

# Kara Kara Conservation Management Network

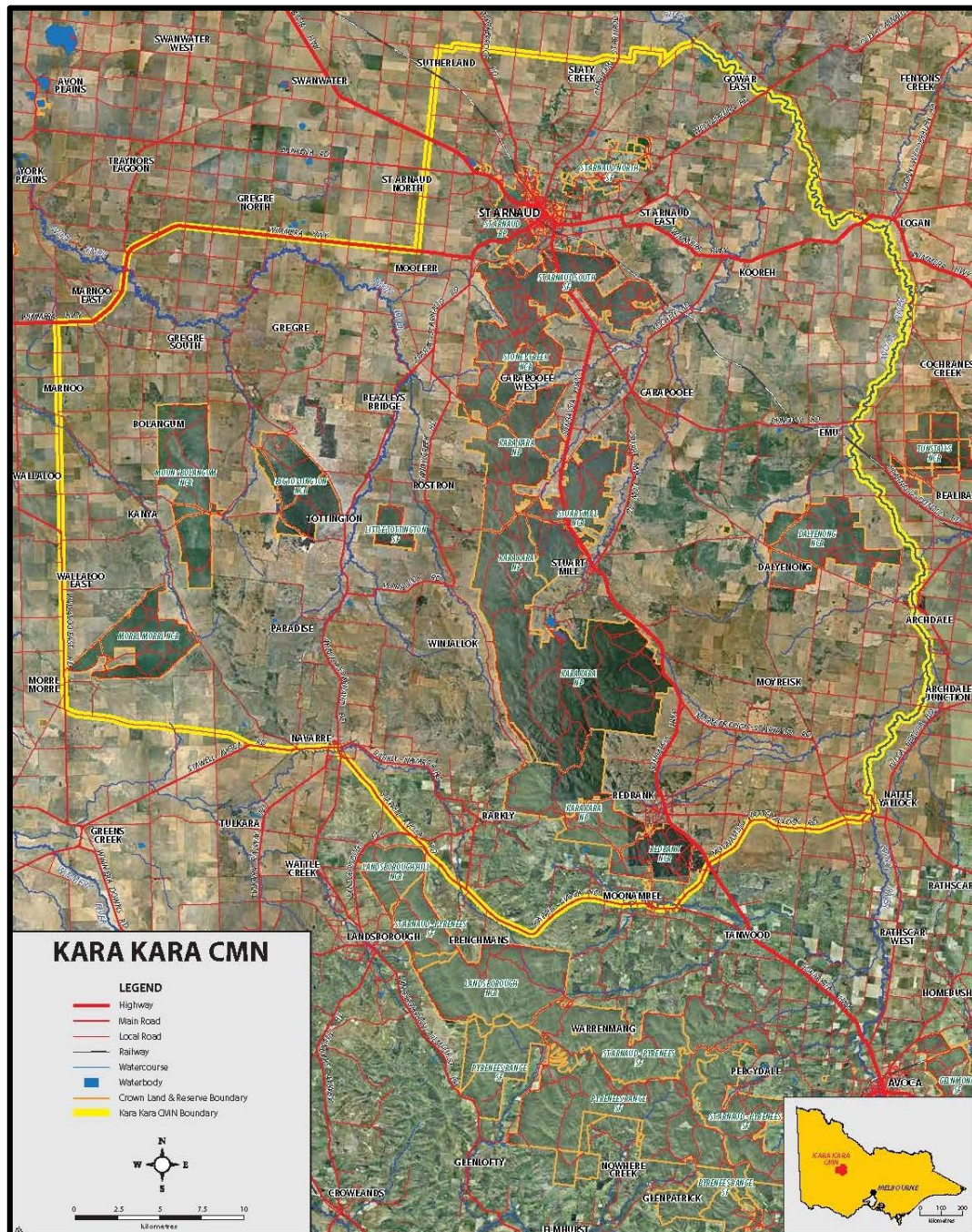


Year in review

2016

# *Our area of interest...*

The Kara Kara CMN's area of interest covers some 1,950km<sup>2</sup>: from St Arnaud in the north to Moonambel in the south, and from Morrl Morrl in the west to the Avoca River in the east.



The Kara Kara Conservation Management Network (ABN 54 518 202 935)



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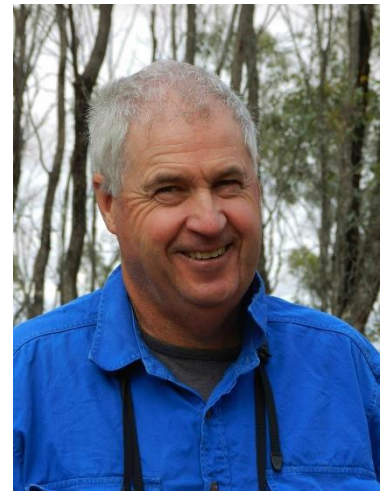
**Publication date:** 25 November 2016

**Cover pictures (left to right):** Yam Daisy with pollinating Hoverfly, Lichen, and Shingleback (D Saxon-Campbell); and Red-rumped Parrot nestlings (B Proctor).



# President's report

Welcome to the Kara Kara CMN's *Year in Review* for 2016; the outcome of our annual reflection on the Network's activities over the past year. The Kara Kara CMN Committee understands the importance of regularly pausing to evaluate our achievements, acknowledge our successes and failures, and ensure that the Network's projects and programs remain closely aligned with the objectives and strategies contained in our *Strategic Plan 2013-2018*. Our annual *Year in Review* is our attempt to achieve this.



The main thrust of Network activities during 2016 has been across several broad areas: the delivery of on-ground projects (as always); establishing new, and developing existing, relationships with organisations and individuals interested in conserving our environment; improving our community engagement; and building internal capacity to secure the organisation's long-term future. Our activities are summarised in the '2016 Scoreboard' on pages 3 and 4, with more detail provided later in this Review.

Now for some general comments to put these activities into context.

The easing of El Niño conditions earlier in the year saw a break in the long dry across south-eastern Australia. As a result, our region is on track to experience its first 'wet year' since the mid-1990s (BOM 2016). Beginning in Autumn and continuing through to spring (and hopefully beyond), the sustained rainfall has rejuvenated the dry sub-soil and delicate ecosystems we endeavour to protect, and brought welcome respite to local landholders and conservation groups across Victoria. Our woodlands are looking green and healthy for the first time in many years, which is in itself testament to the remarkable resilience of our native flora.

For the Network, the long dry adversely impacted our revegetation projects and natural native species regeneration by hindering germinations and recruitment. Increased grazing pressure from native herbivores also saw a depletion of understorey across our native woodlands. However, the recent wet spell has seen this understorey regenerate to a large extent, providing us with a rare opportunity, subject to funding, to embark on an extensive monitoring program in the year ahead to evaluate species establishment and regeneration under close to optimum conditions. For example, some direct seeding projects we previously thought had failed may yet yield positive results.

Another interesting development for the Network has been our ability to secure a greater share of funding – mostly public – for our environmental projects, with a particular focus on threatened species protection. As well as helping us protect several FFG\*-listed or severely depleted species in our area, these projects have provided a vehicle for the expansion of our community engagement activities, yielding excellent results. New working relationships have been established with a number of local landholders – some of whom had not had any previous involvement with Landcare – and student involvement with revegetation and threatened species projects has been incorporated into the curriculum at two local secondary colleges.

A big thank you to our Committee and Facilitators for your efforts throughout the year. With several new projects about to commence, we have plenty to do in the year ahead and I look forward to working with you in achieving our objectives. Thanks also to our member organisations and sponsors for your ongoing support, whether financial or through on-ground assistance. Your support is vital in helping us to protect and enhance our region's threatened ecosystems.

Chris Campbell  
President

\* Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act (1988), Victoria.

# 2016 Scoreboard

Activity type	Corresponding strategy*
<b>Natural resource management</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completed several revegetation projects, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A 6km section of the Wimmera Highway;</li> <li>17ha on private properties along Carapooee Creek; and</li> <li>On private land at Archdale, which included the erection of grazing exclusion fencing.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Assisted DELWP with threatened native orchid plantings on public land.</li> <li>Erected grazing exclusion fencing to protect a population of Austral Indigo (<i>Indigofera australis</i>) along Carapooee Creek.</li> <li>Commenced projects aimed at protecting and enhancing remnant populations of threatened species, including Buloke (<i>Allocasuarina luehmannii</i>), Silver Banksia (<i>Banksia marginata</i>) and Brush-tailed Phascogale (<i>Phascogale tapoatafa</i>).</li> <li>Secured funding to erect exclusion fencing to protect an ephemeral soak and associated flora on private land at Emu.</li> </ul>	   1,2 1,2  1,2,5 6  2,5   2,9  2,5
<b>Building partnerships/relationships</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established, expanded and/or maintained relationships with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local schools and landholders;</li> <li>DELWP Fire Management staff in relation to proposed controlled burn operations;</li> <li>The Australian Network for Plant Conservation; and</li> <li>Parks Victoria's Dja Dja Wurrung Ranger Team.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Ongoing networking/relationship building with neighbouring CMNs and conservation organisations.</li> </ul>	   1,2,9  2,7 2 All  All
<b>Community engagement and education</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaged with and involved local secondary school students in revegetation and habitat enhancement projects in the region.</li> <li>Presented at NRM-related events hosted by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>North Central Catchment Management Authority; and</li> <li>Central Victorian Biolinks Alliance.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Distributed regular e-newsletters to members and friends of the Kara Kara CMN.</li> </ul>	  1,2,9  1,2,10 1,10  All
<b>Public advocacy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Made submissions in response to the Victorian State Government's discussion papers, Native Vegetation Review and Biodiversity Plan 2036, and in response to the Inquiry into the Control of Invasive Animals on Crown Land.</li> </ul>	   All

Activity type	Corresponding Strategy*
<b>Monitoring and evaluation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted photo point monitoring at Kara Kara CMN project sites throughout the region.</li> </ul>	All
<b>Research</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted quarterly woodland bird surveys.</li> </ul>	1,2,4,5,9
<b>Building capacity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completed digital photograph library project.</li> <li>Completed spatial mapping training for Facilitators and selected volunteers.</li> <li>Facilitators attended a Landscape Restoration Workshop hosted by Federation University.</li> <li>Arranged first aid training for Facilitators and members (6).</li> <li>Secured funding to purchase motion sensor camera equipment for use in threatened species monitoring programs.</li> </ul>	10 10 1,2,10 10 2,9,10

**\* 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: Secure the ongoing viability of the Kara Kara CMN



**Pictured:** Rosy Baeckea (*Euryomyrtus ramosissima*) in bloom. (Photo: A Hughes)



# *What we achieved – 2016 highlights*

## On-ground conservation and habitat protection projects

### **Improving habitat connectivity**

The good Autumn-Winter break saw a resurgence of activity on revegetation and habitat enhancement projects by Network volunteers, both on new projects and in completing plantings put on hold in the spring of 2015 due to the extremely dry conditions.

After securing additional funding from VicRoads, we were able to continue our revegetation program along the Wimmera Highway to help strengthen connectivity between Kooreh in the west and the Avoca River to the east. In 2016, we direct seeded a further 6km of road-side, bringing total revegetation works undertaken along the Wimmera Highway over the past two years to 10km or 15ha.

The Network was also able to complete 17ha of plantings associated with a 2015 Landcare grant on five private properties adjoining Carapooee Creek on the eastern side of the St Arnaud Range. Over a cold and wet four days in June, about 30 students from Donald Secondary College enthusiastically assisted our volunteers, planting over 5,500 native seedlings of mainly understorey plants. Timing is everything, with a small amount of direct seeding on one of the properties completing the project in time for the soaking rains of late winter and spring.



**Pictured:** Donald Secondary School students assist with revegetation on private property at Carapooee. (Photo: D Saxon-Campbell)

*"the Autumn-Winter break saw a resurgence of activity... by Network volunteers"*

### **Enhancing habitat for small mammals**

#### ***Arboreal gliders***

Targeting some of the region's small arboreal mammals, the Network's glider project aims to conserve and expand existing glider habitat and improve landscape connectivity to aid species dispersal. As canopy dwellers, gliders are capable of crossing gaps of up to 50 metres [K. Soanes (glider researcher), pers. comm., 2016]. Over time, however, widespread land clearing and the gradual fragmentation of our native woodlands have created significant gaps in the tree canopy. As a result, many glider populations have become isolated, both physically and genetically.

In partnership with a local landholder, the Network erected 700m of fencing along a minor drainage line on the western side of Archdale Road, about 17km south-east of St Arnaud. The fenced area was then revegetated to reinforce the biolink between Carapooee Creek to the

north and the Dalrymple Nature Conservation Reserve to the south-east. This relatively small but significant project was funded by the Central Victorian Biolinks Alliance (CVBA) and is part of the CVBA's broader glideways program which aims to conserve gliders and their habitat throughout western and central Victoria.

### ***Brush-tailed Phascogale***

More recently, the Network was successful in securing funding through the Threatened Species Protection Initiative to enhance habitat for the FFG-listed Brush-tailed Phascogale, a species known to occur in the woodlands around St Arnaud. Phascogales use tree hollows for breeding, shelter and protection from predators; however, with only small pockets of old-growth, hollow-bearing trees remaining in the region, competition for existing resources is high. Under this project, nest boxes constructed by students from the St Arnaud Secondary College will be installed progressively in remnant native woodland on several private properties in the region to supplement natural tree hollows and encourage Phascogale dispersal into new areas.

Sites have already been chosen for the first tranche of about 20 boxes, with installation expected to occur over the summer of 2016/17. Further nest boxes have been ordered for installation in 2017, when an ongoing program to monitor nest box activity will commence. Of course, Phascogales aren't the only species that are likely to benefit from this project. Antechinus as well as several other glider and possum species also depend on tree hollows, and it is hoped that the nest box project will help provide additional shelter for these species as well.

*"Seed Production Areas... will help bolster... remnant populations of native species"*

### ***Protecting our native flora***

Funding secured by the Network under the Threatened Species Protection Initiative and a Landcare Grant is also being used to establish Seed Production Areas on private properties at Emu, Carapooee and Carapooee West to propagate seedlings for use in revegetation projects. These resources will also be used to help bolster existing and isolated remnant populations of native species such as Buloke (*Allocasuarina luehmannii*) and Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*), in the process promoting gene flow and increasing genetic diversity.



Once widespread across Victoria's inland plains and commonly associated with Box woodland on alluvial soils (DSE 2004) within our region, Buloke is now listed as threatened in this State, occurring mostly in small copses or as scattered trees on private land. Further, most mature trees within these remnant populations are ageing and intense grazing pressure is preventing regeneration. While not yet a listed species, Silver Banksia, too, is in decline, having disappeared from much of its former range across south-eastern Australia (ANPC 2015).

**Pictured:** Buloke (centre back) is a species commonly associated with Box woodland. (Photo: A Hughes)

As well as propagating seedlings from locally-sourced seed of these species, we propose fencing some remaining Buloke populations to reduce grazing pressure and foster natural recruitment.

Work on this project is well underway. The seed production site at Emu has been ripped and is currently being fenced, while volunteers have been busy sourcing seeds and propagating them under glasshouse conditions.

Some smaller but equally worthwhile projects have either been completed or are in the pipeline.

One of these, in conjunction with Parks Victoria's Dja Dja Wurrung Ranger Team, was the erection of a small fenced enclosure to protect a population of Austral Indigo (*Indigofera australis*) along Carapooee Creek in the Kara Kara National Park. A member of the Fabaceae (Pea) Family, Austral Indigo is uncommon in the St Arnaud area and this small population was being preferentially grazed to the point that it rarely flowered. Hopefully this barrier to grazers will enable the plants to flower and set seed.

Apart from our own projects, for the past few years the Kara Kara CMN Facilitator and several volunteers have participated in reintroduction plantings of the threatened Brilliant Sun Orchid on public land to the west of the St Arnaud Range. Plantings are coordinated by DELWP's Biodiversity Officer using seedlings germinated under glasshouse conditions. With this year's above-average rainfall restoring sub-soil moisture, it is hoped that the seedlings will have a good chance of flowering and setting seed.

Another small project planned for the New Year will help protect a small ephemeral soak discovered on a private landholding at Emu; a delicate ecosystem that only came to light during the recent wet conditions. Fortunately, the Network has been able to secure funding to fence this delicate ecosystem from damage by grazing herbivores.

## Our vision...

"We are committed to protecting and enhancing habitat critical to the survival of woodland birds and other threatened fauna and flora, primarily through the creation and maintenance of well-managed bio-links."



## Building partnerships/relationships

Networking is vital in helping the Kara Kara CMN meet its objectives in protecting biodiversity in our region. So much more can be achieved by working in partnership with a range of individuals and organisations; from landholders and interested members of the public, to our member organisations and neighbouring conservation 'allies'. This year saw the Network make significant inroads in establishing new, and expanding existing, relationships with a range of organisations and individuals.

### Engaging with local schools

A highlight for the year was being able to have Network-coordinated activities included in the curriculum at two local secondary colleges.



At St Arnaud Secondary College, middle-school woodworking students constructed an initial instalment of 20 nest boxes to be used as shelter for Brush-tailed Phascogales. More boxes have been ordered for construction during Term 1, 2017.

Meanwhile, students from Donald Secondary College dedicated part of their annual school camp during Environment Week to assist the Network with major revegetation works on private properties adjoining Carapooee Creek. Discussions are currently underway with the College with a

view to including a slightly different activity for students in the 2017 curriculum.

While quite different in nature and scope, these programs represent simple yet practical ways to engage our youth in conservation-related activities.

**Pictured:** Woodworking students from St Arnaud Secondary School put the finishing touches to nest boxes to be used to enhance Brush-tailed Phascogale habitat. (Photo: D Saxon-Campbell)

### Expanding our landholder network

Landholders, and farmers in particular, are known for their resourcefulness and resilience. Trying to earn a living while at the mercy of Australia's boom and bust climate, they have to be! What's often forgotten, however, is that many of our farming families have worked the same land for generations. They know it intimately. Most care deeply about improving the land and preserving its biodiversity, especially those whose properties contain remnant native woodland. As a Conservation Management Network, this is a vision we share and we see our role as providing local landholders with support and advice when they seek it.

In this context, it was pleasing to have several new broad-acre landholders express interest in Kara Kara CMN programs during the year. Whether participating in our larger scale revegetation programs or by simply allowing us access to their properties to seek out potential sites for the installation of nest boxes, their involvement has been most welcome.

*"so much more can be achieved by  
working in partnership"*

## Our partners in conservation and natural resource management

The Victorian Government's policy shift towards a risk- rather than hectare-based approach to planned burning operations late in 2015 was, in our view, a positive step for the environment. Nonetheless, the Network continued to liaise with regional DELWP and Parks Victoria Fire Management staff in relation to fuel reduction burns planned for our region. We see this input as vital. Network members and volunteers have intimate local knowledge of the location of ecologically-sensitive ecosystems and threatened species within our region; information that has not always been factored into burn operation planning in the past despite this information having been submitted to government via the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas database.

Inspired by our participation in Stage 1 of The Australian Network for Plant Conservation's (ANPC) *Bring Back the Banksias* project (ANPC 2015<sup>2</sup>) in late 2015, the Kara Kara CMN Committee moved to make Silver Banksia one of several target species for propagation within our Seed Production Areas. It is hoped that the collective efforts of the ANPC, the Kara Kara CMN and the numerous other conservation organisations participating in this project will go a long way to conserving and bolstering relict populations of this iconic native species across south-eastern Australia.



In March, we had the opportunity to deepen our fledgling partnership with Parks Victoria's newly-established Dja Dja Wurrung Ranger Team, when Team Leader Trent Nelson accompanied Kara Kara CMN Facilitator John Boadle on a tour of Network projects within the Kara Kara National Park. Though still early days, this relationship promises to be beneficial to both parties. For the Network, it is an opportunity to learn about Dja Dja Wurrung lore and traditional land management practices. For the Ranger Team, it is an opportunity to reconnect with 'Country' and gain an insight into the Network's relatively modest efforts to protect the National Park's natural values.

**Pictured:** Silver Banksia (*B. marginata*) was once widespread across south-eastern Australia. (Photo: A Hughes)

*"efforts to engage... the community about Network projects... is beginning to yield results"*

## Community engagement and education

Our ongoing efforts to engage with and educate the community about Network projects and regional biodiversity is beginning to yield results, albeit at a modest scale but with increasing momentum.

During the year, we continued to update members and friends of the Kara Kara CMN about our projects through our website at **[www.karakaracmn.org.au](http://www.karakaracmn.org.au)** and via our regular e-newsletters. However, face-to-face communication continues to be just as important in engaging with the community.

The involvement of St Arnaud Secondary College students in the construction of nest boxes provided us with a chance to address the class on how they would be used to enhance the quality of habitat for the region's arboreal mammals and more generally about biodiversity. This was a chance not to be missed given that most of the students live in an urban setting where their opportunity to experience and learn more about the biodiversity of our native forests is limited compared with those who live on the land and interact with nature on a more regular basis. The positive response from these students and the excellent coverage this program received in the local press highlight the value of community engagement activities in spreading our conservation message.



**Pictured:** Committee member, Jeroen Van Veen, talks to woodworking students from St Arnaud Secondary College about regional biodiversity. (Photo: B Proctor)

During the year, our Facilitators presented at NRM-related events hosted by member and partner organisations:

- In March, we addressed over 100 attendees at the Central Victorian Biolinks Alliance's (CVB) Glider Symposium in Seymour about the Kara Kara CMN's glider project and other Network programs aimed at protecting woodland habitat in Victoria's central west.
- In early June and again in October, we presented at events hosted by the North Central Catchment Management Authority's (NCCMA). The first was the NCCMA's annual Water Science Forum, which provided us with the opportunity to spread the word about the Network's citizen science projects, in particular our woodland bird project and ongoing habitat monitoring activities. We were also delighted to be able to outline the Kara Kara CMN's vision, background and details of selected Network projects to a group of about 65 people during the NCCMA's *30 Years of Landcare* celebrations in St. Arnaud.

As well as contributing to community education, our participation in regional events such as these helps to build our network of contacts and secure the Kara Kara CMN's future. Special thanks to the CVB and NCCMA for the opportunity.

## Public advocacy

In addition to our on-ground projects and community activities, the Kara Kara CMN Committee sees itself as having an important role to play as an advocate for the environment and biodiversity. As such, we endeavour to influence public policy at both State and Federal level by making submissions to Government on a range of issues with the potential to impact on local ecosystems. In this context, in mid-2016, the Victorian State Government released several discussion papers for public comment. The Network made submissions on two of these: the *Native Vegetation Review* and *Protecting Victoria's Environment: Biodiversity 2036*. We also made a submission in response to the Inquiry into the Control of Invasive Animals on Crown Land.

In many cases, our voice is but one among many; however, positive change is rarely achieved through silence and inaction.



## Research

Having completed some major projects last year, research was less of a focus during 2016. Despite this, we continued to monitor woodland bird assemblages across the region, with surveys conducted quarterly at 20 sites within the southern section of the St Arnaud Range and in neighbouring nature conservation reserves.

Coupled with the quarterly surveys conducted across a similar number of sites in the north of the Range by our member organisation, the St Arnaud Field Naturalists Club Inc (SAFNC), this data will, over time, develop into an important resource to help us monitor native woodland bird populations within our area of interest.

## Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring the success or otherwise of our various projects continues to be a priority for the Kara Kara CMN. How else can we evaluate our efforts, learn from mistakes and improve our conservation outcomes going forward?

To date, however, our efforts in establishing a monitoring framework have not been fruitful as we would like. It's true that photo points, where appropriate, have become a part of each new project and a monitoring calendar has been established; however, documenting and interpreting results and maintaining the momentum of a monitoring program over time seems more problematic.

To address this, we are currently seeking funding for a larger-scale program in 2017, which will revisit each of our project sites to track progress against objectives and generate recommendations to the Committee for improvements in our processes and methods.

*"monitoring the success of our various projects  
continues to be a priority"*

## Building capacity

### Facilitator funding

As a Committee, we are mindful that the Kara Kara CMN would not be able to operate half as successfully without the funding provided by the State Government through the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program. Administered through DELWP, this funding is structured in such a way that it enables the Network to share the resource between two part-time Facilitators according to their skill sets.

As the public face of the Kara Kara CMN and with a broad knowledge of the region and locals, John Boadle is principally responsible for planning and organising projects, and liaising with landholders and member organisations and individuals. In contrast, Debra Saxon-Campbell manages most of the Network's communications, and undertakes research and monitoring projects as required. John and Debra share responsibility for drafting and submitting applications for grant funding for Kara Kara CMN projects.

### Skills training and OH&S

Enhancing the skill set of our Facilitators and volunteers and providing them with a safe workplace as they undertake Network projects is a continuing priority for the Kara Kara CMN.

In February, our Facilitators attended a 3-day Landscape Restoration Workshop hosted by Federation University. In addition to presentations and field trips outlining the latest research

and theory relating to revegetating and restoring landscapes, the workshop provided advice that was pertinent to many of our projects. For example, learnings from this workshop have influenced the Committee's thinking and practices when it comes to seed collection from isolated plant populations, the aftercare period on revegetation projects and matching species to their suitable soil types.

The series of spatial mapping training sessions funded by DELWP and recently undertaken by our Facilitators and selected volunteers have now been completed. All of the Kara Kara CMN's programs have been mapped and we now have the capacity to expand these resources as new projects commence.

Working outdoors can be particularly hazardous, so we are thankful to Parks Victoria for providing funding for first aid training and some protective equipment for our Facilitators and several of our members.

### **Network resourcing**

Our digital image library project commenced in late 2015 and was also completed during the year. A shared facility between the Kara Kara CMN and the SAFNC, this resource is proving especially useful in Network communications and is expected to become even more so as further images are added.

In a recent and welcome development, the Network has been successful in securing funding to purchase motion sensor and telescopic camera equipment for use in monitoring the use of nest boxes by arboreal mammals. Being mostly nocturnal, our native fauna is usually well out of sight of landholders, so the images produced by this equipment will also be invaluable in showing how their participation in Network projects is, even in a small way, reaping benefits for biodiversity.



**Pictured:** Native woodland. (Photo: B Proctor)

# References

Australian Network for Plant Conservation Inc. (ANPC<sup>1</sup>) (2015) *Bringing Back the Banksias: Partnering to save Silver Banksia from the brink*. [Cited 15 November 2016.] Available from URL: <http://anpc.asn.au/banksias>.

Australian Network for Plant Conservation Inc. (ANPC<sup>2</sup>) (2015) *Bring Back the Banksias*. [Cited 17 November 2016.] Available from URL: <http://anpc.asn.au/banksias>.

Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) (2016) Monthly Rainfall: St. Arnaud. [Cited 14 November 2016.] Available from URL: <http://www.bom.gov.au>.

Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) (2004) *EVC/Bioregion Benchmark for Vegetation Quality Assessment. Goldfields Bioregion: EVC 67 – Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland*. [Cited 15 November 2016.] Available from URL: <http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au>.

## Kara Kara CMN Committee and management 2015/16

### **Committee:**

President: Chris Campbell

Vice-President: Russell Steel

Secretary: Brenda Proctor

Treasurer: Chris Scott

General committee members:

Jane Holt

Jeroen Van Veen (Bush Heritage Australia)

Debra Saxon-Campbell

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