

Mud Islands Times

Number 32 December 2006



WE WISH YOU ALL A JOYOUS FESTIVE SEASON AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

1 Thank you to members for paying their subscription to FOMI for another year. The membership year will run from July 1 each year, so that's easy to remember. We have a really good group with many active members. As always, if you have friends who haven't become a member yet, encourage them to join in the fun of getting out in a boat in the middle of Port Phillip Bay and at the same time they help put something back into the environment. Look out for the activities list for 2007. It's not just weeding!!

2 October Brisbane Ranges Outing. Over 40 members and friends met at the Steiglitz Courthouse and processed convoy-style around the back roads to view various areas of bush. We stopped about 4 times to stroll through the vegetation; an easy task after the fires had razed the undergrowth to expose white granitic sand in many places. A few orchids were spotted at the old Steiglitz Cemetery in the latter part of the day. Thanks to those people with their eye trained on the ground - they weren't easy to see. Specimens of the sun, bearded, and duck orchid were identified. Well done!



Most impressive, were the pure stands of *Xanthorrhoea* in full flower after the wild fires in January this year. See a sample of unusually shaped *Xanthorrhoea* flower stems on the FOMI website home page photo gallery. <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~fomi/>



If you have any other interesting photos for the Photo Gallery, please email them to fomislands@yahoo.com

3 November Mud Islands activity — bird watching, sea grass monitoring and weeding group.

Weeding: The weeders pulled another patch of mallow and a few boxthorn. It is always surprising how there can be boxthorn of substantial size (1.5m tall), when it was not even evident last time. This just emphasizes the importance of continual vigilance and weed pulling/cutting/painting.

Seagrass monitoring – Three transect lines were laid out and anchored with a temporary buoy, before we snorkel out to monitor seagrass growth. Each line is 100m, marked at 1 metre intervals. Snorkellers saw a big banjo ray, approximately 1.5m long, resting in the lush, dense seagrass along Transect 1, in about 1m depth of water. Transect 2 saw a variation in seagrass lengths and densities, but there were sections where the seagrass was 60 cm long!



We walked around to the creek and searched for the Transect 3 markers amongst the saltbush. Pelican babies, teenagers and adults stood to attention, gazing at the snorkellers clad in black rubber wetsuits, booties and with masks hanging around their necks, as they walked around in ankle deep water in part of the creek, measuring along the zig-zag path of Transect 3. It was encouraging to note a small section of seagrass sprouting in the creek, only about 5cm tall! It was fascinating to watch the variety of crabs and ghost shrimp activities, as we hovered above the deeper parts of the warm creek.

Bird watching - A few walked and twitched at the same time, others simply watched for birds careering overhead as we rested on the beach! Evidence of the storms in the last month, showed where high tide waves had washed over parts of the cormorant roosting area. Some saltbush has washed away. Loads of seagulls and ibis are nesting. Adolescent seagulls were practicing their flying acrobatics on the breeze. Terns were also wheeling overhead and spearing into the water to catch their lunch. Caspian terns (the ones with the red beaks) had largely fledged. Crested terns were still sitting on about 6 nests with eggs, but most eggs had hatched. All ages of pelicans were gathered around the lagoon.



Whilst waiting to dock at Queenscliff at the end of the day, a pied cormorant kept us entertained for about 15 minutes. He caught a fish that was so big, he had difficulty swallowing it. After several attempts to swallow it (and nearly dropping it) he paddled to the rocky embankment. With the aid of binoculars, it was noted that the poor fellow was trying to down a young flounder! No wonder it was having trouble going down. Finally it did, to a cheer from the onlookers on our boat!

4 **Out of the Blue** a program on the community radio station 3CR, interviewed Donna and Steve Smithyman in early October. Monique Bregman discussed the activities that FOMI conduct and the important role that the members and volunteers play in keeping the island free of weeds, monitoring the seagrass growth patterns over time, and how the sands are shifting around the island, helping reshape and change the dynamic form of these special islands. So FOMI is getting some publicity to a sympathetic audience.

5 **Occupational Health and Safety** — Mid September at Queenscliff's Marine Discovery Centre, Coast Care Coast Action (Department of Sustainability and Environment) hosted an introductory forum for volunteer groups. Issues discussed included, first aid on activity days, responsible leadership and volunteers signing an indemnity form on the day. Using the DSE guidelines, it seemed that FOMI are already doing a very good job, meeting suggested outcomes and acting according to best practice principles. We eagerly await the release of the guidelines after the draft document is revised. Stay tuned for an update next year.

6 Release of the Parks Victoria Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park Management Plan, July 2006. It is in PDF format on the Parks Vic website:

http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/resources07/07_1781.pdf

(87 pages, 3.86MB). If you would like to look at a hard copy, email debsingleton@optusnet.com.au (secretary) and we'll arrange for you to borrow the FOMI copy.

Remember that Mud Islands is part of the declared Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park, which means it is in a 'no take zone', even though it is tempting sometimes. The beauty of going out there is to discover treasures, wonder at them, photograph them and return them to where they were found, so that someone else can have the pleasure of discovery. It is all part of nature's cycle of life (and death). As we know, these are very dynamic islands, forever shifting with the currents.



7 **President's report (extracts), FOMI AGM, September 2006**. Full report available on the FOMI website: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~fomi/>

The working bees on Mud Islands have been progressing very well. Up until June this year we have focused exclusively on Eastern Island. Starting at one end and working our way through we found a large number boxthorns and pockets of tree mallow, particularly in the southern end of Eastern Island, not far from the creek. Search and destroy is our mantra!

So at this stage Eastern Island is considered 'clean' and we have started afresh on Boatswain Island.

The trip out to the Islands on the 22nd May was our first visit to Boatswain for a while. It was very interesting to observe the changes that take place in a relatively short period of time. The amount of sand being deposited around the mouth of the creek on the south easterly corner is massive. It is now impossible to pull the dingy around without heading way out into the bay. There are two new sand banks that are permanently above the high tide mark now and the phosphate rock that we used to look under for crabs is now totally buried under the beach.



Walking along the beach on Boatswain Island reveals that this part of the island is undergoing active erosion. Even the tern breeding area has been inundated this year as the strip of land supporting the saltbush becomes thinner and thinner. It will be vital that we monitor and record the changes happening to the islands. Change is the one constant out there. For example the creek between Boatswain and Northern Island has been closed for some time now, so in reality there are only two islands that make up the Mud Islands complex. However, on our last trip there was evidence that water was trying to get through that spot again, but from the lagoon side rather than the bay side.



The hard workers on the working bee in May were all surprised to see how many Boxthorns were present on the first section of Boatswain Island. In fact we didn't get far beyond the shadow of Mount Mud due to the amount of cutting and painting of young boxthorns. By the time we finished for the day we were just on the edge of a large patch of Tree Mallow.

The July trip focused on clearing vegetation from the tern colony, which is one of our most important activities for the year, and one of our most confronting particularly for new members. Many Crested terns (100+) were mulling together on the beach along with 1 Caspian tern. They were gathering strength to tackle the ever present gulls nesting on the breeding colony site.

The islands are looking fantastic; we have an active core of people and a lot of potential for the future.



8 The Activity Coordinator has set up a sign-in book at the address: fomislands@yahoo.com.au so you can register online prior to activities in the future. You can also check out the guest list for the activities such as the Christmas Breakup held recently...

9 Christmas Breakup dinner at the Portarlington Pub on Fri 1 Dec, 7.30pm. 12 people spent a really pleasant evening at the pub, sampling local seafood as part of the menu, and yarning about some of the highlights of the year. The group seems to be growing with some active new members and a sense of purpose in the air! Keep up the involvement everyone!

10 2007 Trips (typically 4th Sunday of the month):

25 February - Weeding

BONUS TRIP - Clean Up Australia Day — Sunday 4 March 2007. FOMI is registering for a kit to clean up our islands. If you are interested in joining us on that day, sign onto the guest list at the email address: fomislands@yahoo.com.au

The usual trip to the islands will go ahead on Sunday 25 March 2007 – it will be another **seagrass** monitoring trip. Weeders are also most welcome.

22 April - Weeding

27 May - Weeding

24 June - Weeding

22 July - **Victorian Wader Study** group and weeding

26 August – Weeding

October – **Alternate excursion**

23 September - Weeding

25 November – **Seagrass** monitoring and weeding

Remember, we only have seats for 13 people on each trip.