

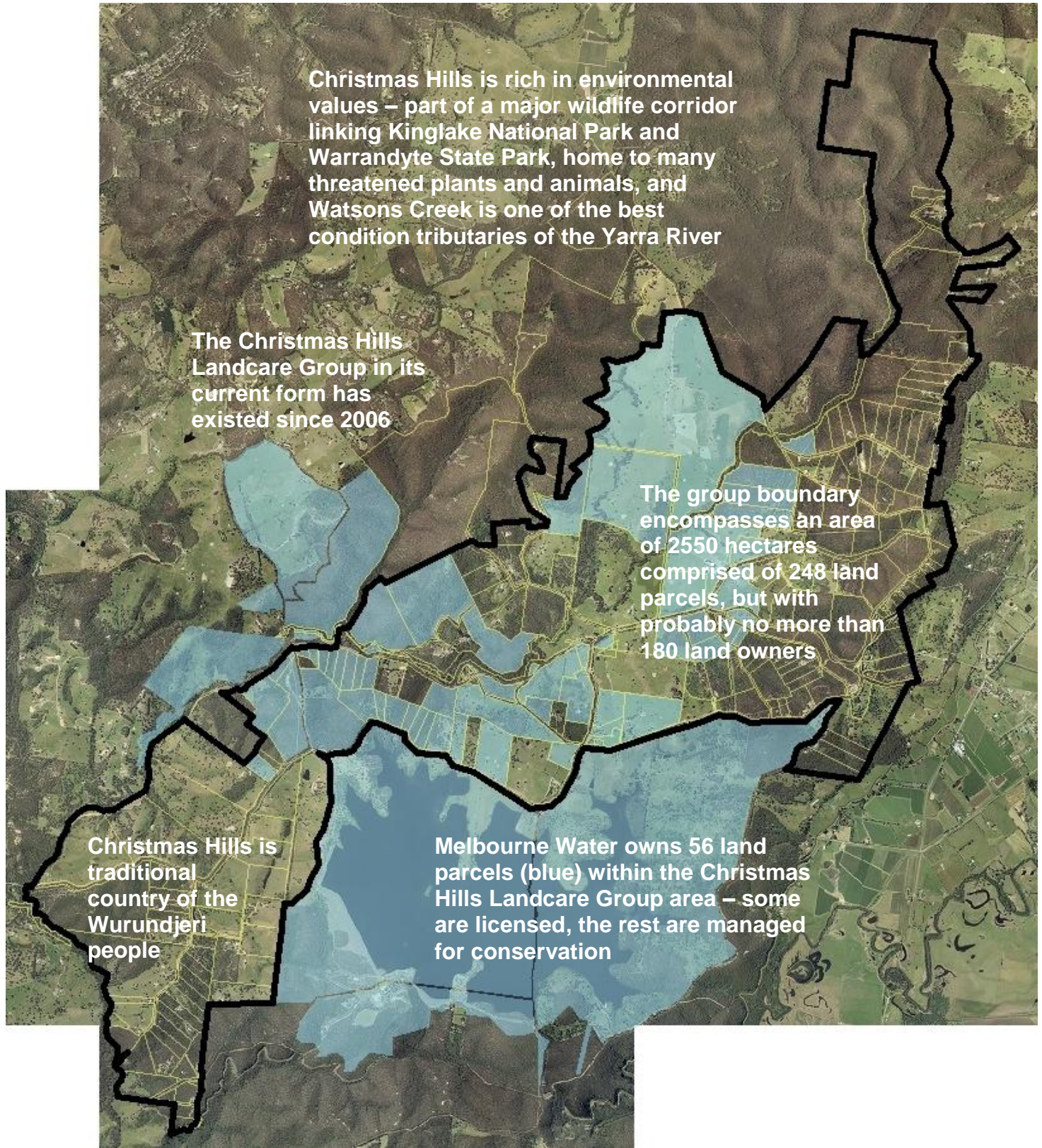


**Christmas Hills
Landcare Group**

2013 Annual Report



Background



Management committee

At the AGM held on the 10th February, the 25 members in attendance voted in 7 people to the Management Committee:

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 2013 the committee focussed on:

- organising the events
- assessing funding opportunities and determining projects to pursue funding for,
- setting up a web-based file sharing facility
- drafting a Workplace Safety Management Plan for the group
- 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, and
- having a say on Nillumbik's Sites of Significance Review



Vision

All Christmas Hills landholders working together in a coordinated and collaborative way to care for and sustain the environmental assets we value in Christmas Hills



Mission

To engage with Christmas Hills landholders and establish relationships with and between them, leading to them taking coordinated action on their respective properties that protect and sustain the environmental assets of 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?

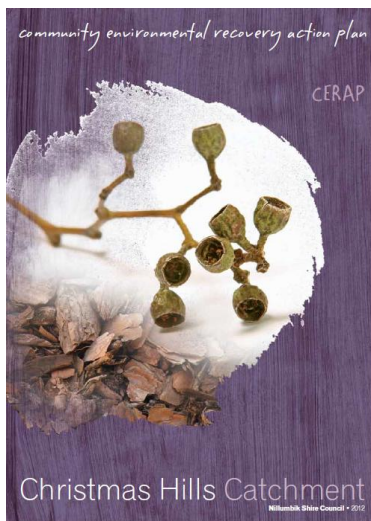
- Communicate the map-based plan of Christmas Hills environmental assets, threats and required action to landholders
- Translate and interpret the group's objectives and action priorities from the plan to property scale

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.



Membership

Tina Keene was again appointed as our Membership Officer for 2013. During the year Tina encouraged renewals, which along with our new members, led to the following list of financial members for 2013 and helped us reach the 50 member mark for the first time.

Angie and Greg Macmillan
Astrid Burt and Boyd Fletcher
Bridget Bainbridge and Niki Spala
Chris and Tina Keene
Colin and Denise Berry
Colin and Eva Tyssen
Darren and Narrelle Trippett
Darren Bennett and Vanessa Reid
David Lang and Joan Stephens
Deb Wadsworth
Diane and Ray Marsh
Doug Evans and Pip Charlton
Douglas and Helen Bell
Fran and Graham Jennings
Garry and Mandy Lovell
Hamish Knox
Helen and Barry Richards

Jackie Hamlet
Jan Cranwell and Phil Styles
Jane and Peter Russ
Joanne Sharman and Tomas Clark
John Devling
John and Moira Robertson
Judith Ellerton
Kay and Rod Armstrong
Kevin and Margo Heeley
Kylie Moppert and Mark Gardner
Liz and Peter Laver
Lucy Canavan and Danny MacMinn
Martin Gray and Tamara Rennie
Michael Shead and Nicole Vallack
Mick and Suzanne Craine
Natali and Nick Capobianco
Neroli Merridew

Nev Ragg and Janet Meade
Nicole Noy & Ross Coupar
Paul and Jenny Mitchell
Paul Danelutti
Peter Benda and Sonja Pedell
Rob Shackleton and Linda Joyce
Robyn Adams & Dianne Simmons
Sally Corrigan
Sarah Hammond & Rhys Morgan
Shaun and Nicole Batchelor
Simon Gilbert and Jill Scott
Tanja and Nick Bird
Tony & Brigid Bell
Veronica Holland
Vivienne Murphy
Warwick and Carol Leeson

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 each year.

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 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
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
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
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
4. Leadership – How good is your group at attracting, inducting and changing over people in leadership roles?	4	4	4	4	3	3
5. Management structure and systems – How effective is your group's management structure and it's internal systems? (such as decision-making, managing finances, communicating to the rest of the group)	5	5	5	5	4	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
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
8. People resources – How good is your group at attracting and retaining members?	4	3	4	4	3	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
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
11. Confidence – How confident is your group to try new approaches or methods, and/or tackle new issues?	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
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
14. External support – How easy is it for your group to access external support when it needs it?	3	3	4	3	4	5



Breakfast with the Birds (and AGM)

The 10th February heralded our first event for 2013 – an early morning bird-watching walk with David Baker-Gabb, Director, Elanus P/L and former Director of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (now Birds Australia). 31 people picked up many tips on birdwatching (and listening), and spotted several different species on their walk, including a Sacred Kingfisher.

After the walk we returned to Pip Charlton and Doug Evans' place where we prepared a breakfast fit for kings – croissants, fruit salad, egg-and-bacon sandwiches, bircher muesli and plenty of tea and coffee.

Over breakfast we conducted the AGM. For the first time in the group's history, an annual report has been compiled, and copies of this were circulated to assist the members to reflect on the year just gone. Doug captured feedback from the members on the aspects they liked and what they thought could be improved, before leading our annual group 'health check'. Then a draft program of events for 2013 was mapped out, followed by the election of the management committee for 2013.



Early morning birdwatching before breakfast and the 2013 AGM



Helping neighbours with weed control

Helping our neighbours in a practical way by holding weeding working bees on their property has become a regular feature on our annual calendar of events.

In addition, these events help members to recognise some weed species, and learn how to treat them using tools from the Christmas Hills Tool Trailer. This approach aims to build the capacity of landholders to be able to manage these weeds on their own properties.

Two events on the 2013 program saw us weeding on the properties of two of our members.

In April, 8 people helped Judith Ellerton tackle Sallow Wattle and other weedy wattle species on her steep property.

In August, 9 people helped new members, Peter Benda and Sonja Pedell, tackle weeds such as Sweet Pittosporum, Bluebell Creeper, and Boneseed on their recently purchased property on Buttermans Track.



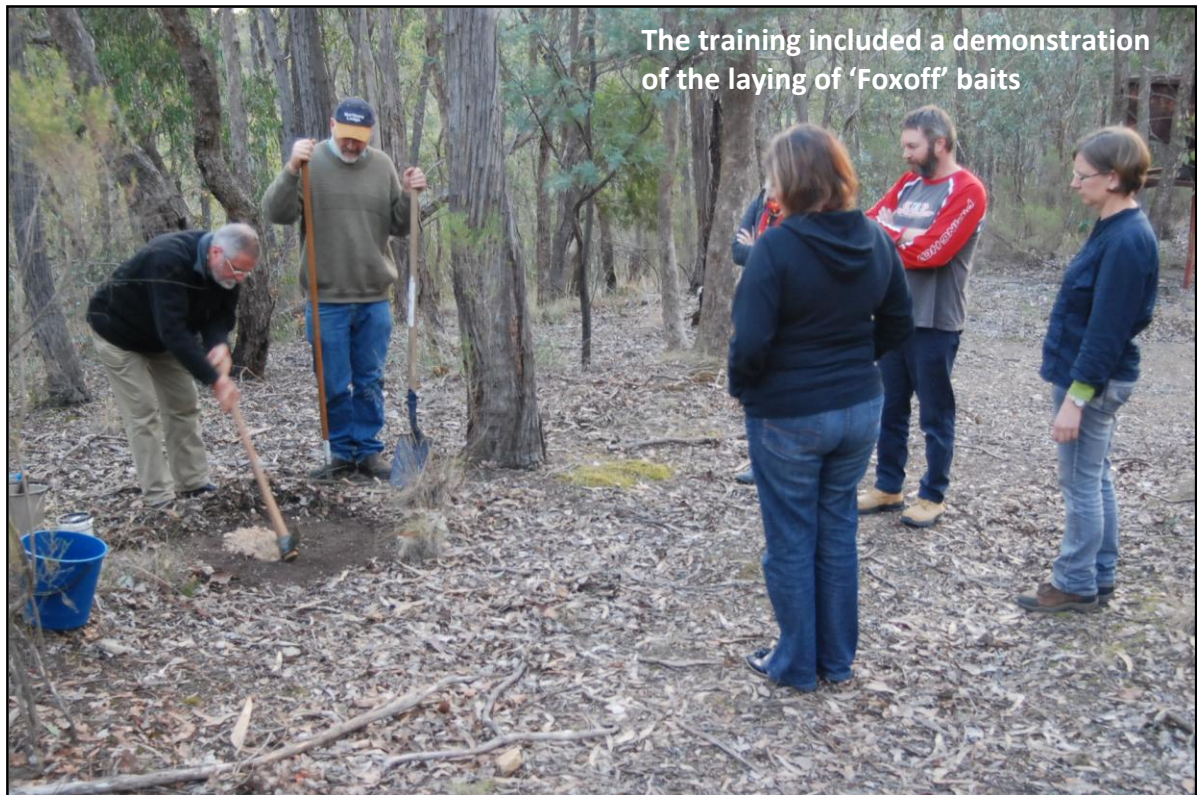
ACUP 1080 endorsement training

Following a failed funding application to undertake fox control where the feedback highlighted a lack of follow up control works, we decided to see if we could train up a number of members to be able to legally and safely lay “Foxoff” (1080) baits.

This first required a number of us to complete a ‘Farm Chemical Users’ course to get our Agricultural Chemical Users Permit (ACUP) from DPI. We then organised a local training session at Bridget Bainbridge and Niki Spala’s place with Kevin Chandler from Goulburn Ovens TAFE.

As a result, 6 CHLG members successfully completed the “Minimising the risks in the use of 1080 pest animal bait products for vertebrate pest control” course and were then able to receive the 1080 endorsement to their ACUP.

We can now include follow up baiting by qualified members as part of future fox control funding applications.



The good oil on soils

On a sunny June day, 6 people gathered at Chris and Tina Keene's place to hear from Chris Alenson, an independent consultant in sustainable agriculture and former Swinburne lecturer.

In what was a very practical session, Chris helped those present to understand what makes soils healthy, how to assess the health of their soils, and importantly, what things they can do to improve the health of their soils.

This was definitely an event for getting your hands dirty.



Orchids of Christmas Hills

15 people gathered at Mark Gardner and Kylie Moppert's place in September to learn about the wide range of orchids that call Christmas Hills home. For this purpose we were very fortunate to have the services of Gary Backhouse, co-author of the key references "The Orchids of Victoria" and "Wild Orchids of Victoria, Australia".

Gary's presentation was illustrated with photos of local orchid species, and we were shown some of the key characteristics to help us identify the different species. We also gained many wonderful insights into the ecology of orchids, before stepping outside to see what species we could find nearby.

Following this, as always, we retired to a delightful afternoon tea and chatting with neighbours.



Gary Backhouse, co-author of the Orchids of Victoria, presenting to the group



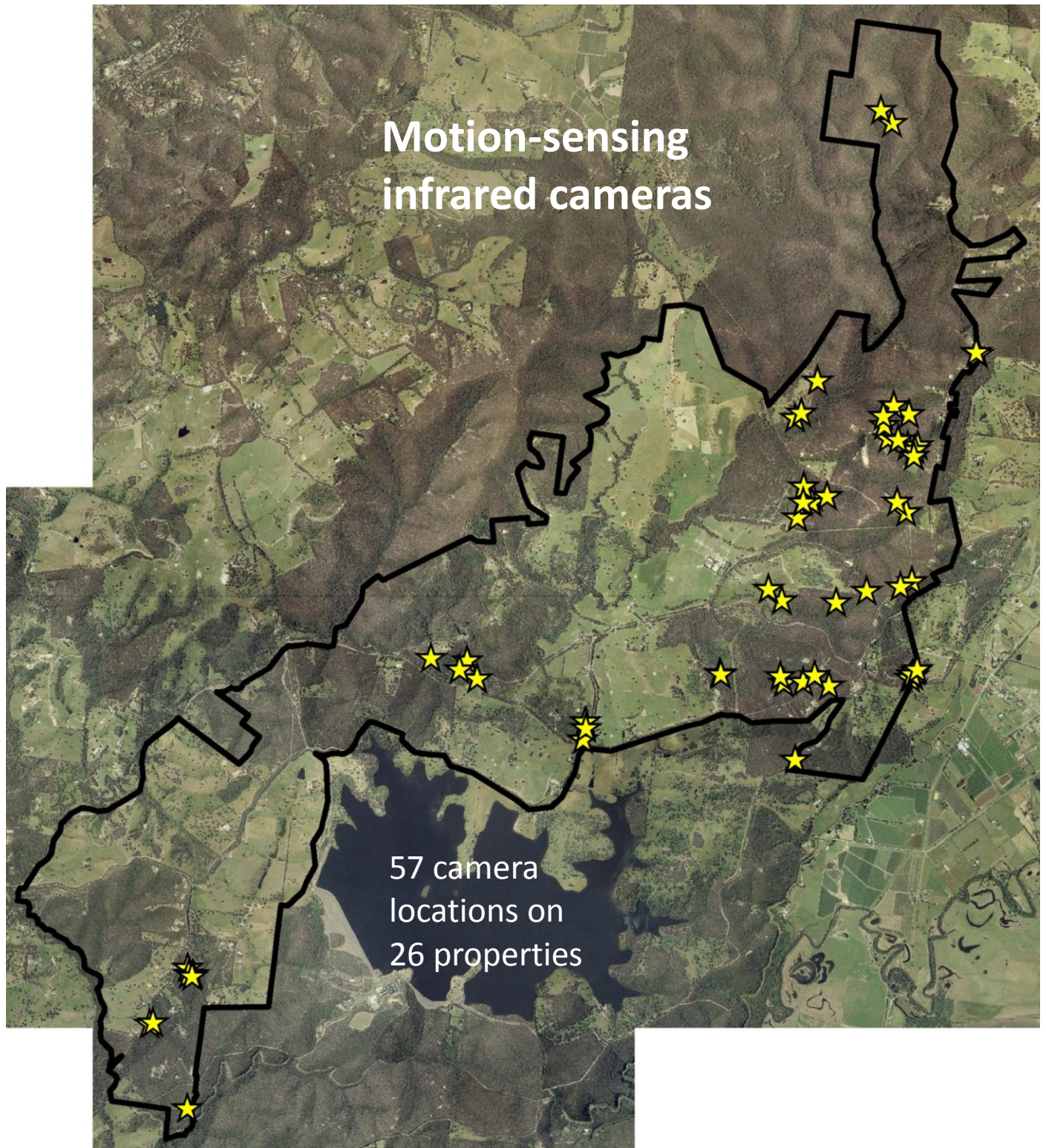
Living with Nature and Bushfire Risk in Christmas Hills

Each year the group aims to hold one event that is open to everyone in Christmas Hills with the aim of increasing our profile and recruiting new members. For 2013 we partnered with the Christmas Hills Fire Brigade to deliver an event designed to help local people sensitively manage native vegetation on their properties in the interest of both protecting ecological values and minimising the risk from bushfire.

On the 1st December, over 60 people gathered in the newly restored Christmas Hills Hall to hear Owen Gooding, Team Leader Vegetation Management with the CFA, talk on sustainable fire management. This was followed by a brief overview of the Christmas Hills Fire Brigade by the local brigade Captain, Di Simmons, and a brief overview of the Christmas Hills Landcare Group by the Chair, Doug Evans.

Doug followed this up with a selection of short videos that summarised what the CHLG motion-sensing cameras had captured on private properties during 2013, before we all enjoyed dining on the selection of home-made curries brought by those in attendance.





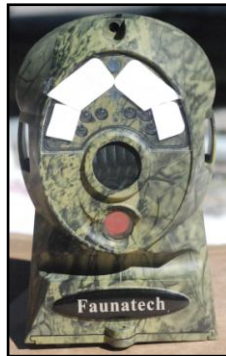
Community fauna monitoring

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

With funding secured from various sources, we now have twenty of these cameras and in 2013 their use by landholders was locally coordinated by Nev Ragg, Kevin Heeley, Kay Armstrong, Sally Corrigan, Nicole Noy and Doug Evans.

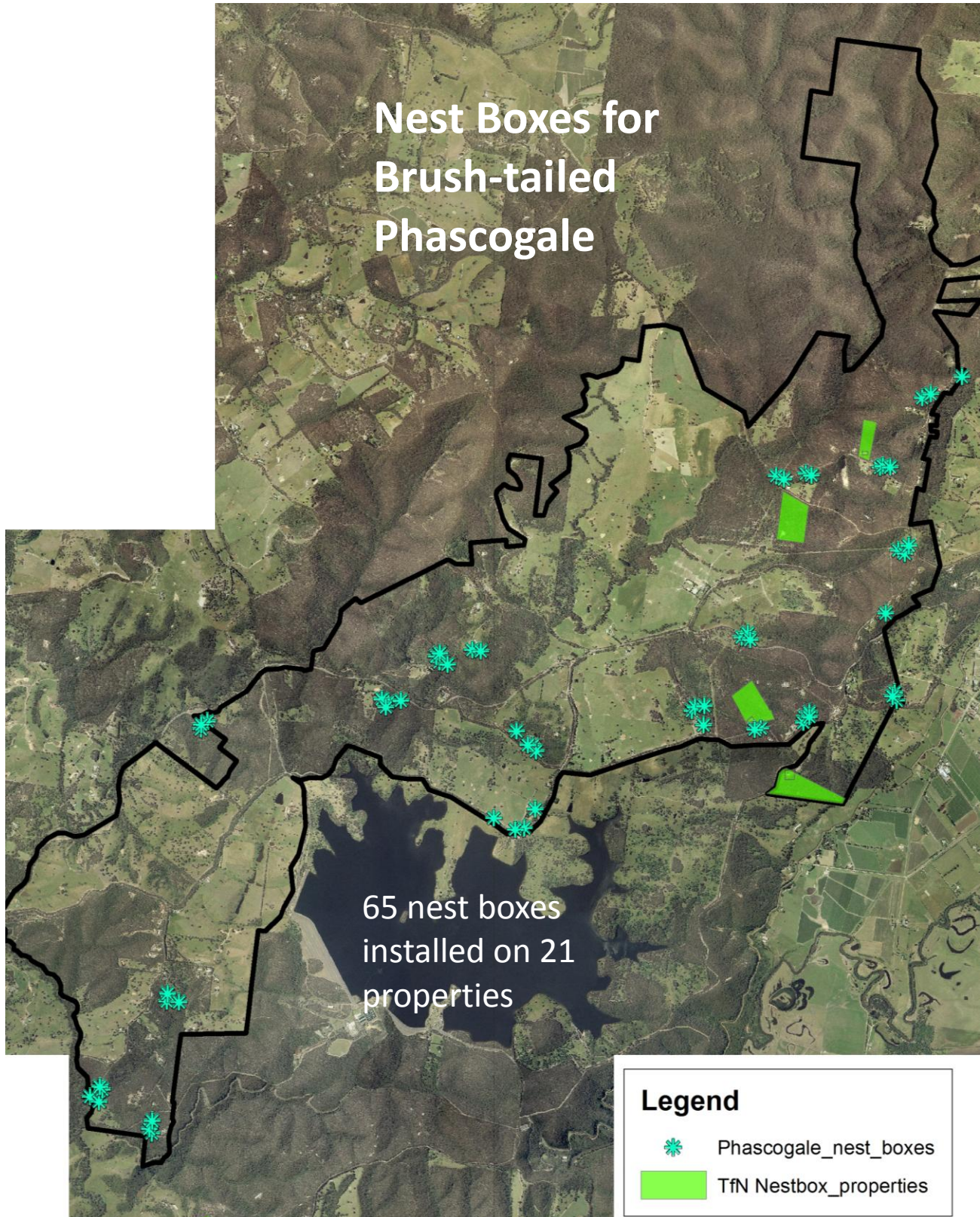
In 2013 cameras were used on 26 different properties in 57 different locations. They detected 33 different fauna species, including 9 different native mammal species, 7 different introduced mammal species, 15 different bird species and 2 species of reptile.

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 2013 seven landholders used the equipment and detected the presence of Southern Boobook and Barking Owls.



We now have three different types of cameras, but they all use the same typical set up shown at left with a camera mounted facing the scent lures.





Tuan nest boxes

The Brush-tailed Phascogale or Tuan (*Phascogale tapoatafa*) is a small, nocturnal, arboreal, carnivorous marsupial that is listed as 'Vulnerable' in Victoria. There are populations in both Kinglake National Park and Warrandyte State Park which are considered the most significant remaining in the Highland Southern Fall bioregion, with Nillumbik considered a stronghold for the species. This species is also frequently 'captured' on private land by landholders using the CHLG motion-sensing cameras.

Using a grant we secured through the Victorian Government's Communities for Nature program, we purchased 65 nest boxes designed to suit Brush-tailed Phascogales. We then had funding support through the Nillumbik Conservation Corridor project to have them installed on 21 properties by a contractor qualified to work at heights.

The nest box design was based on one borrowed from the Western Port Catchment Landcare Network, but modified to add an internal baffle to reduce the likelihood of occupation by Indian Mynahs, and an inspection port to enable monitoring from the ground using a pole-mounted camera. We engaged Jigsaw Industries, a business for supported employees run by the Mawarra Disability Centre in Warragul, to construct the boxes.

The grant also enabled us to purchase two pole-mounted cameras that will then be made available to landholders to monitor the nest boxes on their properties.

Complementing this was the installation of another 16 phascogale nest boxes on 4 covenanted properties (with 4 more boxes on a fifth property to come) by Trust for Nature in support of the cluster of covenanters we have here in Christmas Hills.



L to R – Brush-tailed Phascogale; One of the new nest boxes; Inspecting a nest box with one of the new pole-mounted cameras



Woody weed control projects

\$19,836 (11/12 PPWCMA)

17.5 properties, 340 Ha

\$9,218 (11/12 C4N)

5 properties, 27 Ha

\$12,808 (NCC project)

2.5 properties, 10 Ha

\$19,988 (12/13 PPWCMA)

11 new properties, 158 Ha and

11 previous properties, ~60 Ha

Total to date: \$61,850 to treat 36 properties covering 535 hectares

Legend

- PPWCMA Grant 11-12
- Communities for Nature 11-12
- Nillumbik Conservation Corridors 12-13
- PPWCMA Grant 12-13



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 25 properties covering 377 hectares. During 2013 Indigenous Design Environmental Services were engaged to do weed control work on 11 additional properties covering 158 hectares, as well as 11 previously treated properties requiring further work. This was funded through a grant secured through the PPWCMA Community Grants program.

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



1073 Skyline Road - before (left) and after treatment of Sweet Pittosporum



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

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

Sandwich board – to indicate an event is on and demonstrating we are active.

Partnerships

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

Nillumbik Conservation Corridor (NCC) project

This project involves nine Landcare groups and a Friends group, with \$599,000 over four years to improve habitat for threatened species in Nillumbik. In 2013 we benefited in the form of funding for some infill planting following removal of a dense pittosporum infestation, as well as funding to cover the installation of the phascogale nest boxes. Nicole Noy is our rep.

Nillumbik Landcare Network (NLN)

CHLG has partnered with the nine other Landcare groups in Nillumbik to employ a part-time Landcare Facilitator for three years to establish and support the new Nillumbik Landcare Network. Jackie Waring has taken up the role following the resignation of Damian Magner. Doug Evans is our rep.

Nillumbik Shire Council

Nillumbik is the host employer of Julia Franco, NCC Project Coordinator, and Jackie Waring, NLN Facilitator. Nillumbik has also invited all Landcare groups in the shire to comment on a draft version of their Sites of Significance review.

Christmas Hills Fire Brigade

CHLG works with the brigade through cross promotion of news and events, and collaborated on the 'Living with Nature and Bushfire Risk' event, including sharing the cost of hiring the hall.

Christmas Hills Community Group Network

A project looking into options for renewal of the Old Post Office is the focus of this new network comprised of the Christmas Hills Mechanics Institute, the Butterfly Studio, The Christmas Hills Fire Brigade, the Skyline and Wallace Road Bushfire Zone Alliance, and ourselves. Rhys Morgan and Kylie Moppert are our reps.



Finances

	Opening balance 1 st January 2013	Plus receipts	Less expenses	Transfers*	Closing balance 31 st December 2013	Notes
Group funds						
Memberships and donations	2,680.31	640.00 ¹	-997.80 ²	0.00	2,461.18	
Ritchies		138.67				
Group funds total	2,680.31	778.67	-997.80	0.00	2,461.18	
Project grant funds						
Rabbit control 1	2133.54				2,133.54	
Fauna monitoring	1,224.51	11,150.00	-9,990.08		2,384.43	Web mapping design modification to do
Woody weed 2	9,218.00		-9,218.00		0.00	
Tool trailer	171.40	328.28	-336.40		163.28	
Woody weed 3	0.00	19,988.00	-19,839.78		148.22	
Farm Chemical Users and ACUP 1080	0.00	654.00	-200.00		454.00	Four subsidies yet to be claimed
Grant funds total	12,747.45	32,120.28	-39,584.26		5,283.47	
TOTAL	15,427.76	32,898.95	-40,582.06	-	7,744.65	
Bank balance 31 st December 2013					7,744.65	

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

¹ Membership funds received include donations and multi-year memberships

² Expenses include insurance, postage, events, and memberships of the VFF FTLA and Victoria Landcare Network





Neighbours caring for our place.....



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