

## President's Report

Spring 2013

The FoGL AGM in August resulted in all members of the past committee being re-elected. Congratulations are extended to all and I look forward to another fruitful and successful year of working together. I would like to thank all Committee members for their hard work over the past 12 months. FoGL would be unable to function without their dedication. In particular I wish to thank Vice President Trevor Caldwell and Secretary Maurice Burns for their work while I was away up North.



I am very pleased to report that FoGL was successful in our two Healthy Parks Healthy People (HPPH) grant applications. The first funded project is for rehabilitation, conservation and access management on the western end of the northern silt jetties at The Cut.

This area was fenced off by Parks Victoria in the past, but unauthorised removal of the fence some years ago has resulted in vehicles causing damage to the fragile and easily erodible soil.



We will be blocking access to vehicles, while still maintaining pedestrian access, and revegetating the damaged area.

The second funded project is to further

extend the monitoring and protection of plants threatened by grazing in the Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park.

Work has started on both these projects and member involvement on the first will be invited as needed. Please consider giving some of your time if at all possible.

We have also been successful in receiving a grant from the Gippsland Lakes Ministerial Advisory Committee (GLMAC) to provide community education about the Mitchell River Silt Jetties. These are an internationally significant, but very fragile landform. This grant will be used to erect signage, produce informational brochures and set up links to a website to alert local residents and visitors as to the value of this site and the need and possible means of greater protection.

A follow-up sea spurge weeding day at Barrier Landing and Rigby Island will take place on Wednesday September 25th. According to Matt Holland, PV Ranger, our previous efforts at Barrier Landing have resulted in much reduced regrowth of this weed, but further work on Rigby Island is needed. Please contact me if you are able to attend.

The Eagle Point/Paynesville Landcare Group have contacted us re a possible joint project to address the issues of inappropriate off-road use of vehicles, erosion, weeds and signage around Eagle Point Bluff. We are seeking further information about such worthwhile collaboration, but also need to be mindful of the smallness of our Group and our commitment to ongoing projects.

We will be having our final Committee meeting for this calendar year on November 27th, to be followed by an end of year function. Details to be announced later, but put the date in your calendar now so that you can come along. Member interests and input are always greatly welcomed.

Wendy Parker

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## Rotamah Island (Gellung-warl) and the Rotamah Island Bird Observatory Inc.

Rotamah provided part of the home territory of the Aborigines of the Tatungalung tribe of the Kurnai nation who were numerous at the time of European settlement. The shell middens still to be found in the sand dunes along the 90 Mile Beach remain evidence of their existence. The abundant wildlife and mild climate of the Gippsland Lakes provided an ideal area to live and thrive.



In 1840 explorer Angus McMillan reached the shores of Lake Victoria and very soon cattle runs were taken up in the district. At this time much of Rotamah Island was cleared and cultivated for grazing.

Rotamah Island had eleven owners and many more occupants up until 1975 when it was bought by the Victorian Government.



In 1978 both Rotamah and Little Rotamah Islands were added to The Lakes National Park.

In late 1980 the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

began leasing the island's homestead, to operate as a bird observatory.

Up until 2000 the RAOU observatory was involved in various research programs, as well as regularly running weekend natural history courses. From 2001 to the present time RIBO Inc. has continued the Bird monitoring and research projects under the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme.

Rotamah Island supports eucalypt, banksia and monotoca woodland on its sandy soils but much of the island is open woodland, a reminder of the grazing that occurred for over 120 years. The lower lying areas now support dense stands of melalueca. From August to November Rotamah is at its best with a spectacular show of wildflowers.

The Island supports good populations of eastern grey kangaroos, swamp wallabies, possums, echidnas, wombats and bats along with introduced rabbits, foxes and internationally endangered hog deer.

It is however the prolific bird life that Rotamah Island has become renowned for with more than 200 species of bird having been recorded. Commonly sighted birds include emus, grebes, cormorants, pelicans, rosellas,

robins, scrubwrens, cuckoos, bassian thrush and the graceful white-bellied sea eagle.

In 1878 Alfred Howitt wrote "the (aboriginal) name of Rottemah Island in the Lakes is Gellung-warl which means spear point" "Warl" is the word for spear and "Gellung" is the point or tip. However the word "Gellung" also refers to tongue. Therefore whilst translating as point, it may mean "spear tongue".

One of the first European visitors to Rotamah was the squatter P.C. Buckley. Buckley kept a diary which he re-wrote in 1869-71. His first mention of Rotamah is in 1845 when he wrote "camped near a place afterwards called Ratty Mah". In 1858 he began using Rotamah to run cattle and horses and calls it variously "Rottimar", "Rotty Marr", "Rottymarr" and "Rotta Marr". Thus it would seem the name was in common use from the late 1850s.

The 1871 survey map "Corner Inlet to Gabo Island" by Lt. Stanley seems to be the earliest map with the name Rotamah marked on it.

The Victorian Gov't Place Names Committee regard the official name and spelling as Rotamah, but have no information of when it was named.

The population and use of Rotamah has changed over time

2,000 B.P. - 1840s. Tatungalung tribe who belonged to the Kurnai lived on Rotamah which they called Gellung warl (spearpoint). The surrounding lakes habitat and surf beach provided all their resources.

1858 - 1866. Rotamah was used by P.C. Buckley to graze cattle. He built bridges onto Little Rotamah and Rotamah Island. He employed stockmen to stay on the island for short periods to build the bridges, yards and look after the stock.

Late 1860s. Colin McLaren built a wattle and daub hut near present house and lived on the island for the next 30 years.

1888. Charles Radford acquired part of island where the house and jetty stand today. Built an "up to date weatherboard residence" and used Rotamah for sailing base with McLaren as "caretaker".

1900 - 1938. Bartons extended their leases and freehold in the coastal country by acquiring Rotamah which they named "Overstrand" two brothers and a sister. Edward Adolphus Barton one of the brothers, and Alice Gertrude or Edith Constance one of the sisters. Fred Barton says the house was built in 1908. Sheep were the main stock. Joe Southon began shearing on Rotamah in 1923 and continued to 1944. Frank Williams was the manager. (...cont.)

1938-1946. Dan and Jean Killmorgen together with their children, Gloria and Denis lived on Rotamah. They ran about 400 sheep. The island was not well cleared at this stage and there were a lot of paperbarks and even more mosquitoes near to the house. They also ran a small number of cows and used an old army punt as their means of transport. There was a small shearing shed to the north east of the house on the shore of the lake. Two large fig trees grew in front of the house and a big mulberry tree at the rear. There was a good vegetable garden in the valley at the back of the house.

1946-1956. Property owned by Richard Searby, a Melbourne chiropractor.

Joe Southon reports that he was about 60 and pottered round in his pyjamas all weekend in the vegetable patch. He came to Rotamah for weekends but some of his family lived on the island.

1956. Owned by the estate of Doris Cumberland.

1956-1958. Owned by C.E. Bossley and I.E. Clayton of Paynesville.

In 1957 Bert May, Chris Goodman and Mrs. I. Clayton drowned near the end of the jetty.

1958-1964. Owned by Geoff Wells and Len Fenton.

1964-1967. Owned/Managed by Whitelaw Holdings Pty. Ltd.

1967-1975. Owned by Inaptum Pty. Ltd. c/- Fred Stanger. The previous owners had used Rotamah as a

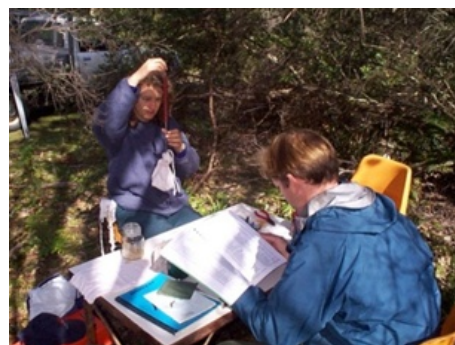


holiday house. Stranger intended to retire to Rotamah and decided to make improvements to the property. The house was very run down. At one stage it had been used to store hay. Fred Stranger considered demolishing the house but later decided to upgrade it. The eastern bedrooms were added, verandah enclosed for bathrooms and toilets. The ceilings were lowered; (the originals were left and can be seen when in the roof - this seems to help insulate the house) and internal plaster walls were added over the old lathe and plaster walls. The cottage was built for a manager. The shearing shed was demolished and

Stanger decided to run Hereford cattle. New fencing, water troughs and the windmill were installed. The southern side of the island was regarded as poor soil and escaped clearing. Any regrowth scrub on Little Rotamah was cleared as was a lot of scrub behind the beach. During this time Stanger was still working as an electrical contractor and using the island at weekends. It seems his family were not interested and before he retired he decided to sell.

In 1975 the Victorian Government purchased Rotamah and the surrounding freehold from Stranger for inclusion in The Lakes National Park. Grazing on the island ceased for the first time in 120 years, and the bush began to re-establish. An extra room was added to the front of the cottage and it and the main house were used as residences for rangers. However the Parks Service had difficulty keeping Rangers on the island because of the isolation experienced by their families and the difficulty of getting to schools etc.

In 1980 the National Parks Service leased the buildings to The Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union for the purpose of establishing a Bird Observatory along similar lines to Australia's first Observatory at Eyre in Western Australia. Esso BHP donated money for the establishment costs and the Observatory opened in March 1980 with Alan Burbidge as the resident warden. He was later joined by Julie Raines and they were married on the island in 1984.



Kangaroos began to return, at first they were in small enough numbers for Alan to comment in the daily log of seeing kangaroos

around the house. By the end of his stay annual kangaroo counts revealed the population to be around 600. In 1984 Tony Howard took over as warden and was joined by Isobel Crawford in 1985. Many of the old and new fences were taken down and the paddocks continued to disappear under regrowth Black Wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*) Coast Banksia (*Banksia integrifolia*) and Tree Broom Heath (*Monotoca elliptica*).

In 1985 Rotamah was visited by Prince Charles and Princess Dianna who came to inspect the bird hides which had been built with funds from the Victorian 150 years celebration. A new jetty was built for the occasion by the Ports and Harbours Authority. The new jetty was longer than the previous jetty (...cont.)



and thus went out into deeper water which enabled larger boats to moor. From this time day visitor numbers, especially those in hire vessels, increased dramatically. Esso BHP again donated money this time to buy a new boat for transporting visitors from Trapper Point and for the wardens to travel to Paynesville for banking, supplies etc.

Twenty two professional and many part time volunteer wardens managed the affairs of the Observatory under a predominantly local Management committee for the period of the RAOU lease from 1980 to 2001

Allan Burbidge, 4 years 6 months, - February 1980 to August 1984

Julie Rains, 3 years 3 months, - June 1981 to October 1984

Tony Howard, 2 years 3 months, - September 1984 to December 1986

Isobel Crawford, 2 years 7 months, - January 1985 to August 1987

Coral & Murray Dow, 1 year 3 months, - July 1987 to October 1988

John Ashford, 5 months, - October 1988 to March 1989

Sue Clegg, 6 months, - October 1988 to April 1989

Gabriele & Colin Hall, 1 year 9 months, - July 1989 to April 1991

Roxane Edwards & Keith Shadbolt, 1 year 5 months, - April 1991 to September 1992

Gwen & Graham Goodreid, 8 months, - November 1992 to July 1993

Joanne & Thierry Rolland, 3 years 2 months, - August 1993 to 31st October 1996

Barbara Moss & Peter Mitchell, 2 years 8 months, - 28th October 1996 to 21st June 1999

Liz & Craig Doolan, 1 year 8 months, - August 1999 to 21st April 2001

Wendy & Dan Blunt, 8 months, - May 2001 to 6th January 2002

In 2001 negotiations between Birds Australia and Parks Victoria, on renewal of the lease to the observatory were abandoned by RAOU (Birds Australia) and their association with Rotamah Island ended.

In 2002 a remnant of the former committee, which had been excluded from the negotiations with Parks Victoria by RAOU management, along with a number of other local supporters, set about to re-establish negotiations with the intent of seeking a long term lease and continuing the ongoing research and historic

use of the Rotamah homestead as a bird observatory and research and training centre.

In order to achieve this aim an incorporated association, RIBO Inc was formed and registered in 2001.

Since then and with the Pro bono support of Freehills Lawyers, RIBO Inc has achieved DGR status and is now on the National register of environmental organizations.

Over the subsequent 12 years RIBO Inc. has worked with successive state governments and Parks Victoria officers to acquire a 20 years lease of the homestead and surrounding land and a 7 year lease of the wardens cottage.

Critical support has been provided by the Hugh Williamson foundation by way of restoration funding, Parks Victoria local officers and State and Regional Managers, the Shire of East Gippsland, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and a large number of supporters including FoGL, Watermark Inc. ESSO Aust. Ltd. and the sixty members of the association who have kept the dream alive during the past decade.

We are now in the home straight with the renovation of the Homestead having commenced and due for completion by the end of November.

Rotamah Island Bird Observatory is indebted to Dr Coral Dow for the research on the history of Rotamah while in her role as joint warden with her husband Murray in the late 1980's.



Don Ripper

## What's On

Wed 25th September Sea Spurge weeding Barrier Landing. Contact Wendy Parker if you can attend.

Committee Meeting 27th November, followed by end of year function. Details to be announced.

## FOGL Frog??

Committee member Anne Schmidli seems to have discovered would-be FOGL members in the form of Banjo Frogs (sometimes called Pobblebonks). According to Anne, they are very vocal just now and she decided to 'talk' back to them. When she calls, 'FOGL!' they immediately respond with what sounds like 'FOGL.' Impressive!

# Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park monitoring and protecting plants threatened by grazing

Following a controlled burn conducted at the east end of the Coastal Park on Boole Poole in 2010 FOGL has been investigating plant regeneration and possible impacts on this process. Annual observations in the years following have been provided in previous additions of the newsletter and on the FOGL website

One of the findings from the monitoring project has been the growth of plants protected by tree guards in contrast to unprotected plants in designated plots.

In the "Boole Poole Seedling Survey Report 7th November 2012" it was concluded that while some form of browsing was having an effect on seedling development the cause was unknown. This led to the author Bruce Macpherson recommending that more single tree guards be established around seedlings so more precise statistical analysis could be performed on growth rates. He also recommended that remote cameras would be the most cost efficient means for monitoring and recording the herbivore species responsible.



To develop and enhance these observations further, a Healthy Parks Healthy People grant was obtained to erect more substantial tree guards and install field cameras. This funding support will be of great assistance to advance this cooperative project involving FOGL, Parks Victoria and TAFE.



On September 13 representatives from each group travelled to the east end of the Coastal Park to undertake installation works. After target seedlings were located at each of the 3 study areas, 30 triangular tree guards were erected. These were constructed using heavy duty plastic mesh attached to star pickets with heights of 1.2 and 2.0 metres. TAFE students who attended made a valuable contribution applying themselves enthusiastically to this practical area of their studies

Later in the year cameras are to be installed at the three sites. Trial plantings with tree guard protection will also be undertaken along with the annual monitoring survey in November.

The efforts and support of Ranger Matt Holland, Bruce Macpherson and FOGL members Maurice Burns and James Turner is much appreciated.

David Ellard Project Leader

Membership Application

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP of FRIENDS OF GIPPSLAND LAKES PARKS & RESERVES INC.

.....(name of Applicant(s))

of .....(address)

Ph. .... Mb. .... E-mail(s).....

desire to become a (state category of membership - see below).....

member of the Friends of the Gippsland Lakes Parks and Reserves Inc.

In the event of my admission as a member, I agree to be bound by the rules of the Association for the time being in force (can be viewed at <http://fogl.org.au/forms/rules.pdf>).

.....Signature of Applicant

Date .....

Membership fees (to 30 June 2013):

Adult \$20, Family \$35, Organisation \$10, Concession \$10 (Healthcare, Pension, Student)

Please complete Membership Form and enclose membership fee (cheque or money order only) then post to:

The Secretary,

Friends of the Gippsland Lakes Parks and Reserves Inc.

P.O. Box 354

Metung VIC 3904