



LOW TIDE AT TOMPKINS PARK

Over summer, low tides have exposed an expanse of mudflats along the southern shores of Alfred Cove Marine Park. Working there on a few of those occasions we were delighted to spy the Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) among other wading birds taking advantage of the perfect ambient conditions, foraging a few meters off Tompkins Park.

The Common Greenshank is a heavily built, elegant wader, 30–35 cm in length, with a wingspan of 55–65 cm and weight up to 190 g for both males and females. The bill is long and slightly upturned and the legs are long and yellowish-green. They are one of a number of species of trans-equatorial migratory shorebird, flying between Australia and Siberia.

The wonderful Yellow-billed Spoonbill (*Platalea flavipes*) - a large, white waterbird with a yellow face and long spoon-shaped bill, and yellow legs and feet - was there too.

This bird's unusual bill is a feeding adaptation which allows it to specialise in foraging for invertebrates in deep, muddy water. Its sensitive tip allows the spoonbill to *feel* for its food instead of having to see it. It walks through the water, sweeping its bill from side to side to detect its prey.

Low tides (0.4 m and under) have occurred many times over the season, uncovering important feeding and resting grounds for the Estuary's rich diversity of local, nomadic and migratory birds.

Exposed mudflats; Common Greenshank; Ibis, Spoonbill & Greenshank
Photographs courtesy C O'Neill & M Matassa



BLUE MOON OVER ALFRED COVE



January's Blue Moon rising at Alfred Cove
Photograph courtesy C O'Neill

The little viewing platform off Burke Drive overlooking Alfred Cove proved a popular location at which to await the rise of January's blue moon and observe its eclipse later in the evening, people gathering there at dusk with their tripods, cameras and special lenses.

In quiet conversation all agreed the place could not have been more beautiful, with a pair of Rufous Night Heron, a flock of six Greenshanks, an owl, an egret and Black-winged Stilts among the plethora of birdlife observed preparing or settling for the night at this exquisite sanctuary.

However, when darkness fell moon-watchers became alarmed to see in the distance two young men don torch lights, grab a scoop net and trudge from where they had been fishing or swimming in the shallows off Point Waylen, through the sedges, samphire and lagoons around the Cove, crossing in front of the small viewing platform to beyond - trampling fragile vegetation and disturbing resting and foraging birdlife.

Observers say such shattering use of the Marine Park - including this highly sensitive section of coastal saltmarsh (a Federally-listed *Threatened Ecological Community*) - is an increasingly regular occurrence.

As the natural values of Alfred Cove are unsustainable under such mounting and cumulative pressure, SERAG urges authorities to strengthen protective legislation as a matter of urgency - before this special place is lost to future generations.

FLEABANE SEASON

There are a few varieties of Fleabane (*Conyza* spp.), an annual weed germinating in spring and reaching maturity in summer. It is difficult to control, with high and rapid seed production, high germination rates and strong dispersal capability.

Generally, fleabane is often seen on the sides of roads and pathways, as it doesn't compete well under high plant density or cover, and it requires disturbance to establish and persist.

This summer there was a very bad outbreak of fleabane in a section of Alfred Cove in front of the Pelican Cove apartments.

Thanks to the hand-weeding efforts of our TREEmendous Tuesday volunteers, fortunately the bulk was removed prior to its seed setting.

With a seed-bank persisting for over three years, and wind and water delivering new seed from afar, the site will need to be monitored carefully for the next few years, however.

We also hope to increase the density of sedges and shrubs along this exposed margin next winter.



Before & After weeding by the TREEmendous Tuesday Team
Photographs courtesy C O'Neill

THE IMPACT OF PLASTIC LITTER

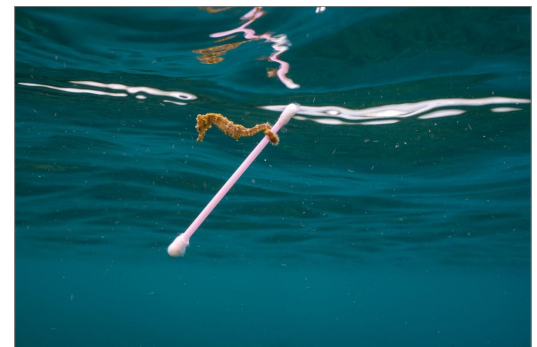
There are a number of organizations and community initiatives aiming to raise awareness about the problems associated with single-use disposable plastic and to encourage people to solve them.

Tangaroa Blue Foundation is an Australian-wide not-for-profit group dedicated to the removal and prevention of marine debris - one of the major environmental issues worldwide. The plastic bottles, bags and takeaway containers that we use for just a few minutes are made of a material that is designed to last forever. From the Foundation's data: 18,000 pieces of plastic are estimated to float in every square kilometre of ocean; 633 species worldwide including 77 Australian species are impacted by marine debris; over 75% of what is removed from our beaches is made of plastic.

Footage taken last September by Justin Hofman - a nature photographer with another group, the *SeaLegacy Collective* - illustrates the problem poignantly.

In documenting a marine ecosystem off the coast of Borneo, he recorded a delicate seahorse (*Hippocampus kuda*) drifting in polluted waters using discarded plastic waste rather than healthy seagrasses to steady its movement in the current - see (<https://www.facebook.com/bbcnews/videos/1733880309978851/>).

Justin Hofman is keen to share his photographs to inspire us to change our behaviour, especially in the way we manage waste.



Photograph courtesy Justin Hofman,
SeaLegacy Collective

HAVE YOUR SAY ON SINGLE-USE PLASTIC BAGS

The State Government is working to address the problem of single-use plastic bags polluting our environment and is asking for community feed-back. It is also open to considering other problematic items.

It is planned that from July 1 2018 retailers can no longer supply lightweight single-use plastic bags to their customers.

The discussion paper *Implementing a lightweight single-use plastic bag ban in Western Australia* was released on 20 December 2017 and is **open for comment until 5.00pm 9th March 2018**. We urge you to read the discussion paper and to make a submission via survey monkey or in writing.

For information and to make a comment, please go to this link www.dwer.wa.gov.au/plastic_bag_ban. The survey is very easy and quick to complete.

CONSIDER HELPING AT A SITE NEAR YOU

SERAG has again registered Pelican Point as a site for Clean Up Australia Day, to be held on **Sunday March 4th**.

For some years now a large number of people have very kindly devoted a couple of hours of their Sunday morning helping to collect rubbish from in and around the foreshore of Matilda Bay, and along through Pelican Point to JH Abrahams Reserve. It is an enjoyable and beneficial activity, finishing with light refreshments.

There are many places across the metropolitan area and further afield where clean-ups will take place. If you would like to join in it is not too late to **register on the Clean Up Australia Day website**, where you will also find specific site details: what to wear, what time and where to meet. Go to: www.cleanupaustaliaday.org.au/.



MILYU TEAM STRENGTHENED

We have been very pleased to welcome a few new people into our Monthly Monday at Milyu team, strengthening our capacity to regularly clear the Marine Park foreshore and A-Class Nature Reserve of many kilos of litter.

Each event results in an average of over 2kg of litter collected per person - principally comprising small pieces of plastic such as bottle caps, cigarette butts and lighters, party balloons and straws as well as the more obvious bait bags, water bottles, aluminium cans and take-away containers.

This year we are keeping a record of the items found, using the Tangaroa Blue Foundation's check sheet, to develop a clearer picture of the most littered items affecting Milyu.



Weighing bags of litter at Comer Reserve after the event - 17 kg collected this time

Photographs courtesy C O'Neill

CELEBRATING ANNIVERSARIES IN 2018

During the course of this year SERAG will be celebrating a series of significant anniversaries to do with the Perth community's deepening understanding of its relationship with the Swan River, its appreciation of its unique natural values, and its growing desire to protect and conserve these values:

- the 75th Anniversary of the establishment of the Swan River Reference Committee in 1943,
- the 70th Anniversary of the formation of the Swan River Pollution Committee in 1948, which later became the Swan River Conservation Committee, and
- the 60th Anniversary of the foundation of the Swan River Conservation Board in 1958, the first Statutory body and formed as a result of community pressure.

Many planning decisions, urban and agricultural activities and some seemingly 'good ideas at the time' have taken their toll on the River's biodiversity: abattoir and other industrial waste once poured into the River; infrastructure has often been built too close to foreshores to allow for changing flow patterns; recreational activities have sometimes 'loved the River to death', and during the 1950s and 60s, many foreshore areas (including Tompkins and Troy parks) and other wetlands were simply used as rubbish dumps.

Hence we plan to draw attention to the surviving natural values of the River, including the small remaining pockets of native vegetation along the Estuary's margin - their unique beauty, their contribution to overall River health and the various pressures still impacting on them - and to recognise community efforts over many decades to conserve, restore and protect River well-being.

We hope you will join us in celebration at our first event, on Saturday 26th May at Alfred Cove.

BEE-EATER HEAVEN

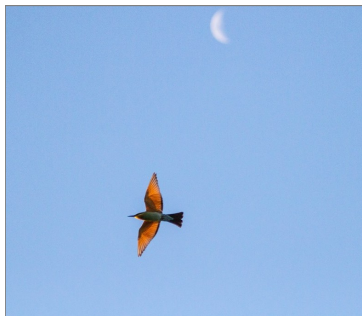
The 100 ml of January rain made for Rainbow Bee-eater heaven, drawing flocks of the species into the sky at Pelican Point a few days later to feast on the resultant explosions of mozzies and other insects. Weeks later bee-eaters were still there in abundance.

Both Pelican Point and Alfred Cove (at which we witnessed a similar though less spectacular event last year) provide excellent habitat for the Rainbow Bee-eater (*Merops ornatus*) - their open wooded areas supply stable soil for their long underground nesting chambers while native vegetation, marshland and lagoons yield vital insect-life for nourishment. However, these sites are small and under increasing pressure from human activity, so it is imperative to maintain and strengthen the ecological resilience of these last-remaining natural bushlands and wetlands on the Estuary - including by returning some grassed areas to a more natural state.

No habitat - no birds!

The bee-eaters will soon begin their migration to winter in northern Australia, New Guinea and some southern islands of Indonesia.

Rainbow Bee-eaters at Pelican Point *Photographs courtesy T Graham-Taylor*



VULNERABLE BEE-EATER NEST DISCOVERED

At the start of summer SERAG volunteers found a Rainbow Bee-eater nesting tunnel while checking for Caltrop in a cleared area on the Attadale foreshore.

The nest was in an exposed spot next to a swathe of poisoned native vegetation - where even kikuyu struggles on the reclaimed soil, where enormous lawn mowers regularly tidy the grass, and where walkers with their un-leashed dogs daily meander to and from the designated dog exercise area.

The species having travelled long distances to the location for millennia, one poor little pair of birds was obviously still hoping to use the site for breeding. We wonder at the probability of success.

CONSERVATION WORK SUPPORTED

The positive efforts of SERAG in conserving the ecological values of Pelican Point have been again supported through the Swan Alcoa Landcare Program (SALP) as well as through an NRM Community Action Grant.

The funds will be used for on-going restoration work in Bush Forever 402, including of degraded areas in the terrestrial section of the Marine Park and an area which was badly burnt late last year, near an ancient *Nuytsia floribunda*.

We will continue our emphasis on controlling bulbous weeds and running grasses and replacing woody weeds such as *Casuarina glauca* and Victorian tea-tree with native species.

A number of nesting boxes will also be installed for possums, pardalotes and microbats.



One of the restoration sites at Pelican Point
Photograph courtesy C O'Neill

RIVERPARK WEED MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

In late December, individuals and groups involved in weed management and foreshore rehabilitation projects in the Swan Canning Riverpark were invited to contribute to the development of a Riverpark Weed Management Strategy.

A half-day workshop organised by DBCA at the beautifully situated Canning River Eco Education Centre, enabled participants to share practical experience and information on weed management as a first step to enhancing the efficiency and capacity of all those involved in river-care.

Improved coordination and collaboration will facilitate greater emphasis being placed on data collection, analysis and monitoring - hopefully leading to improved outcomes at a landscape scale.

SERAG Chairperson Margaret Matassa was among those invited to address the gathering.



AT TOMPKINS PARK EAST

This photograph of a very elegant bird poised in the Marine Park shallows was taken at the eastern end of Tompkins Park where, with the support of a Coastwest Grant, we are undertaking significant and much-needed restoration.

The bird is a young Eastern Great Egret (*Ardea modesta*) - a large heron with all-white plumage. Such birds are often seen wading in a range of wetlands - from lakes, rivers and swamps to estuaries, saltmarsh and intertidal mudflats.

It usually feeds alone, standing in shallow water, waiting for fish, frogs, insects and other small aquatic creatures to appear before stabbing them with its yellow bill.

The species can be distinguished from other white egrets and herons by its very long neck - one and a half times the length of its body - with a noticeable kink two-thirds of the way up.



Photograph courtesy A Kane

TOMPKINS PARK STAGE 2 - PROGRESSING WELL



Foreshore restoration continued at the eastern end of Tompkins Park during January and February.

Low water levels provided an opportunity to tackle *Typha orientalis* which has been steadily overtaking the foreshore, as well as to commence the removal of some enormous clumps of Brazilian Pepper and replace them with native species of similar form but better ecological function. A replacement for the dead eucalypt in the first photograph has also been planted.



Alternative habitat for birds and other native fauna must be established prior to all weeds being removed, so some clumps of peppers will be taken out later in the year.

The nature of the work is intensive and challenging, hence we have been especially grateful for the terrific support provided on a number of occasions by volunteers from Conservation Volunteers Australia.



Volunteers hand-weeding; removing massive Brazilian Peppers; DBCA trailer and ute fully laden with weed biomass; tackling typha & terrible reminders of the previous use of the foreshore as a rubbish tip

Photographs courtesy C O'Neill

STRENGTHENED SURVEILLANCE CATCHES VANDAL

Over a period of more than three years, large swathes of native sedges, shrubs and trees have been deliberately poisoned or pulled out in Alfred Cove Bush Forever Site 331 - including in the A-Class Nature Reserve.

The repeated vandalism has caused enormous damage to the environment and thwarted the efforts of local school children and other community volunteer groups (including SERAG) to strengthen the resilience of fragile and rare habitat for native birds and other wildlife. It has also cost the community many thousands of dollars.

Fortunately, improved surveillance has finally lead to a local resident being caught and convicted of criminal damage and fined.

Unfortunately there are *many* urban pressures on the Swan River Estuary's unique flora and fauna - regrettably cumulative and some now unavoidable - so we hope that on-going surveillance will at least minimise future occurrences of this type of mindless destructive behavior and its terrible toll on the natural values of the site.

We extend sincere thanks to the managing authorities - especially the City of Melville and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions - for their efforts and continued commitment to protecting the ecological health of this outstandingly beautiful, ecologically important and treasured location, including from vandalism.

WAVE PARK APPLICATION AT EPA

In January Urbansurf WA submitted documentation to the Environmental Protection Authority seeking endorsement of their proposal to construct a massive privately owned artificial surfing and retail complex at Tompkins Park.

As the wave park would add additional avoidable pressures on the Swan River Estuary's unique flora and fauna, and as the documentation contained significant flaws and omissions, SERAG lodged a recommendation that it be formally assessed by the Environmental Protection Authority at the Public Environmental Review level.

Following that assessment, the EPA could then recommend either approval according to stated conditions, **or** they could recommend that the proposal not be approved as it is environmentally unacceptable on stated grounds.

We also prepared a short and simple video alluding to the natural beauty, cultural heritage values and ecological importance of Alfred Cove to support our recommendation. It can be accessed on <https://youtu.be/I29r0fNRdFo>.

WATERING PROBLEM SOLVED

With a large number of local community environment groups caring for particular re-vegetation plantings over their first summer, it is sometimes difficult to borrow Melville's watering trailer during particularly hot and dry spells - and very expensive to employ a contractor.

To ease the problem and become a little more self-sufficient, SERAG has bought three 200 litre barrels that originally contained olives from Greece.

With taps and hoses added by a very handy volunteer and using gravity feed only, the barrels have been converted into a simple watering system particularly useful for smaller jobs. They fit well on the back of a ute, are light to manouvre and easy to store - and they have already been well-used.



The 'very handy' volunteer; barrels in use
Photographs courtesy C O'Neill



FOR YOUR MARCH CALENDAR

- TREEmendous Tuesdays: Alfred Cove 6.30am - 8.30am
- 04 (Sun) Clean Up Australia Day Pelican Point 8.30am - 10.30am
- 12 Monthly Monday at Milyu 7.00am - 9.00am
- 13 (Tues) Bushcare Alfred Cove 8.30am - 2.30pm
- 14 (Wed) *International Day of Action for Rivers*
- 24 Saturday Morning at the Cove 7.30am - 9.30am
- Watering at Alfred Cove and Pelican Point

Please contact SERAG to register your interest and for further information.



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