



Murnong Trail Notes

#2, May 2016

- **What's down there at this time of year?**

Much of Ballarat's plant growth shuts down for the 'dry', and this season's dry was l-o-n-g. But at last the drenching rain has come, and so has new growth. Among it, the resprouting **murnong** is visible by its narrow, toothed leaves. The red colour of **sundew** seedlings is also noticeable. And at the other end of the scale, our **grass trees** are in flower – in the bush, and also alongside the staffroom.



You could ask a member of the SusCom or Green Group (see group mugshot on next page) to show you around at lunchtime.

- **We now manage our Land for Wildlife**

In 1995, Damascus College sought **Land for Wildlife** status for its bushland, but was turned down because the bush was too weed-infested. In 2014-15 many pest trees (pines) were removed by our Groundsman, Rob Jans; woody weeds were sprayed by a contractor, and the Green Group and community volunteers did clean-up work on several weekends. Our application was re-sent in late 2015, and the start of the Trail now sports a Land for Wildlife sign. Land for Wildlife status is voluntary recognition that our bushland is more than space with a few trees; it has intrinsic value as an ecosystem. We are still discovering new plant, animal and bird species down there. Our stewardship of this land is also a practical outcome of our commitment to the Year of Mercy, in our own backyard.

Most recently, the gorse along the back fence has been sprayed. It won't be gone in a flash; gorse doesn't do that. But we're well on the way to our goal of minimum weed infestation.

- **National Park syndrome**

Parks all over the world struggle with this one. We have something of value to conserve, and we need people to know what it means. So we created a trail to interpret the bushland for our students, and it's good to see it getting use. Please impress on students, though, that this is a habitat for flora and fauna – especially ask them to keep to the trail, and not to wander or run across bushland, even over the firebreaks. It is so easy to damage small plants accidentally, and to deter birds, reptiles and small mammals from making the area their home.

- **CPDA, Friday 6th May**

The May CPDA team focussed on weed removal. One of our most pernicious weeds is actually a garden escape, the pretty bluebell creeper or sollya (*Billardiera heterophylla*). It's a Western Australian native whose seeds are spread by birds, and it strangles native growth. There's now a lot less of it down the back. Thanks team, you were great.



- **Enviroweek**

We will be showcasing the trail during Enviroweek, September 13th – 17th. I'm hoping that Bryon Powell from Wadawurrung (the Ballarat Wauthurung Corporation) will come back and lead some interpretative walks along the trail. Let us know if you or your class would be interested in a guided tour, like that experienced by our recent visitors to the College from La Reunion.



- **Nest boxes**

On CPDA work, we watched as a treecreeper flew into its nest in this gum hollow. But there are precious few bird hollows around in our forest, so two years ago, **Neale Thompson** created some nest boxes for a range of native species, with the help of his VCAL class. This year, they were finally put in place by a long-time friend of the College, **Paddy Arnts**, and you can see them from the Trail. Thanks to all concerned in providing this vital piece in the forest's biodiversity.



- **Interested in helping?**

Can you help conserve the biodiversity of our bushland? Use the Contact Groups **Sustainability_Committee** (staff) or **GreenGroup** (students) in Outlook.

I'm looking at a **working bee** for the first Saturday of the July holidays, with a focus on removing piles of fallen wood and checking last year's plantings so we can fill the gaps. Please let me know if you would be interested in joining us. A good workout + environmental stewardship = wellbeing to the max.

On behalf of the Green Group and the Sustainability Committee,



David Neate

Sustainability Coordinator

Damascus College