richards	Natali and Nick Capobianco	Vivienne Murphy
Jackie Hamlet	Neroli Merridew	Warwick and Carol Leeson
Jan Cranwell and Phil Styles	Nev Ragg and Janet Meade	

Joining the Christmas Hills Landcare Group means meeting neighbours, building relationships, gaining knowledge and skills, helping each other, and working together.

Joining the Christmas Hills Landcare Group gives you:

- access to local events designed to improve your understanding and develop your skills
- regular opportunities to meet and socialise with neighbours
- access to projects designed to assist landholders to take action

So if you own or manage land in Christmas Hills, we would love you to join us! It only costs \$20 for your first year –you get a members gate sign, a community benefit card, and are added to the email list to get you in the loop - then it is only a \$10 annual renewal fee.



Following a community gathering in October 2005 at the Christmas Hills Primary School organised to gauge interest in Landcare, membership of the Christmas Hills Landcare Group has steadily grown.

Please encourage your neighbours to join, and don't forget to renew your membership!

Group Health

Each year the Christmas Hills Landcare Group undertakes a group 'health check'. This is a self-assessment based on feedback from members, typically conducted at the AGM.

Rating scores are based on a 5-point scale where 1 = "Very poor", 3 = "OK", and 5 = "Excellent"

Group health element	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	10/11	2012	2013
1. Vision / direction – How clear is your group about where it is going and what it is trying to achieve in the longer term?	4	4	4	4	4	5	5
2. Purpose / role – How clear is your group about its purpose and the role it plays in achieving its goals?	4	4	5	5	4	4	5
3. Action Planning – How good is your group at planning, designing and delivering activities that help it achieve its goals?	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
4. Leadership – How good is your group at attracting, inducting and changing over people in leadership roles?	4	4	4	4	3	3	4
5. Management structure and systems – How effective is your group's management structure and its internal systems? (such as decision-making, managing finances, communicating to the rest of the group)	5	5	5	5	4	5	5
6. External profile – How well known and respected is your group and its goals by your local landholders and wider community?	2	2	3	3	4	3	4
7. Financial resources – How strong is your group's financial base and how good is your group at attracting financial support when required?	3	3	3	3	5	5	5
8. People resources – How good is your group at attracting and retaining members?	4	3	4	4	3	5	5
9. Information resources – How good is your group at accessing the information it needs, either its own knowledge base or finding it out from external sources?	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
10. Networks – How well-connected (eg partnerships, regular contact, etc.) is your group to other groups and organisations that can help it to achieve its goals?	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
11. Confidence – How confident is your group to try new approaches or methods, and/or tackle new issues?	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
12. Human capital – How good is your group at using and developing the skills and experience of its members?	5	5	5	5	5	4	5
13. Social capital – How strong are the social relationships between members of your group, and how good is your group at building and maintaining these relationships?	3	3	4	5	4	4	5
14. External support – How easy is it for your group to access external support when it needs it?	3	3	4	3	4	5	5

Partnerships

The CHLG aims to form mutually-beneficial partnerships with others who share our objectives.

Nillumbik Conservation Corridor (NCC) project

This four year project involves nine Landcare groups and a Friends group and aims to improve habitat for threatened species in Nillumbik. Now in its third year, in 2014 we worked on the production of an orchid flowering calendar and online orchid guide for Nillumbik. Thank you to Nev Ragg, Kay McRae, Garry Lovell and Doug Evans who made their photos available for this project.

Nicole Noy is our representative on the project committee.

Nillumbik Landcare Network (NLN)

CHLG and the nine other Landcare groups in Nillumbik have formed the Nillumbik Landcare Network which is supported by two part-time Landcare Facilitators, Jackie Waring and Colin Broughton. In 2014, the main focus has been on developing a Conservation Action Plan (CAP) for the network and its member groups. We also helped staff a NLN stall at the Practically Green Festival at Edendale Farm.

Doug Evans is our representative on the Network Board.



Nillumbik Shire Council

Nillumbik is the host employer of Julia Franco, NCC Project Coordinator, and Jackie Waring and Colin Broughton, NLN Facilitators.

Christmas Hills Fire Brigade

In 2014 CHLG worked with the brigade and the Bend of Islands community to plan and deliver the Firescape workshops.

Christmas Hills Community Group Network

This network is comprised of the Christmas Hills Mechanics Institute, the Butterfly Studio, The Christmas Hills Fire Brigade, the Skyline and Wallace Road Bushfire Zone Alliance, and the Christmas Hills Landcare Group. In 2014 this network continued to explore options for renewal of the Old Post Office on the corner of the Eltham-Yarra Glen Road and Ridge Road. Rhys Morgan and Kylie Moppert are our representatives.

Promotion

The Christmas Hills Landcare Group maintains its profile through five main means:

Website - where we post newsletters and project and event details:

<http://portphillipwesternport.landcarevic.net.au/Christmashills>

Facebook – where we post interesting items to see if that might reach a new audience:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Friends-of-Christmas-Hills-Landcare/151667101570175?sfrm>

Newsletters - occasional emails to all members to keep them informed of upcoming events, project opportunities and other news of relevance.

Gate signs – for each member to illustrate their support and to show the extent of our membership in the community.

Sandwich board – to show passers by that an event is on and demonstrating we are an active group.

During 2014 we also submitted 3 captioned photos to Landcare Australia Limited's "A day in the life of Landcare" campaign that was celebrating the 25th year of Landcare going national. All submitted photos can be seen on LAL's "A Day in the Life of Landcare" Facebook page, and these are expected to be compiled into a commemorative book during 2015.

We also submitted an article to the Victorian Landcare Magazine but unfortunately due to late submission and an article already received on a similar topic, ours was not published.



Finances

	Opening balance 1 st January 2014	Plus receipts	Less expenses	Transfers*	Closing balance 31 st December 2014
Group funds					
Memberships and donations	2,461.18	530.00	-2,012.38 ¹	311.50	1,281.30
Ritchies		101.87			101.87
Group funds total	2,461.18	631.87	-2,012.38	311.50	2,461.18
Project grant funds					
Rabbit control 1	2,133.54				2,133.54
Fauna monitoring	2,384.43				2,384.43
Tool trailer	163.28			-163.28	0.00
Woody weed 3	148.22			-148.22	0.00
ACUP 1080 subsidies	454.00		-200.00		454.00
Woody weed 4		9,185.00	-9,185.00		0.00
Orchid search and guide		9,835.00	-5,493.09		4,341.91
Grant funds total	5,283.47	19,020.00	-14,678.09	-311.50	9,313.88
TOTAL	7,744.65	19,651.87	-16,699.47	-311.50	10,697.05
Cash book balance 31st December 2014					10,697.05
Bank balance 31 st December 2014					11,251.05
Unpresented cheque - tool trailer rego					-54.00
Unpresented cheque - Hall hire bond					-500.00
Bank balance less unpresented cheques					10,697.05

* Transfers represent minor over/underspend on projects. Transfers may be between similar projects or to/from Group funds.

¹ Group funds expenses include:

- Hall hire bond for February 2015 event (expect to be refunded)
- Catering and Black Snake Productions for December 2014 event
- Tool trailer registration
- CHLG computer upgrade
- Insurance; postage, and memberships of the VFF FTLA and VLN



Neighbours caring for our place.....



<http://portphillipwesternport.landcarevic.net.au/Christmashills>