

Summary of Vicky and Jill's talks 27 August 2026: Nurturing Local Biodiversity

Vicky Shukuroglou is convenor of **Friends of Biodiversity: Hohnes Hill**, and [Nillumbio](#).

Vicky began her presentation by **orienting us in place**. Following a sequence of her trademark stunning photographs of different locations around Australia, she paused on an image of Nillumbik bushland, noting that where we are gives us all the clues we need for how to look after it.

She posed the question to the audience, **'What does it mean to be in place?'** How do we find out about the creatures that live here and their needs? Some have **very specific needs** – for example, some insects can only live on one fungus, or have a particular relationship with one plant. She gave the example of the symbiotic relationships between the Eltham Copper Butterfly, the notoncus ants and the sweet bursaria plant, all of which need to interact in specific ways to allow that butterfly to thrive.

There are **incredible complexities** that we need to understand, mysteries and tender connections that we can easily break if we don't observe. The key to nurturing biodiversity is **intimacy** – how well do we notice? **Careful observations** can allow us to tread sensitively and keep disturbance to a minimum; to pay attention to what is happening around us. To be aware that much is happening below the ground as well – a healthy habitat can be indicated by the richness of the fungi, which in turn can be a clue to the health of the mycorrhizal layer underground.

How we respond is our choice – it's all about love and relationship and care. Grief is ever present. Vicky shared examples of letters of love and loss to the trees that were written at the time of the **Fitzsimons Lane roadworks** – a demonstration of how grief can be shared with community.

Vicky concluded her talk with a description of the work of care and regeneration by the Friends of Biodiversity: Hohnes Hill, demonstrated by photos of before and after transformation. By working with attention and slowness, love and care, **weeds have been much reduced**, populations of **Eltham Copper Butterfly** have increased dramatically, and **orchids and other wildflowers are proliferating**. Vicky stressed the importance of **monitoring** - these changes have been documented by meticulous flora surveys and Eltham Copper Butterfly larvae counts, and, most importantly, **ongoing observation and sensitive response**.

Jill Kellow is convenor of **Friends of Macmahon Ball Paddock**, Eltham, and **Friends of Moor-rul Grassland**, Kangaroo Ground.

Jill began by setting Nillumbik in a **bioregional context**. Nillumbik sits within the Highlands Southern Fall (HSF) Bioregion, along the southern edges of the Great Dividing Range. Within each bioregion there are Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs).

Macmahon Ball Paddock sits primarily within the **Grassy Dry Forest** EVC, while Moor-rul Grassland sits within the **Plains Grassland** EVC – one of only two indigenous grasslands in Nillumbik.

Nillumbik has over **100 bushland and wetland reserves** comprising a diverse range of habitats – all cared for and managed by only four council Environmental Works Officers. There are **22 active Friends Groups** for these reserves. The reserves are important refuges for Nillumbik's endangered species including the Eltham Copper Butterfly, Powerful Owl and Rosella Spider Orchid. Reserves are ranked according to their ecological significance.

Friends groups typically meet for two hours once a month, and are allocated 400 indigenous tube stock per year from **Edendale nursery**. Tasks mostly include **weeding and planting**. The aim of friends groups is to 'maintain tidiness and safety in the reserve, and to gradually return the vegetation to a semblance of its natural state before European settlement'.

Jill touched on the history of the two reserves. Macmahon Ball Paddock was named after **Professor William Macmahon Ball**, who acquired a parcel of land on Bridge St around the time of the Second World War. The land was later subdivided, and the Paddock was given to the council as a nature reserve. Moor-rul Grassland was managed by Wurundjeri people with fire to create open grounds for hunting and plant cultivation, and the Friends of Moor-rul Grassland ('Moor-rul' describes the fertile soils of Kangaroo Ground) was established by **Nillumbik Reconciliation Group** in 2009.

Macmahon Ball Paddock has regenerated since cessation of farming with an upper storey of Red Box, and a variety of forbs such as chocolate lilies, bulbine lilies, dianella, hyacinth orchids, greenhood orchids and various native grasses and rushes.

Problems and issues include vandalism, poor soil, weeds (ehrharta spp, romulea), lack of water and climate change.

Moor-rul Grassland remnant indigenous grassland species include Kangaroo Grass, Wallaby Grasses and Weeping Grass, and other grass species such as Spear Grass and Wheat Grass have been added by the Friends. Other non-grassy species that have been added or regenerated include *Wahlenbergia* spp, Trigger plants, chocolate lilies, dianella, saltbush and *Convolvulus*.

A particular weed problem has been the presence of the grass *Phalaris*, which can cause a potentially fatal disease for kangaroos called staggers. The weed *Romula rosea* has also been difficult to eradicate. Redlegged Earth Mite has caused the death of yam daisies and blue pincushions (*Brunonia australis*) at Moor-rul.

Further information:

- To join **Friends of Biodiversity: Hohnes Hill**, or to get more information about this Friends' group's activities, go to

<https://www.nillumbio.org/friendsofbiodiversityhohneshill>. Alternatively, fill in your contact details here <https://www.nillumbio.org/contact>, or send an email to Vicky at nillumbio@email.org.au.

- To join **Friends of Macmahon Ball Paddock** or **Friends of Moor-rul Grassland**, contact Jill at jnkellow@gmail.com.
- To find out about other Friends' groups in the shire, go to <https://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au/Explore/Environment/Environmental-volunteer/Friends-groups>
- Vicky has co-authored a **pocket field guide to Melbourne's eucalypt species** – the [ACE Guide to Eucalypts Melbourne](#). This book makes identification a breeze. **36 eucalypt species** - 32 indigenous and 4 introduced - of greater Melbourne are beautifully photographed by Vicky in intimate detail, identified by bark, fruit, bud and leaf. Buy online at <https://eucalyptsmelbourne.au/buy/> \$30 plus \$7.50 postage and handling.

