

*Snape Reserve*  
*Committee of Management*  
*Annual Report*  
*July 2024 - July 2025*



*Clematis mycrophylla & Acacia montana,*  
*September 2024*



Silky Desert Mouse

## *Snape Reserve Committee of Management*

### *2024-2025 Annual Report*

#### *Catastrophic Fire:*

Lightning ignited fire on the western edge of the Little Desert National Park on the 27 January 2025, and it quickly spread eastward and burnt through roughly 80% of Snape Reserve. The weather conditions were extreme with the fire burning very hot, which left many areas of the Reserve devoid of vegetation. In many places only bare patches of earth are to be seen. The Reserve's annual rainfall total for 2024 was only 286 mm compared to the Wimmera average rainfall total of 400 mm. This greatly contributed to the very severe impact of the fire on the Reserve.

Miraculously, at the front of the property a strip several hundreds of metres deep running along Old Racecourse Road was unburnt. And most fortunately the assets of Brian' Shed and equipment including the tractor are all safe. The back fence between the little Desert National Park and the Reserve was badly damaged in the fire and needs replacing. A section of the fence with Lehman's property was damaged by a large red gum falling on it and wooden corner posts were burnt. One of nine newly installed wooden bench seats for the use of birdwatchers and walk in visitors was destroyed as was the bird hide on the dam. It is not intended to rebuild the bird hide as the dam where it is sited does not hold water for lengthy periods. Twenty of the 68 track signs were fire damaged and need replacing.



Aerial photograph of the eastern end of Snape Reserve soon after the fire. It clearly shows areas of the Reserve that have been badly hit by fire and the strip running along Old Racecourse Rd. not affected.  
*Courtesy of Mary Argall.*



In late May there are signs of the bush regenerating. Many of the burnt trees have sprouted epicormic growth, even though there have been drought conditions in the Wimmera. In a few areas there are green tinges of new grass growth but overall, the landscape is blackened with bare patches of earth a feature.

Snape Reserve Committee of Management were not able to access the Reserve between the fire event and late May because of restrictions placed by Trust for Nature. Committee of Management now has access to areas that were largely cleared of overstorey in the past for farming. This limited access allows the vital work of weeding, watering parched revegetation and the 2025 revegetation planting to proceed.



### *Phytophthora Hygiene:*

Phytophthora, a root-rotting fungal pathogen, is more likely to spread following fires. Fires can create new environmental conditions that favour the pathogen's survival and success. To prevent the spread of dieback to Snape Reserve by the fungus *Phytophthora cinnamomi* TfN have introduced management guidelines. The fungus is spread by movement of infected soil or plant material from existing areas of the disease to clean areas. This requires that footwear and vehicles that have been in off road bush settings be cleaned and sanitised before

entering Snape Reserve. A field hygiene kit has been purchased for Snape Reserve containing scrubbing brushes & screwdrivers to remove dirt, and a hand sprayer containing Methylated spirits as a sterilising agent.

### *Insurance:*

Lindsay Smith spent many weeks collecting, getting quotes and collating information to easily enable Trust for Nature to claim insurance for the loss by fire of fencing, signage, the bird hide and a wooden bench seat.

### *Weeds:*

Weed numbers were down between July and the fire in late January due to the exceptionally dry conditions and past weed control work. Thanks to Greg Bourke, Terry Lynch, Lindsay Smith, Sharyn Cook and Coral Schmidt for their contributions in keeping weeds on the Reserve in check. The following weed work happened on the Reserve during this period.

- Amsinkia was hoed in known past locations. It was very pleasing that Black Box Swamp a very bad area for this weed in years past, had much improved. Overall, this weed is taking less work to manage.
- Malta thistles numbers were less this year, but Black Box Swamp still had a big population of this weed. Other areas where Malta thistles were hoed are near the eastern end of the Gurra Track exclosure, and the eastern and western ends of Callitris Swamp. Wimmera Woodruff Swamp area has improved, and there was only one bad patch of small plants at Red Gum Flat.
- Lindsay visited the known sites of Saffron thistles and hoed the small numbers that were there.
- A few stemless thistles were hoed at Callitris Swamp and Red Gum Swamp.
- A few Twiggy Mullien were treated with herbicide at Red Gum Swamp.
- Marshmallow weeds in small numbers were hoed at various locations on the east side of the Reserve.
- Small numbers of Horehound are still being found and hoed in many locations on the northern cleared areas on the Reserve.
- Wild Sage numbers are reducing on the Reserve, but considerable time was spent glyphosate brush painting this weed in locations at Red Gum Swamp and Callitris Swamp.
- Along Old Racecourse Road many onions weeds plants were hoed, and many Wild Sage plants were sprayed with herbicide using a pump up 8 litre spray bottle.
- Scattered Bridal Creeper plants have been dug up in small numbers on the Reserve.
- Very small numbers of winged slender thistle were hoed this year.
- Some emergent Veldt grasses were hoed around Brian's shed after last year's herbicide application.
- Thousands of Heliotropes were hoed and sprayed at the southern end of Old Racecourse Swamp and at Callitris Swamp in late Spring. The control work on this weed stopped when the fire occurred with still much to be done. All weed work ended with the fire event and in May there was little evidence of a weed problem.

### *Rabbits:*

More rabbits are being seen active around the Dimboola district. Several rabbit holes have been ripped on the Reserve, the first in a long while, but there is still evidence that Calicivirus is impacting rabbit numbers.

### *Foxes:*

A few foxes have been sighted on the Reserve.

### *Bees:*

*Bacillus thuringiensis* was added to the bird drinker in Spring/Summer of 2024-5, because there were many hundreds of feral bees getting water there. The *thuringiensis* kills the feral bees without harming the birds. Over two months of treating the water weekly the bee's numbers at the drinker were small. The fire will have significantly reduced feral bee numbers on the Reserve, and it is hoped they will not be a problem in the future.

### *Deer:*

A mob of around 20 deer were sighted by CFA members on Old Racecourse Road in the week following the fire. Permission was given by TfN to night shoot any deer on Snape Reserve in June, a program arranged by Parks.

### *Cultural Fuel Reduction Burns:*

A scheduled fuel reduction burn was postponed for 2024/2025 due to weather conditions. It is conjecture, but if the fuel reduction burn had gone ahead perhaps the impact of the fire on the Reserve may have been less severe.

### *Flora Survey:*

The 21 quadrats were not surveyed in spring 2024 due to Sue Smith's illness.

### *Fencing:*

Considerable work has been undertaken to upgrade the front fence running along Old Racecourse Road. Corner strainer posts have all been installed. Vegetation along the fence line has been trimmed back, mainly by Lindsay Smith. The old ringlock fencing wire has been taken down and rolled up for reuse to manufacture revegetation guards where the material was fit for purpose. Sufficient galvanized star steel posts have been purchased to redo the fence. To finish the fence funds from TfN need to be allocated to hire a fencing contractor to hammer in the new star steel posts mechanically. Once this is done Snape Reserve Committee of Management can quickly finish the fence by running plain wire through the star posts.

The back fence adjoining the Little Desert National Park was damaged by the fire and Parks have agreed to cover half the cost of its replacement. The fence in its current condition is sufficient to stop access of vehicles from adjacent Parks tracks into Snape Reserve. TfN head office are liaising with Parks to have the damaged fence replaced. When the fence is replaced, it should provide a lot of material that can be used to protect revegetation works on Snape Reserve.

### *Resignations:*

John Rocke resigned from the Committee after serving for 16 years. Daryl Argall resigned from the Committee after 14 years' service and Cliff Unger resigned after 18 years' service. All three committee members made valued contributions to the running of Snape Reserve and the Committee was sorry to accept their resignations.

### *Water Cart:*

Sharyn Cook with the help of Daryl Argall gained the loan of a 1200 litre water cart that belongs to Hindmarsh Shire but was lying idle. This has been of great use in watering revegetation. Greg Bourke generously donated a tarpaulin to protect the water cart from the weather.

### *Survey for the Golden rayed blue butterfly:*

The Golden-rayed blue butterfly found only in Victoria is endangered. It feeds exclusively on *Myoporum parvifolium* (Creeping boobialla) which is found along the edges of salt swamps, flood plain areas and in woodlands. Growing in shade its foliage may be sparse. It can tolerate limestone and sandy soils. Creeping boobialla is endemic to Snape Reserve and is found in good numbers particularly around Old Racecourse Swamp. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 2024, Jessie Sinclair with two other Zoo's Victoria staffs did another survey for the butterfly. Three surveys had been done previously. Ian Flux and Sharyn Cook were present. Unfortunately, no butterflies were found.

### *Revegetation:*

Unfortunately the drought conditions and the fire resulted in death of the majority of the 2024 revegetation plantings. Also, most of the 450 Black box planted in 2023 at Wimmerra Woodruff Swamp have succumbed to the drought and fire. About fifteen hundred overstory and understory species were planted in 2024. Roughly 30 Yellow gums and 14 Red gums have survived plus a 31 Desert stringybarks, 20 Collistomen and *Acacia Brachybotrya* plus 120 *Myoporum parvifolium*. These plants would not have survived but for the waterings they were given prior to and post the time of exclusion of workers to the Reserve.

Before the fire happened the revegetation was watered multiple times as follows.

- Horsham High School under the supervision of a teacher and Adam Blake watered the Revegetation in the Gurra Track enclosure.
- The Moffat Track revegetation was watered and hand weeded by Sharyn Cook, John Nichols and Ian Flux.
- Lindsay Smith and Ian Flux watered the Red gums.
- Lindsay Smith, Greg Bourke and Ian Flux watered Callistemons & Yellow gums on the west side of the property
- Lindsay and Ian Flux watered the Myoporum plantings
- Sharyn Cook, Greg Bourke and Ian Flux watered the red gums, yellow gums on the south bank of Old Racecourse Swamp and the Callistemons at the front gate and on Gurra Track.
- Lindsay watered the red gums & the Myoporum post fire.
- Sharyn & Ian watered the red gums & the Myoporum and the Callistemons on Gurra Track post fire.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 2024, 200 plants of Creeping boobialla provided by Zoo's Victoria were planted in equal numbers at Red Gum Swamp and Callitris Swamp verges with 120 surviving. It is hoped the larvae of the Golden rayed blue butterfly can be introduced onto Snape Reserve in the future and establish a viable population. Another 200 plants of Myoporum will be planted on Snape Reserve this year.





Myoporum planting team 2024 consisting of Zoos Victoria staffs and Snape volunteers.

For revegetation work in 2025 ninety plants were ordered from a local nursery to plant near the front gate of the Reserve to try and add colour to this area. Unfortunately, the nursery only supplied 28 of the ninety plants ordered.

Lindsay Smith has grown-on 500 plus plants which a nursery supplied in 2024 but were too small to be planted in that year. Most of these plants Lindsay needed to pot up from Hiko pots to tube stock. These plants consist of wattles and hop bushes and will be planted in the exclosures. Lindsay also grew from seed 100 *Clematis microphylla*.

On the 12/6/2025 sixty plants of *Clematis microphylla* were planted on the Reserve, some near the front gate, but most in the area around Brian's Shed.

### *Track Maintenance:*

The tracks on Snape Reserve were not slashed in the summer of 2024 because there was very little vegetation growth on them due to the extreme dry and there was also the risk of starting a fire if the slashing went ahead.

### *Thermal Cameras:*

The two thermal cameras which send images to Koori school children via satellite technology installed on Snape Reserve, and supplied by the Barenji Gadjin Land Council, were removed by them on the 26/9/2024.

### *Tree Guards:*

The 450 Black Box trees planted in 2023 on the Wimmera Woodruff Swamp were re-guarded with ringlock and a star steel posts in 2024 to stop kangaroo damage. Unfortunately, as before mentioned, the fire and dry conditions in 2025 has caused mass mortality of these plants.

### *Walking Access:*

The fire on Snape Reserve meant visitors were not accessing the Reserve from the 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2025. Since July 2024 visitors have come from Adelaide, Apollo Bay, Bannockburn, Boorowa, Crescent Head N.S.W., Dimboola, Dumbalk, Geelong, Goolwa S.A., Gosford, Grenville, Hamilton, Hattem N.L., Horsham, Kyneton, Leeton, Loch, Macedon, Mallacoota, Melbourne, Portland, Port Lonsdale, Windaroo, Wodonga,

Donations from walking access visitors in 2024 – 2025 totalled \$229.95.

### *Visitors:*

On the 19/8/2024 a Horsham High School group helped with watering of the 2024 revegetation at the Gurra Track enclosure.

On the 4/10/2024 Knox Photographic Club visited with one group led by Mary Argall and Sharyn Cook concentrating on flora and the other led by Ian Flux looking for birds. Club members were very appreciative of the support they had been given at the Reserve.

On the 19/10/2024 Geelong Field Naturalists visited and with one group led by Sharyn Cook concentrating on flora and the other led by Ian Flux looking for birds. This club was also very appreciative of the support they had been given at the Reserve.

On the 29/10/2024 Jonathan Starks, Landcare Facilitator, led Woodcroft College students and three teachers from South Australia on an educational visit to the Reserve.

On the 6/6/2025 Victoria Schwarz, a Monash University Ph.D. student accompanied by two other students took core samples of the soil profile from parts of Old Racecourse Swamp. Victoria was granted permission by TfN to do her sampling. Her thesis is determining changes in the Wimmera River course over time.



Phytophthora hygiene was done on the Monash University teams footwear, vehicle and sampling equipment before their work commenced.

### *Voluntary Hours:*

The 2024 to 2025 voluntary hours worked at the reserve are set out in the table below.

ACTIVITY	HOURS
Building	25
Fencing	180
Maintenance & Improvements	45
Management	379
Revegetation	674
Surveys	15
Weeds	200
Educational Visits	252
<b>Total Hours</b>	<b>1770</b>
<b>Week equivalent (38Hr)</b>	<b>46.5</b>
<b>Dollar Equivalent (\$43/hr)</b>	<b>\$76,110</b>

Total volunteer hours worked since Snape Reserve was purchased are listed in the table below.

Year	Hours Worked	Value
2003 to 2023	56,074	\$1,249,141
2023 to 2024	2,910	\$ 125,130
2024 to 2025	1,770	\$ 76,110
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60,754</b>	<b>\$1,450,381</b>

The hours worked up to and including 2013 were valued at \$20 / hour. The hours from 2013 to 2023 were valued at \$25 / hour. The volunteer hourly rate of \$43 (value from the Centre for Volunteering Victoria) was used from 2023.

### *Thanks:*

Thanks to all the committee members who have contributed to the running of Snape Reserve.

With special thanks to the regulars contributing on Thursdays.