



U3A ... Learn, Laugh, Live Mallacoota & District Newsletter

VOL 18 No 3 May—June 2023

Presidents Desk

Hello Friends

Autumn is upon us with some cooler, dry weather. Early April wasn't good for star gazing. The last few nights have been beautiful. It was very exciting to see the interest in the solar eclipse at Exmouth.

These warm, windless days are a good time for reading your latest U3A newsletter. If you missed some of our Term 1 presentations you can catch up now. Check out our program for Term 2. And there are more articles on various topics to enrich your day.

By now you will all have received an email about the upcoming AGM on Friday 5th May at 2pm. Please read the attached Annual Report and Financial Statements. All the committee positions will be open for election at that meeting. The current committee members are all willing to continue, however, new volunteers would be welcome. We have a great time together preparing our programs for you.

The AGM will be followed by an exciting presentation by Pat and Mike Coupar so please come to the AGM and stay for the adventure!

Hope to see you there.

Fiona Raitt

“TIMBILLICA” Birds, Weather and History.

Robert and Irene Allan farm “Timbillica”, on the Wallagaraugh River just across the NSW border. Four generations of the Allan family have



worked this country. Irene was born into the Becker family at Maramingo.

The first members of the Allan family to arrive in Australia had close links with prominent identities in local history with the first to arrive – James – working

for Ben Boyd as a carpenter, then worked for Captain Stevenson and married his daughter. Robert came later.

Present Robert showed a certificate of conditional purchase for the first block selected at Narrabarba (20kms closer to Eden). The conditions included clearing and living on the land. This portion was 50 acres costing £2 in 1865. Other areas were subsequently purchased with the current holding having 19 titles.

The provision of official rain observations commenced in 1909 with the rain gauge being sent from weather officials to Eden, by boat. Robert has been taking the readings for 63 years. He showed a chart in which the dates for floods and fires correspond well with years of high and low rainfall respectively. Major floods in 1919 and 1971 were “once in 100 years flood.”

The range of black & white, historic photographs were fascinating. Shown included the Genoa Rifle Club complete with large bore Martini-Henry rifles. A member of the Allan family rode to Towamba to compete in shooting competitions. The large, simple, sturdy, wood and tin, early house showed the separate kitchen building thereby reducing fire risk. Within the main house complex a small, separate room had been built to serve as the local Post Office.

Horses were the main form of transport, although heavy loads were pulled by the much slower bullock wagons. Pushbikes came into use later, before motorbikes came into favour.

Irene spoke about bird recording at Timbillica. She had been home educated, at Maramingo, through a radio correspondence system. In the early 1950's Irene became a member of the Gould League of Bird Lovers. This society later became the Bird Observers Club (and subsequently part of Birdlife Australia). She displayed her collection of the attractive badges worn by members of these clubs.



Among the regular birds visiting Timbillica were Emus. The emus visited the farmhouse to feed on the fallen pears or, if no pears had fallen, would jump and pluck the fruit from the trees. Kookaburras also came to visit the kids along with a very friendly King Parrot.

Ken Simpson (author of a popular field guide) encouraged the Beckers to record Swifts. These fascinating, slow-flying, migratory birds are common and seasonal over most of Australia. The white-throated needletail is East Coast and hinterland only.

In 2009 Prof. Mike Tarburton recruited Irene as a reporter for his study of Swifts, which she has been doing since then. In the season (from October to March) information on the number of birds seen and aspects of the weather is passed in phone conversations. Swifts often fly low across paddocks



feeding on the insects disturbed by cattle. A photo showed Swifts flying low over the water in the billabong, on the Timbillica river flat, skimming a mouthful from the surface.

On one occasion a flock of 80 Pelicans landed on the

billabong. White-bellied Sea-Eagles are more common visitors, feeding on Eels. On one occasion a Sea-Eagle had a major battle with a Wedge-tailed Eagle leaving the Sea-Eagle sitting in a tree for 2 days to recover.

As well as birds, other iconic animals are seen.

Echidnas visit. Irene showed a photograph of a large Goanna sitting on the battery array.

Robert continued on farm life over the different eras. He showed pictures of horses at work hauling hay wagons and other produce. The horses required maize to be grown as feed. This grain was also dribbled from a wagon as a means of luring pigs to walk to market in Eden. The green maize crop formed a refuge when a fire threatened the property. Other crops grown included potatoes, sold to fish and chip shops in both Eden and Mallacoota. Beans and pumpkins were shipped to Melbourne for sale. The farm's first tractor had steel wheels and a paraffin/petrol motor.

Robert returned to comments on the weather with pictures of snow on the ground at Timbillica in 1982, also floods in various years. This included photos of versions of the Genoa bridge, noting that the 1971 flood covered the deck of the bridge, where a land holder had moved his sheep for refuge! The wettest month was June 1978 with 521 mm of rain (on the 3rd of that month 215mm fell: one of three days recording over 200 mm).

Irene concluded with some comments about birds following the 2019/20 fire. A week after the fires she observed Honeyeaters feeding on the ground. Bowerbirds built a bower with many blue items and some yellow. Irene placed a red item in the bower only to find it was rejected. She noted that the birds and other animals, including reptiles, have recovered much more quickly than the trees.

We are grateful for Irene and Robert sharing some of their family history in the district, including their family's remarkable work recording weather over 110 years and bird observations over 60 years. If you missed the talk we have a recording which can be made available.

And the men went to work not the wife,
The cheese never needed a fridge,
And the bread was so crusty and hot,
The Children were seldom unhappy,
And the Wife was content with her lot.

I remember the milk from the bottle,
With the yummy cream on the top,
Our dinner came hot from the oven,
And not from a freezer; or shop.
The kids were a lot more contented,
They didn't need money for kicks,
Just a game with their friends in the road,
And sometimes the Saturday flicks.

...
I remember the slap on my backside,
And the taste of soap if I swore
Anorexia and diets weren't heard of
And we hadn't much choice what we wore.

Do you think that bruised our ego?
Or our initiative was destroyed?
We ate what was put on the table
And I think life was better enjoyed.
Author Unknown



You can be up-to-date with all activities

Facebook at U3A Mallacoota

The Real Mallacoota Community page

Mallacoota Community page

and our regular emails.



Peter Mason: Gabo Island

The Community Clubrooms were approaching capacity when people gathered for Peter Mason's colourful presentation about of extensive experiences visiting Gabo Island over five decades.

Peter first visited the Island at the age of 14, in the 1970's, accompanying local fisherman, Dave Casement, delivering a load of stores. Visits in the 80's were with Dave Allen, in the abalone co-op patrol boat. More recently, his planned June visits have not been possible due to COVID restrictions or excessively rough seas preventing boat access.

He mentioned that day trips by boat are presented, sea conditions permitting, from Mallacoota. Pre-booked fly-in visits are offered by operators from Merimbula Airport. The tide is too strong to allow crossing on foot from the mainland, as was often the mode in the past.

His first image was an aerial view of the island by a visiting pilot, which he regarded as having three components: a scrubby central area separating the grassier Top and Bottom areas. The landing area is at Santa Barbara Bay. Peter commented about the risks of



Photo: Craig, the pilot.

picking stuff up from the sea-bed here: Moray Eels will attack you!

On shore a small building is very old: possibly one of the oldest remaining buildings in Victoria. At one stage it had been twice the current length. The Army had billets there in the past. History is everywhere on the Island with many stone artefacts from the activities of indigenous people. It is thought the name 'Gabo' is from an Aboriginal pronunciation of "Cape Howe". The island has also been used as a cattle run. Only 3 very large cattle remain.

The dominant building on the island is the lighthouse. It is the second tallest in Australia and built of hand hewn, Gabo Island red granite blocks. Some major public buildings in Melbourne have foundations from this source. The spiral staircase up to the light station is

cast iron. The guides to take people up to the top are specially trained.

When refurbishing one of the older residences on the island it was found to have drill holes in the floor to drain water from the tidal wave of 22

September 1895. Peter

showed an image of the high water mark from that event and indicated on another, of the current settlement where it was located: an astonishing distance up from the shoreline - both the current shore and as it would have been in 1895.

There are still many penguins on the Island, although numbers have decreased since it was the biggest colony of Little Penguins in the world. Peter hadn't disturbed them by taking photographs but did have a "Happy Feet" image of their tracks in the sand. The Penguins, and Muttonbirds, nest in burrows in the grass.

Birds of prey are also very evident, especially Kestrels which perch on the chimney of the accommodation (and window ledges of the lighthouse). Peter also showed images of a Black-shouldered Kite, several of a White-bellied Sea-Eagle (he has seen up to 10 at one time) and one of a less common (possibly a first observation for the Island) immature Spotted Harrier.

The Island is well endowed with marine mammals. Showing an image of basking seals, Peter commented that there are now both Australian and New Zealand Fur Seals to be found. They all flee the water for the safety of the rock shelves when Orcas come by. Some researchers feel that the increased number of seals partly explains the decreased number of Penguins on the Island.

Peter showed several images of Humpback whales breaching, including one of a mother and calf emerging together: great agility for animals weighing up to 40 tonnes. Another image showed a mainly submerged whale approaching an abalone boat moored just off the Island. These animals are recovering from the impact of whaling. The annual whale migration along the east coast occurs between May and November as they first head north to breed and then return south for summer in Antarctic waters. On an October day Peter saw up to 200 whales pass.





As well as the Humpbacks Peter has recorded Pilot and and Brydes Whales and Orcas. In answer to a question from the floor, he explained that Sperm Whales – although washed-up dead, on shore recently - are usually only found out near the Continental Shelf: at its closest, about 30 kms offshore.

We are grateful to Peter sharing his experiences of the island over many years. It is easy to see why Gabo is regarded by many locals as a special place, a refuge from the mainland.



Program for Term 2, 2023

Regular Monthly Meetings

In the Community Clubrooms, 2pm for a cuppa

Start 2:20pm

Friday **28 April**, Keith Simpson, 'The Life of a Dusky: the flathead and the fisherman'

Friday **5 May**, **AGM at 2pm** followed by Mike and Pat Coupar, 'The Galapagos of the Southern Ocean: Macquarie Island and New Zealand's subantarctic islands'

Friday **2 June**, Bob Fisher, 'Early Bushwalking in Tasmania's World Heritage Area'

SPECIAL EVENT

Saturday **10 June, 2023**

4pm.

Tim Allard, CEO of the Australian Wildlife Conservancy

will address AWC's science-based conservation and land management projects covering 12.9 million hectares across Australia

Regular Weekly Meetings

Tuesdays, 3-4:15pm, starting 2 May, current affairs discussion with afternoon tea, in the Church meeting room.

Wednesdays, Mah-jong, contact group leader for details

Other Events: watch our Facebook page for details:

- Star Gazing evenings, weather permitting
- Pickle Ball in conjunction with Mallacoota Youth & Sports Club
- Governance for not-for-profit Organisations covering topics such as: committee members' duties, insurance and indemnity; basic bookkeeping using Excel, from bank statement to financial statements.

ANZAC Day



Photo credit: RSL Victoria

Last year's dawn service at Stevenson's Point drew a large crowd including a number from our U3A .

U3A Mallacoota has supported the Anzac Day commemoration in Mallacoota for many years. Bob Fisher represented the U3A at the wreath laying in 2022 and will do so again in 2023.

Bob also gave a very moving presentation to our U3A in 2022 about his family's service during WW2.

***"They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them."***

The Four Seasons of Timbilica

Autumn is here, the mornings are cool,
My jumper is on (that's usually the rule).
It's also quite foggy, can't see very far,
There's dew on the rooftop and
all over the car.

So soon will be *Winter*, the winds
will be cold,
Coming straight off the snow,
(it's not good if you're old!)
The grass in the paddocks, very
short and quite brown,
As the frost settles in so cold in
the ground.

Nothing will grow much on the short *winter* days,
And everything's waiting for those warmer sun rays.
I already hear the sweet little song,
Of the lovely blue wren as it bounces along.

Then WOW it's arrived, *Spring* time is here,



I swear I can hear all the birds give a cheer!
They are frantically building their nests in the trees,
The wind slightly warmer as it rustles the leaves.

The *Spring* is my favourite, all the orchids are out,
The paddocks are green and there's rain clouds
about.

The cattle are happy they are
munching away,
And I just like to watch all the
young calves at play.

Then comes the *Summer*, some-
times it's a worry,
With hot north winds things dry
out in a hurry.

But we just soldier on and hope for

the best,
Then it's all back to *Autumn* and, well, you know the
rest.

Irene Allan
April 2023



Bandicoots



Wondering what could be making conical shaped diggings in your lawn?

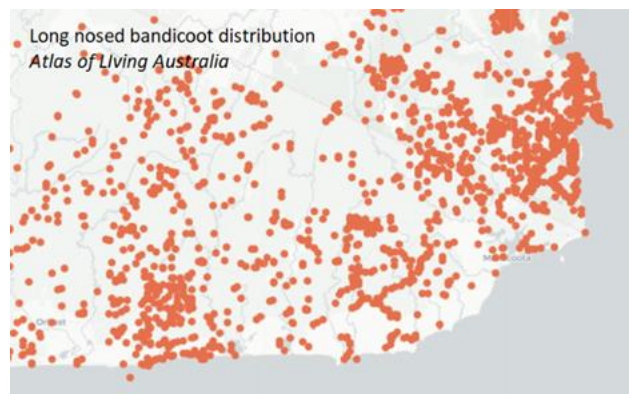
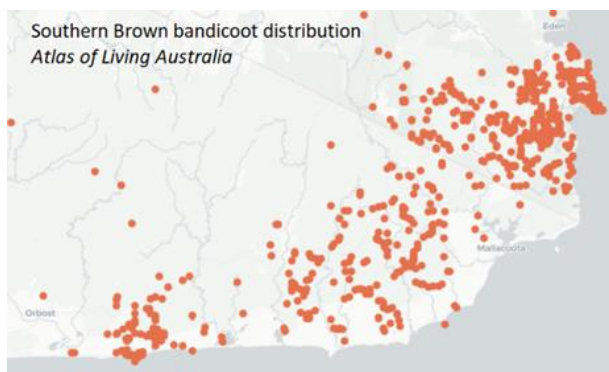
Long nosed bandicoots are well known culprits. At Karbeethong we have passed the worst of the rabbit plague but now have an abundance of bush rats and strange conical shaped holes in our lawn. Neighbours who trap and release bush rats have caught several bandicoots, which they release back onto their property (whereas bush rats are taken to the Miners track for release). Bandicoots can be seen by the road, driving back home at night.

Bandicoots are about the size of a rabbit and have a pointy snout, humped back, thin tail and large hind feet. Southern brown bandicoots are the largest, about the size of a rabbit, have a relatively short nose, but are often confused with the long-nosed bandicoot. Below is a photo of a southern brown bandicoot taken in at the Cranbourne Botanic Gardens, and night vision photo of a long-nosed bandicoot in a garden here in Mallacoota (photos by Caroline Jones). Bandicoots are one of the marsupial species performing the role of 'ecological engineers'. Their digging for food has the same effect as turning over a garden bed: aerates the soil, adds compostable material into the soil and generally improves the soil structure. So, their intentions for your lawn are good!

It seems that the experience around Kinglake some years after the 2009 fires was that long-nosed bandicoots bounced back well in Kinglake National Park.

Southern Ark has done a lot of work since the Gippsland fires to control predators and to study the impact on small- to medium-sized ground-dwelling mammals, such as antechinus, potoroos, and bandicoots, which require a complex understorey with a diverse shrub layer and a ground cover of logs, leaf litter and woody debris for optimal foraging. Some of you may recall the recent presentation by Andrew Murray of Southern Ark in the Community Clubrooms to report on this work.

The oldest record of bandicoots in the Atlas of Living Australia is 1907. It and many of the earlier records are from museum specimens rather than field observations. The ALA is a repository of information from museum data and field trips, etc. The number of records ticks up from 2010 onwards, with peaks in some years and seasons reflecting the timing of studies.



Southern Ark's 31 March 2023 project newsletter reports that their camera-trapping program across 685 sites in east Gippsland has recorded an increase in long-nosed bandicoots from 117 of those sites in 2021 to 466 sites in 2022.

The current local experience in Mallacoota confirms that the population of these small mammals continues to bounce back from the fires particularly after a few wet years and strong regrowth.