



Heho Herald

Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater Newsletter

**Patron: Her Excellency Professor the Honourable
Margaret Gardner AC, Governor of Victoria**

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President's Report

Sue Bendel



Farewell & Welcome Bruce!

On Saturday 9 May 2026, thirty-five members and friends of the Helmeted Honeyeaters gathered to farewell Bruce Quin, the DEECA Senior Ornithologist and welcome Bruce Quin the volunteer extraordinaire. Guests enjoyed the opportunity to renew friendships with old friends and meet many like-minded people.

Although the weather was cool, the atmosphere was lovely and warm, with people mingling and exchanging stories. The formalities were brief with a quick welcome, and later in the afternoon Sue Bendel welcomed everyone again and mentioned the benefit of name tags, as Darren, Bruce's identical twin was also present. Sue then recounted a few stories of people being disappointed when Bruce had not greeted them, but that was because it was actually Darren and vice versa.

'Supermum' was also present representing the many generations of Helmeted Honeyeaters that Bruce had been parent, grandparent, great grandparent to while working at the swamp in all weather conditions and caring for the



Sue sharing stories of Bruce's time as Senior Ornithologist, alongside 'supermum' a significant contributor to the population's survival.

Image: S Garth

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birds. Bruce's contribution to the survival of the Helmeted Honeyeater has been incredible, with Bruce being integral to many of the Friends' gatherings.

Bruce was presented with some gifts created by scientific illustrator and ecologist Linda Bester. The detailed artwork of a HeHo in flight was based on a photo taken by Stephen Garth. This artwork also formed the centrepiece of a larger collage, where Bruce was the star, as the bird was surrounded by many photos featuring Bruce, creating a history of his time working with the HeHos. Photos were taken from many editions of the HeHo Herald. Thank you to Linda Bester for creating such a wonderful memory for Bruce, and to Stephen Garth for the magnificent photo of the bird in flight.



Bruce sharing some of his reflections over the years.
Image: S Garth

Bruce was delighted to be the guest of honour, enjoying the companionship of many people he has worked with over the years. His smile lit up the whole room as he unwrapped his gifts to reveal the magnificent artworks. Bruce spoke about his time on the swamp, recounting in much detail how Supermum had a nest which survived the major floods of 2010, only being half a metre above the top of the floodwater. Bruce expressed how honoured he was to be the guest of honour at such an enjoyable event. Everyone enjoyed good food, (ably catered by social enterprise, Tasty Az), good company, and to conclude the day, a lovely walk with Bruce. Bruce called in the birds, who obliged by watching on from high above in the trees. This rounded off a perfect afternoon for everyone.

Thank you to Kellie Grattidge and Danny Bendel for all your help organising the function and to Stephen Garth for recording the event on his camera. Looking forward to more enjoyable events with members and friends of FOHH.



Presenting Bruce with gifts in appreciation of his contribution to Heho conservation and a legacy of dedication and commitment to their survival.
Image: S Garth

Translocation News

By Angie Symon

Hi there! I'm Angie. I'm backfilling Nick's role as HeHo Field Officer whilst he is on leave.



Cardinia Creek

This May marked the 12-month anniversary of Helmeted Honeyeaters being returned to Bunurong Country at Cardinia Creek. In mid-April, we released an additional 6 HeHos to the site on a beautiful autumn day and had the pleasure of watching the newly released cohort corroboree with the resident birds. I am seeing a number of these birds persisting at the site and interacting with the resident birds. Now having been over a month since the release, I am feeling confident that these birds have settled in well.



O'Shannassy Catchment

At the end of April, we released nine HeHos to Site B at O'Shannassy. Post-release monitoring has included a combination of direct observations, radio-tracking and camera traps positioned at supplementary feeding stations. Whilst I am still seeing some chasing and minor aggression from resident birds to newly released birds, they seem to be settling in well and finding their way.



Trialling a new soft release method

This year, we trialled releasing birds from mesh gazebo-style tents for short holding periods, rather than the metal freestanding soft release aviaries we have used in the past. We set up five tents; each fitted with umbrella stands and milk-crates full of kunzea stems to provide cover and perching opportunities for the birds. Birds were transported into the tents from carry boxes and held for 2 hours before release.

The tents were a success – both for the birds and the humans involved in the setup and pack down. In the past, transporting and building five traditional freestanding aviaries required significant labour time, whereas the tents only took a few pairs of hands and about 3 hours to set up (compared to a couple of days for the aviaries).

Like anything, there are limitations with the tents, and the intention is only to use them for shorting holding periods. We were lucky to have release days with fine weather and little-to-no wind.



A new approach to soft release of the captive-raised birds using easy set up tents.

Images: A Symon

Introducing and Welcome to Linda Sijkpes

It's a pleasure to welcome Linda Sijkpes into some important roles supporting Heho conservation and habitat restoration.

Early in the year the Beyond Yellingbo Steering Committee warmly welcomed Linda as the new Beyond Yellingbo Co-ordinator. For 2 hours per week, she will be working with the owners of 21 properties along creeks and tributaries in the district to restore and extend habitat.

Linda has settled in and is enjoying her new role: *"It is great to be part of a project that brings landholders together to create habitat for not only the Helmeted Honeyeater but other native fauna"*



Introducing Linda Sijkpes, the new Beyond Yellingbo Co-ordinator and Nursery Manager.

Images: D Scott

We are also pleased to announce, the FoHH Committee have appointed Linda as the Nursery Manager at Yellingbo. Please feel free to drop into the nursery and say hi as Linda settles into this role in July. Linda brings with her qualifications in business and Horticulture (DipHort/ DipBus Swinburne) and wonderful local experience and networks as a Landcare Facilitator for the Cardinia Environment Coalition. We are looking forward to seeing how her expertise will shape nursery growing and operations the landscapes beyond it.

Citizen Science Matters

By Sue Tardif



As we say good-bye to May, it's worth recollecting that it heralds a significant time in the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater's calendar. This year, 23 May marked the 36th anniversary of the Friends forming. Few who were there in 1989 doubt that without the determination and foresight of the late Steve Craig, the Helmeted Honeyeater would likely be extinct today. As an employee of the then Victorian Department of Conservation and Environment, Steve broke with traditions. He went out on a limb. He recognised that what he and his workplace were doing wasn't nearly enough. Steve's conviction? It was the community's voice that would make decision makers and governments do something meaningful to reverse the species decline, not that of government employees. Steve was right. He called a public meeting on 23 May 1989, where the coordinated voice of more than 200 Victorians resulted in major steps forward. A committed group of community members demanded, and achieved, new recovery actions for the Helmeted Honeyeater, alongside the Friends formation to partner in those actions. Thirty-six years later, we thank those 200 Victorians, and we recognise the vision and determination of Steve.

May also signals National Volunteer Week from 18-24 May 2026. For many of us, volunteering is part of our upbringing, so it can be easy to overlook the fact that it is stepping into the unknown for others. We often have people attend the citizen science program who are taking their first steps into volunteering, and it can be nerve racking. What I love about our group of regular participants is that they welcome and engage with everyone, revealing their warm, generous nature.

The Macquarie Dictionary describes 'generous' as *"...someone willing to give money, time, or kindness freely (unselfish)... It implies a warm, noble, or open-handed nature."* Generous people, I find, rarely tell you about it. If it wasn't for generous people in our citizen science program (and elsewhere within the Friends programs), we couldn't run the volunteer involving and community events that we organise. A concrete example of that has come up recently. I organise the citizen science events, but due to health and family commitments, I can't always be at them. Our regulars all step in to co-lead the surveys and ensure everyone feels welcome. If it wasn't for Peter Trigg, Karin Seamer, Linda Sijpkens and Bruce Tardif's generosity in agreeing to be trained and take on the responsibility as our first-aid qualified reps, our program would stop. Simple as that. It's a load shared. Thank you all.

Beautiful Firetails, *Stagonopleura bella*, are one of those tiny bird species (averaging just 14 grams) that are seen most years, but infrequently, on the Cockatoo Creek arm of the reserve. They are striking birds with their barred plumage, black mask and thick red bill. It's the flash of vivid red plumage



A Beautiful Firetail, *Stagonopleura bella*

Image: B Tardif

on their rumps that is often what you notice first as they disappear into the sedges and grasses along the swamp edge. On 15 April, our Afternoon Bird & Frog Survey team were treated to a long, clear view of this species as it basked in the sun in a slightly different vegetation type to what we generally see them in, and on a different creek system. In the many years I've hosted events in YNCA, I haven't seen them at McColl's Swamp before. I love the afternoon surveys. In October 2024, these were added to what was previously a morning only citizen science program. I wondered if a shorter, afternoon survey would attract people who couldn't commit to a four-hour session with an early start, and whether we'd observe different species &/or behaviours from the mornings. The answer to both queries is yes! Two-hour, afternoon surveys are now a fixture of our program.



A Rufous Songlark, *Cincloramphus mathewsi*
Image: B Tardif

At our 29 April, Bird & Frog Survey we farewelled Gary as he enjoyed one last survey with us before moving interstate (literally waiting a week to start his long drive after our survey!). We hoped for a 'special' bird to reward his decision. Amongst a great list of species, we were all pretty excited to see six Southern Emu-wrens, *Stipiturus malachurus* (the first for Gary in YNCA, and 'lifers' for Michelle, Robert, Taran and Brian), three Rufous Songlark, *Cincloramphus mathewsi* (we've observed these a few times before, but this sighting was very out of season), six Jacky Winters, *Microeca fascinans* (five of which were hanging out with the Songlarks) and in Michelle's words, a particularly dandy male amongst the twenty-one Superb

Fairywrens, *Malurus cyaneus*. We all come away knowing how fortunate we are to both see these and share the experience with like-minded people.

Our citizen science program is scheduled to take in the six different seasons of the Wurundjeri Middle Yarra timeline calendar. Deep winter (June-July) is said to be the oldest time of the year in this calendar. Although it's very wet, with rough seas, several nomadic and migratory birds arrive in Victoria from Tasmania in June to escape the chillier southern winter and take advantage of seasonal food sources. In YNCA, one of those species is the Tasmanian Grey Fantail *Rhipidura albiscapa albiscapa*, which we got a great view of at our 29 April Bird & Frog Survey. We'll also be looking out for the arrival of Blue-winged Parrots *Neophema chrysostoma*. Listed as vulnerable to extinction, this species is a welcome sight in YNCA each year, although not easy to see before they take flight!



Bird & Frog survey team at YNCA on 29 April
Images: S Tardif

We don't just say, we believe it. Yellingbo is a special place.

As I open my email this morning, these words from Gary, enroute north, reaffirm why I volunteer in this program, *"Joining the friends and the citizen science surveys is just about the best decision I've made in the last few years. I've thoroughly enjoyed getting to know... everybody, as well as spending time in Yellingbo. I'll definitely be planning trips home around when I can join on future surveys."*

Our citizen science team would love to share our time, and what we know about YNCA with you.

Event details for the coming months are listed on our website:

<https://www.helmetedhoneyeater.org.au/get-involved/come-to-an-event-2/>

Seeds and Weeds

By Richard Case



Only one month to report on this time, a mixture of seeds and weeds.

In March, we went down to Parslow's Bridge. I intended to continue the Arum Lily removal, but conditions had suited the grass/herb layer and I couldn't find any Arum, despite having found four clumps of it in the November survey. While there, we made the best of it and pulled out a sack of rubbish, mostly near the car park.

On to the Woori Yallock Loop East Track, where we collected Prickly Currant-bush. It's getting late in the season, some bushes had seed and others didn't. We usually collect this in January - February. Quite a few wasps of both introduced species were around but they didn't seem bothered by us.

Next, we came across a new weed. A creeper. Thick, leathery, single leaves. Whiteish bell flowers. Huge fruit for the size of the plant, bigger than a golf ball and still green. Lots of white sap from broken stems. Aiden took photos and was able to identify it as a Moth Plant, AKA Cruel Plant or White Bladder-flower.

From South America. I hadn't seen it before but in 1991, a botanical report by *McMahon et al* showed it at Quadrat 81, downstream near the Maccy Road Bridge. I returned a few days later with mattock in hand and fixed it up. Then I searched Quadrat 81 but no sign of it there.

We continued our walk around the loop. Victorian Smooth Froglets and a few Brown Tree Frogs were calling. The birds were fairly quiet, but it was warm and we did catch a glimpse of an Eastern Whipbird skulking in the bushes.

Seeds & Weeds Dates

Sunday 14 June

Sunday 12 July

Sunday 9 August

Sunday 13 September

**We meet at the Nursery at 9.15am,
1217 Macclesfield Rd**

Events are automatically cancelled by weather events including wind gusts of 50 kph, thunderstorm, severe, extreme, catastrophic, and total fire ban days. Please check Yarra Glen forecast and Bureau of Meteorology warnings at 5pm the day before.

Beyond Yellingbo

By Dorothy Scott



In March, the Beyond Yellingbo initiative was recognised with an award from the Australian Wildlife Society. Attending the dinner in Sydney to accept the award and a \$5,000 donation for the project, Dorothy gave the following acceptance speech on behalf of the project partners:

Address at the Australian Wildlife Society President's Dinner for the Community Wildlife Conservation 2025 Sydney, March 20

It is an enormous honour to receive this award on behalf of four organisations which came together a decade ago to secure the future of the critically endangered Helmeted Honeyeater, the avian emblem of Victoria. They are the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater; Macclesfield Landcare; Johns Hill Landcare; and Monbulk Landcare.

Over 150 years of habitat loss through the clearing of land and the draining of vast swamps that stretched to Westernport Bay, destroyed the habitat of this bird. By 2010, at the time of the Millennial Drought, there were only 50 of these precious birds alive in the wild, all in one location, a nature conservation reserve in Yellingbo, 55 kms east of Melbourne.

Many people and organisations, including Zoos Victoria at Healesville Sanctuary with their captive breeding program, were working hard to save this species. But as more captive bred Helmeted Honeyeaters were released into the tiny wild population, the lack of suitable habitat was becoming an urgent priority. Where could the birds go, given that each breeding pair needs one third of a hectare, and the habitat in the reserve was insufficient?

So, in 2017 our four groups came together and developed a plan – BEYOND YELLINGBO, to create environmental corridors along the creeks and tributaries that flow into and from Yellingbo so that the birds could literally go “beyond Yellingbo”. With philanthropic support to employ a part-time facilitator, a local conservationist with great communication skills, we reached out to private landholders along the creeks through neighbour-to-neighbour introductions, not through a government top-down approach. And we were absolutely delighted when the community came on board – and how! Ten years on and more than 120 properties have been part of our Beyond Yellingbo initiative to restore and extend the habitat of the Helmeted Honeyeater, together constituting more than 300 hectares of prime potential habitat.

We have planted vegetation on one another's places, mostly done with our own hands in the earth, helped landholders obtain funding for weed control and facilitated management of feral animals. Now there are over 200 Helmeted Honeyeaters in the wild across three sites, an achievement of many

people and organisations. Our community has contributed to this collective effort, not just to secure the future of the Helmeted Honeyeater but helping secure the future of many other endangered and threatened native species which share the same habitat. These include the Growling Grass Frog on the ground, the Lowland Leadbeater's Possum in the trees and the Powerful Owl soaring in the night sky. It is slow, painstaking work but the lesson is clear – that if it takes a village to raise a child, then it takes a whole community to save a species. And there is another lesson - communities can be strengthened by coming together to pursue a common conservation vision, and we live in times when we need our communities to be strong.

We have come a long way, and we have a long way to go. The future of the Helmeted Honeyeater remains uncertain but now we have hope in our hearts. For while saving a species is an end in itself, working together to achieve this goal brings a blessing to us - it sows the seed of hope and lessens a little of the profound despair we feel in the face of species extinction. We thank you deeply for this award which affirms our work, sustains our spirits and strengthens our commitment to continue.

Hope in the Human Heart

*A precious pair of Helmeted Honeyeaters
on the precipice of extinction,
only a few remaining in the wild.
One fire or disease could destroy them all
and yet
and yet
they survive,
as does hope in the human heart
when we rejoice in seeing their number grow,
when we work hard to heal their habitat
and in so doing we heal our soul
from our sorrow for this land.
For what did the Persian poet Rumi say 900 years
ago?
There are countless ways to kneel and kiss the earth.
There are countless ways to find your way home
again.*

Emeritus Professor Dorothy Scott AM
Life member of the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater
Member of Macclesfield Landcare Group



Mitchell Brennan, a Director of the Board of the Australian Wildlife Society and Dorothy Scott accepting the award on behalf of Beyond Yellingbo partners

Images: D Scott

Nursery News

By Stephanie Ross

Since the publishing of the last HeHo Herald, there have been some major changes around the nursery. In mid-March, our co-managers Anna Whitelaw and Marita Hanigan were made redundant in favour of employing a single Nursery Manager to lead the nursery into the future; a job which neither were keen to do on their own. The loss of their presence has been deeply felt, and we sincerely thank them for their service and wish them all the very best.



New table numbers and species signs

Images: S Ross

Sue Bendel and I have stepped up to the plate temporarily and have been keeping things running, along with great support from our wonderful volunteers. During this time, we have been smashing out orders and doing our very best to keep on top of the growing of new plants. We have introduced table ID numbers and plant identification signs which will assist in setting up a much-needed inventory system and is proving invaluable for our volunteers to assist with picking orders and maintenance of the plants. Positive feedback from volunteers, customers and stakeholders is keeping our spirits buoyed in this trying and busy time. With the recent unseasonably warm weather and the addition of a little rain, we've also been quite busy with retail, selling out as fast as I can restock. We have also had a few new

volunteers joining our ranks and hope to get some more soon.

And last but not least, with the Committee appointing Linda Sipjke as the new Nursery Manager, we very much look forward to seeing her at the nursery in the coming weeks and wish her good luck in the new role. Sue and I will continue to play supporting roles until Linda finds her feet.



L-R: Common Heath, *Epacris impressa*, in flower, plenty of Long purple-flag, *Patersonia occidentalis*, for sale and Common Correa, *Correa reflexa* putting on a show in nursery garden.

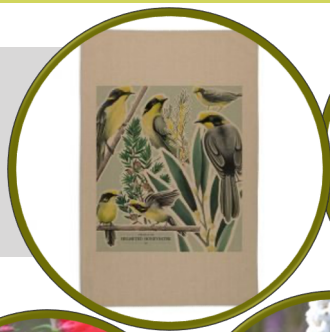
Images: S Ross



A Heho-inspired chilly season

Cooking up a feast?

Check out our Heho aprons and tea towels



Gifts that
will be loved
by your flock!



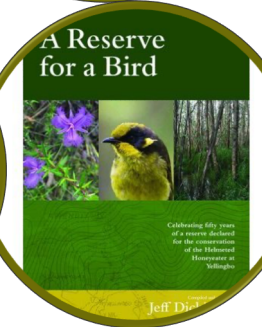
Looking for a living gift?

Visit the Nursery and find a gift to
support wildlife-friendly gardens



Ready for cooler weather?

Wurundjeri's Waring (Wombat) season
is the coolest and wettest time of
year, and a good time to rug up.



Planning some reading?

Check out our range of
Heho-inspired books, you could
enjoy over a warm cuppa

Want to wear your love?

These ear-rings, brooch or
tote bag will get noticed!



Sustainable conservation

Financial sustainability of FoHH is crucial in maintaining long-term conservation projects, works and roles for the survival of the Heho. Funding is secured through grants, donations, bequests, merchandise and nursery sales.

Donations

Personal and in-kind donations enhance and support a variety of ongoing and established FoHH conservation projects and events.

Our heartfelt thanks for the generosity of *all* personal donations we receive through various ways. The following people have donated through the GiveNow platform and agreed to be published...

Jonathan McConchie Gary Dickson Virginia Wallace Robin Young Virginia Plummer Natasha Sinclair Gary Dickson

Shop

Purchasing Heho merchandise or indigenous plants from our nursery contributes to FoHH financial sustainability, advocacy and local revegetation.



Shop online to find Heho gifts, books and apparel by visiting the FoHH website or scanning the QR code.



Visit FoHH Indigenous Plant Nursery in Yellingbo for local plants at great prices. Check the FoHH website for opening hours and days.

Scan to shop

Give

Contribute to community programs that benefit your community and environment or consider a bequest in your will to support FoHH's conservation efforts.



*If you shop at IGA, you can nominate FoHH on your **Community Benefits Card** and 0.5% of your shopping docket will be directed to us.*



Are you considering leaving a gift to the Friends in your will? Use the QR code to find all the relevant information you'll need on FoHH website.

*You can donate your refunds from **Container Deposit Scheme** to FoHH by selecting us as the registered donor using charity ID - C2000009578 or the barcode above.*





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Image: M Serong

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FoHH respectfully acknowledge the Wurundjeri People as the Traditional Custodians of the lands known as Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve. We recognise their continuing connection to land, water and wildlife and pay our respect to Elders past and present.



FoHH would like to acknowledge the ongoing support from Yarra Ranges Shire for printing and distribution of the Heho Herald.