



# Year in review

Kara Kara Conservation  
Management Network Inc.

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*"Children are the future  
of biodiversity conservation..."*

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# President's report



As President, it is my privilege to welcome you to the Kara Kara CMN's *Year in Review* for 2017, our annual reflection on what we have achieved and how these achievements measure up against the objectives stated in our *Strategic Plan*. Our achievements are detailed elsewhere in this Review and are summarised in the Scoreboard on page 3; however, I will discuss the highlights here.

During the year, we successfully completed several funded on-ground programs. Notably, Round 2 of the Threatened Species Protection Initiative funding saw us complete revegetation projects using mixed native tube-stock including seedlings of threatened Buloke; a species that was once widespread across Victoria's western plains but is now in serious decline. We also installed nest boxes on several private properties to supplement existing habitat for the threatened Brush-tailed Phascogale, established our own

seed production area at Emu and worked collaboratively with other regional groups in an effort to save the iconic Silver Banksia.

Pleasingly, our habitat improvement programs are gaining momentum, drawing progressively more interest from landholders who are wanting to protect biodiversity on their properties.

Aside from our on-ground programs, community engagement was a key focus of our activities in 2017. Designed to raise public awareness of the Network while promoting the protection and enhancement of regional biodiversity, these activities were diverse and ranged from public events and sponsorships, to increased engagement with schools and other community groups.

Allied to our community engagement efforts was the development of some additions to our communications tool-kit. We developed a Kara Kara CMN information brochure and took a dive into social media with the launch of our new Facebook page. The latter was a little daunting; however, we saw this process as essential to expanding our 'reach' to target a new and younger audience while complementing our existing online website presence.

Of course, there is always more to be done. Our recent success in attracting funding through a Biodiversity On-ground Action Grant will see us expand our efforts in 2018 to further enhance existing habitat for threatened and declining species, while continuing our landscape connectivity programs.

The New Year will also see us begin the process of reviewing and revising the Network's *Strategic Plan*. Our inaugural five-year Plan has served us well, helping to steer our projects and programs while ensuring we remain true to our vision and objectives. That said, five years on there are opportunities for improvement as we shift our focus towards collaborative, landscape-scale projects and increased community engagement, while keeping pace with evolving funding and administrative regimes.

In this context, there are two factors that will influence the development of our new Plan. The first, at a Federal level, is the commencement of a new funding round under Phase 2 of the National Landcare Program. The second is the outcome of the Victorian Government's Biodiversity Response Planning Co-Design Workshops; a long-winded name for a collaborative process currently underway that is developing a new framework for implementation of the Government's recently-adopted *Biodiversity Plan 2037*.

Exactly what these new and/or revised funding regimes will mean for the Network and other grass-roots conservation groups within our region will become clearer in the course of time; however, emerging themes, certainly at a State level, are that funded projects will be at a landscape or ecosystem scale, and be collaborative efforts involving partners across a number of levels including traditional owners.

In closing, my thanks to our Committee of volunteers and our Facilitators for your contribution and dedicated efforts during the year. Your collective support makes my role so much easier.

Chris Campbell

President

## Kara Kara CMN Committee and management 2016/2017

### **Committee:**

President: Chris Campbell

Vice-President and Treasurer: Russell Steel

Secretary: Brenda Proctor

General Committee members:

Jeroen Van Veen (Bush Heritage Australia)

Debra Saxon-Campbell

Helen Yuille

**Joint Facilitators:** John Boadle and Debra Saxon-Campbell

# 2017 Scoreboard

Activity type	Corresponding strategy*
<b>On-ground habitat protection/improvement programs</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completed activities under Threatened Species Protection Initiative (Round 2) including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Installation of 20 nest-boxes on private properties to benefit the Brush-tailed Phascogale (<i>Phascogale tapoatafa</i>); and</li> <li>Fencing and revegetation of 7ha of bio-link across three sites on private land, with native tube-stock including Buloke (<i>Allocasuarina luehmannii</i>) seedlings.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Established a seed production area and erected fencing to protect an Ephemeral Soak site on private property at Emu.</li> <li>Co-ordinated weed control across several sites in the Kara Kara National Park.</li> </ul>	2 1,2 1,2 3
<b>Building partnerships/relationships</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established nest-box construction as a regular part of curriculum activities for woodworking students at two regional secondary colleges;</li> <li>Partnered with Central Victoria Silver Banksia Group, Victorian Volcanic Plains CMN, Friends of the Forgotten Woodlands and local landholders in a project to locate, map and monitor the genetic health of Silver Banksia (<i>B. marginata</i>) populations in central and south-western Victoria.</li> <li>Fact-finding visit to Euroa Arboretum to view Silver Banksia plantation.</li> <li>Assisted Amaryllis Environmental Consulting with annual native orchid surveys on public land.</li> <li>Maintained and expanded relationships with local landholders, regional schools (primary and secondary), Bush Heritage Australia and Parks Victoria's Dja Dja Wurrung Ranger Team.</li> <li>Provided input into the Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Corporation's community consultation process to develop a Management Plan for regional parks.</li> <li>Maintained dialogue with DELWP Fire Management.</li> </ul>	1,2  1,2 1,2 2,6  1,2,10  2,10 2,7
<b>Community engagement/education</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular eNews updates to members and friends of the Kara Kara CMN linked to corresponding articles on our website.</li> <li>Sponsored a photographic competition at the St Arnaud Agricultural Show.</li> <li>Hosted a <i>Gardening for Wildlife</i> seminar in St Arnaud.</li> <li>Developed a monitoring program and activities for Donald High School students during Environment Week.</li> <li>Presentation to St Arnaud Rotary Club.</li> <li>KKCMN profile and biodiversity and conservation-related articles in St Arnaud community newsletter.</li> <li>Hosted an information booth at St Arnaud Community Festival.</li> <li>Regular updates to Kara Kara CMN Facebook page.</li> </ul>	All 1,2,10 1,2  1,2 1,2,10  1,2,10 1,2,10 All



Activity type	Corresponding strategy*
<b>Public policy/advocacy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participated in DELWP Biodiversity Response Planning Co-design Workshops to shape a collaborative framework for delivery of <i>Biodiversity Plan 2037</i>.</li> </ul>	All
<b>Monitoring and evaluation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commenced a program of monitoring past Network projects.</li> <li>Established monitoring points for all revegetation projects.</li> </ul>	All 1,2
<b>Research</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued quarterly woodland bird surveys.</li> </ul>	1,2,4,9
<b>Building capacity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Launched a KKCMN Facebook page.</li> <li>Developed a KKCMN information brochure.</li> <li>Purchased two nest-box cameras and an audio recorder for threatened species monitoring.</li> <li>Developed formal operating policies and procedures for the KKCMN Facilitators and volunteers.</li> </ul>	All All 2,4,5,9 10

**\* Key to strategies (as specified in the Kara Kara CMN Strategic Plan 2013-2018):**

- 1: Maintain and increase landscape connectivity
- 2: Protect, maintain and increase quality habitat
- 3: Manage invasive weeds
- 4: Coordinate control of introduced predators
- 5: Manage total grazing pressure
- 6: Protect native orchids
- 7: Influence appropriate fire regimes
- 8: Firewood management
- 9: Reduce impacts from inter-specific competition
- 10: Maintain the ongoing viability of the Kara Kara CMN



# Our achievements in 2017

## On-ground habitat protection and improvement programs

When it comes to remnant native woodland, our region has 'good bones'. The St Arnaud Range, which incorporates the Kara Kara National Park and adjacent Reserves, is like a gigantic forested spine that stretches from Moonambel in the south to just north of St Arnaud. These publicly-owned forests are augmented by significant areas of native woodland on private land, particularly to the east, which have potential linkages through to the forests around Moliagul and beyond into central Victoria. Collectively, these woodlands support a diverse range of vegetation communities and habitats.

Protecting and improving the quality of these habitats is a fundamental part of the Kara Kara CMN's vision, as is linking gaps in the forest 'skeleton' to the east and west of the St Arnaud Range to promote wildlife movement and dispersal through the landscape.

Once again, these objectives were the key drivers of our on-ground programs during 2017, but with the additional focus on expanding and improving habitat for several species that are threatened and declining in our region.

### Action for threatened species

Using funding secured under the Threatened Species Protection Initiative (Round 2), we installed the first tranche of 20 nest-boxes at selected sites to supplement existing habitat for the Brush-tailed Phascogale (*Phascogale tapoatafa*); a small carnivorous mammal also known as the Tuan. Pleasingly, the Network has been successful in obtaining funding to expand this important program over the next three years, and several landholders have expressed interest in having nest-boxes installed on their properties. Nest-box monitoring will commence in 2018.



We also revegetated about seven hectares of land across three sites on private properties at Tottington and Carapooee using a mix of native tube-stock, including seedlings of threatened Buloke. These areas were fenced to exclude grazing stock and the young, highly palatable Buloke seedlings were guarded to provide them with extra protection.

Another on-ground initiative was the establishment of a seed production area on private property at Emu. This project has a dual aim: firstly, to provide a reliable source of seed for our revegetation projects into the future, and secondly, for use as a 'seed bank' for propagating Buloke, Silver Banksia and other locally rare and threatened species. Additional fencing was also erected at the same site to protect an ephemeral soak which only came to our notice after the period of good rainfall during spring 2016.

Our participation in the regional Silver Banksia project saw us engage in a variety of activities during the year. On the ground, we identified local remnant Silver Banksia populations within our region and visited each of these to take leaf samples for genetic testing. Longer-term, the objective of this project is to use seed and cuttings collected from the populations identified to be the healthiest genetically to establish Silver Banksia 'orchards' at several locations around the state. Some of the seedlings these orchards produce will be reintroduced into regional remnant Banksia populations to give them a 'genetic power boost', while others will be used in future revegetation projects.



Riparian weed control is an ongoing priority for the Network, particularly on public land. In 2017, we identified weed infestations across several sites in the Kara Kara National Park and co-ordinated a Landcare-funded spraying program using local and traditional owner contractors.

## Building lasting partnerships

Delivery of our on-ground programs relies on forming mutually-beneficial and lasting partnerships at a community level, with government and like-minded organisations and individuals.

### Working with schools

Children are the future of biodiversity conservation, so we are always cognisant of opportunities to involve them in our activities.

A new and mutually-engaging relationship that arose during the year was with teachers and students of the Navarre and Moonambel Primary Schools (pictured right), who accepted our invitation to participate in a planting day on private property at Tottington. Our invitation has since been reciprocated to the delight of several of our Committee members, who have attended school and community events at Navarre.



At a secondary level, the construction of our Phascogale nest-boxes has now become an established part of the curriculum for woodworking students at the St Arnaud and Donald Secondary Colleges. Now that further funding has been secured, our aim is to invite other regional colleges to participate in the program as well as not-for-profit community groups.

### Silver Banksia project

Last year, we reported on the Network's involvement in an important and growing regional project that aims to save the once-widespread and iconic Silver Banksia. Initially inspired by The Australian Network for Plant Conservation's (ANPC) *Bring Back the Banksias* program, this project has grown progressively grown by word-of-mouth to the point where it has now expanded to involve partners across south-western, central and north-eastern Victoria.



### Native orchid program

Our work to help conserve threatened native orchids continued in 2017 in the form of assistance to Amaryllis Environmental Consulting with their reintroduction program and annual orchid surveys on public land. Conservation targets include the Brilliant Sun-Orchid (*Thelymitra mackibbinii*), the Stuart Mill Spider Orchid (*Caladenia cretacea*) (pictured at left) and the Red-Cross Spider Orchid (*Caladenia cruciformis*), all of which are endemic to our region.

### Traditional owner partners

Another relatively new relationship is with the traditional owners of the lands within our region, the Dja Dja Wurrung. Recently, the Network had the opportunity to provide input into a community consultation process relating to the development of a management plan for the six regional parks within Dja Dja Wurrung country, including the Kara Kara National Park. This process is being managed by a CSIRO-led consortium and includes Djandak and the Dja



Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (DDWCAC) and Conservation Management with the support of Parks Victoria. The State Government's recently adopted *Biodiversity Plan 2037* places increased emphasis on the role of traditional owners in protecting Victoria's biodiversity, and we look forward to working more closely with the Dja Dja Wurrung to achieve our joint goals.

### **Our partnerships are far-reaching**

Of course, partnerships typically exist and function across various levels, and ours are no exception. Within the local community, we have a growing network of groups and landholders who are actively participating in our programs. At another level, we continue to work with government agencies, NGOs such as Bush Heritage Australia and Trust for Nature, as well as neighbouring conservation organisations and Networks in the delivery of our on-ground projects. This will continue into 2018, with a particular focus on expanding our relationship with the Dja Dja Wurrung as they roll out their new management plan for regional Parks.

### **Community engagement and education**

We see community participation and support as vital to the success of our ongoing biodiversity conservation efforts, but such support can only happen when people understand and feel engaged with what we are trying to achieve. Recognising this, during the year we ramped up our community engagement activities on a number of fronts.

#### **Environment Week activities**

Each year, Environment Week provides us with the opportunity to enlist the help of regional schools in the delivery of our on-ground projects and in 2017, we played host to 22 Year 9 students from Donald High School.

Our revegetation projects are usually the primary focus of Environment Week programs, but this year we wanted to give our visiting students the opportunity to experience something a little different. So, for day one of their visit, we engaged them in an education program which saw students working in teams to undertake vegetation assessment and monitoring exercises (pictured right) in two fenced grazing-exclusion areas within the Stuart Mill Conservation Reserve.

The aim of these exercises was to teach students why monitoring past projects is important and acquaint them with some basic scientific monitoring techniques. Students also visited other Network projects within the Reserve with the aim of getting them to interpret what they were observing, both at a project level and in the surrounding woodland environment.

Day two saw a return to more traditional Environment Week activities, with students spending the day planting native tube-stock on private property to the west of the St Arnaud Range to expand an existing bio-link between the Big and Little Tottington Nature Conservation Reserves.

As it turned out, the 2017 Environment Week activities were not only a learning experience for the students, but for the Network as well. The education program, in particular, was a real hit and we hope to develop additional environment-related programs for future student groups.



## Engaging the community in habitat improvement

During the year, the Network was successful in securing funding for a series of seminars to educate the community about wildlife habitat, including what habitat is, how habitat needs differ between wildlife species and simple things people can do to create a wildlife-friendly environment at home, whether in an urban setting or on the land. This seminar series was born out of a recognition that, while the St Arnaud region contains some sizeable tracts of remnant native woodland, many of our forests are missing some of the structural elements that wildlife need for shelter, reproduction and protection from predators; things like hollow logs, tree hollows and a good cover of native understorey.



The first of our seminars, *Gardening for Wildlife* (pictured above right), focussed on creating wildlife habitat in home gardens. While competition from other events impacted on audience numbers to some degree, the seminar generated significant interest from householders in St Arnaud and surrounding towns.

The second and final seminar, to be held in March 2018, will focus on creating and enhancing wildlife habitat on farms and other rural properties.

*"...community participation and support  
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conservation efforts..."*

## Raising community awareness of our Network



This year saw us participate in various community events which, though small, were nonetheless important in helping to increase the Network's visibility within the community and raise awareness of our conservation programs.

One of these was our sponsorship of the photographic competition at the St Arnaud Agricultural Show; a long-standing highlight on the Show calendar that was in need of a funding boost to attract new entries. The Network was happy to sponsor two new competition sections – *Australian Native Wildlife* and *Australian Native Wildflowers* – with a senior and junior category in each section (pictured

above left). For photographers, the only condition to entry was that images had to be taken within 60 kilometres of St Arnaud. The standard of entries was high and we look forward to seeing these sections of the competition grow as awareness of them increases among local amateur photographers.



In another first for the Network, we hosted an information booth at the St Arnaud Festival's Saturday morning monster market (pictured right). Pleasingly, a steady stream of people dropped by during the day to say hello, collect a brochure, check out our photo gallery showcasing regional plants, wildlife and Kara Kara CMN projects, or just generally have a chat.



Other awareness-raising initiatives included a presentation about Network projects to the St Arnaud Rotary Club and publication of a Kara Kara CMN profile, together with various biodiversity and conservation-related articles, in the newly-launched St Arnaud community newsletter, *For What It's Worth*. And of course, regular eNews updates and corresponding articles on our website kept members and friends of the Kara Kara CMN up to date with news of our projects and programs.

## Public advocacy

In 2016, the Victorian Labor Government initiated an extensive community consultation process to develop a new long-term plan for the management and protection of biodiversity in this state. The outcome of that process was a new Plan entitled, *Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037* (DELWP 2017). This Plan, which was adopted by the Government earlier this year, will prescribe how biodiversity-related on-ground projects are publicly funded, implemented and administered at a state level over the next 20 years.



Chapter 7 of the Plan provides the background for a 'collaborative biodiversity response planning approach', which refers to a series of workshops tasked with developing the framework for the Plan's implementation and administration into the future. The Network was invited to participate in these workshops (pictured left), joining with representatives from government agencies, NGOs, and other community groups engaged in conservation and natural resource management to provide our perspectives on the best way to manage Victoria's biodiversity going forward.

For the Network, non-participation was not an option. After all, we cannot complain about the outcome if we have not taken up the opportunity to have our say! By participating, we were also able to represent the interests of other conservation-related groups in our region who did not have the opportunity to participate. The outcome of this Co-Design Process will begin to emerge in early 2018.

\* The State of Victoria Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2017), *Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037*, Available from URL: <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/biodiversity-plan>.

## Research and monitoring

On-ground monitoring of past projects is often rare in conservation management. This seems counter-intuitive; after all, how can we know if what we are doing is working if we don't pause from time to time to evaluate our past projects, and use those learnings – good or otherwise – to improve our project planning going forward? For the most part, this is because monitoring is rarely an allowable component of either Federal or State project funding and so, for most organisations, this important task is generally left to volunteers to complete as and when they can.

In late 2016, the Network was fortunate in securing funding from the Norman Wettenhall Foundation to undertake monitoring of our past projects. The monitoring program, which concludes at the end of this year, has so far seen us revisit and evaluate over 20 past projects, ranging from erosion and weed control programs to revegetation works. At this stage, results are still being collated and the project report written; however, we can say that there have been a few failures and some unexpected successes. More information about the outcome of this project will be forthcoming in the New Year once the Network's Committee has had a chance to read and digest the Report's findings and recommendations.

## Building Network capacity

'Building capacity' is often thought of in the context of benefits gained from tangible activities and outcomes such as volunteer training, equipment purchases, new funding sources and the like. While that's certainly true, recent increases in the Network's capacity have come from less tangible sources. They include the positive outcomes and benefits that have arisen from our community engagement activities in the form of raised awareness, interest and participation in Network activities and, by extension, an increase in community goodwill. While these benefits can be difficult to measure, they can become self-perpetuating over time and are manifest through the increasing number of opportunities that are beginning to come the Network's way.

As for the more tangible capacity-building activities and outcomes, during the year our research and monitoring capabilities were further strengthened with the purchase of two nest-box cameras and an audio recorder for use in our threatened species monitoring programs.

At an operational level, we also provided our Facilitators and volunteers with formal guidance and clarity when undertaking activities on behalf of the Network by collating and documenting Kara Kara CMN policies and procedures.

## How to contact us

To find out more about the Kara Kara CMN:

- **Visit** our website at **[www.karakaracmn.org.au](http://www.karakaracmn.org.au)** and, while you're there, join our eNews mailing list;
- **Like us** on Facebook @KaraKaraCMN;
- **Email us** at **[karakaracmn@gmail.com](mailto:karakaracmn@gmail.com)**; or
- **Call** one of our Facilitators on **0428 160 297** (John) or **0419 550 226** (Deb).