



One section of the planting crew from Glenaroua Land Management Group and Manningham Rotary Club at their annual planting day.

The Piper Biolink – a biodiversity crossroads

Due north from Melbourne is an area of growing townships and open farmland sitting between the forests of the eastern and western ranges of Victoria. This distinct ecological space begins where the basalt hills and plains spill over the Great Divide at Kilmore Gap. From here, the tributaries of Sunday Creek and Sugarloaf Creek wind northward through hilly farmlands to the Goulburn River. At the centre of this catchment is Mount Piper, south of Broadford.

The South West Goulburn Landcare Network is developing the Piper Biolink at this crossroads between northern, southern, eastern and western Victoria. The biolink zone is an elevated area with moisture coming from south and north which makes it a potential climate change refuge.

The Goulburn Broken CMA's *Biodiversity Strategy* identifies the Piper Biolink zone as a very high priority for restoration and improved connectivity. The biolink aims to establish a mosaic of bushland and farmland across the landscape. It will link the forests of Mount Disappointment and the Tallarook Ranges in the east with the Cobaw and Macedon Ranges to the west.

From salinity to biodiversity

Bushland protection and revegetation began in the area in response to salinity.

The Sunday Creek and Sugarloaf Creek catchments carry salt into the Goulburn Murray system. The focus has now shifted to biodiversity.

In 1998 the Glenaroua Land Management Group and Northcote Rotary Club (and now the Manningham Rotary Club) began a program to grow and plant 5000 trees and shrubs each year in the Broadford and Glenaroua areas of the biolink zone. Last year, 6500 plants were established on two adjoining properties north of Mount Piper and the seedlings will be ready again for planting this winter.

The Nulla Vale Pyalong West Landcare Group also began their Forest Link Project in the late 1990s, linking the Tooborac (box ironbark) Forests with the Cobaw Ranges across the heavily cleared granite country west of Pyalong. The 40-metre wide corridor is now complete, but it is continually being enhanced with larger nodes of revegetation and extensions linking to patches of bushland.

The Piper Biolink was first mooted in 2008, but the idea was set aside after the February 2009 bushfires.

Funding support through DPI and DSE (now DEPI), Goulburn Broken CMA and

Caring for our Country has also helped landholders from outside the fire area to work with government agencies to protect and enhance biodiversity on public land within the Piper Biolink zone. Sites include forests, crown frontages, local reserves and road reserves.

Gathering momentum

The Piper Biolink has now been taken up by Landcare groups and networks, CMAs, Mitchell Shire Council and DEPI. Funding is being targeted towards key sites for protection and enhancement and several separate projects are already underway.

The Mount Piper to Monument Hill Habitat Highway was funded through the Goulburn Broken CMA in 2012. Major plantings in 2007 and 2008 provided a wide link along the joint boundary of two properties from the Mount Piper Nature Conservation Reserve to Dry Creek in Broadford.

Landholders upstream from Broadford have now been approached and most of the creek line will be protected over the next two years. Natural regeneration and some plantings will enhance the habitat highway, including a block of 29 hectares on two adjoining properties.



The view from Mount Piper to Dry Creek in Broadford showing the completed biolink.



My grandfather cleared the land and got a lot from it, but we now have a lot of problems. I want to put a bit back into the place.



for Central Victoria

By Peter Mitchell,
Sonia Sharkey and Elyse Kelly

Gorse and blackberries are an ongoing issue along Dry Creek. Funding provided to Sunday Creek/Sugarloaf Catchment Inc. from the Goulburn Broken CMA through the Victorian Landcare Program is helping landholders treat gorse on private land. DEPI is controlling weeds on crown frontages.

Welcome news of another part of the biolink was received this year. A key 700-hectare bushland property linking the forested hills to the farmlands along the Black Range at High Camp was purchased by Trust for Nature. The property will be covenanted and resold in the next couple of years.

This purchase has provided impetus for more links westward across Mount William to the Cobaw Ranges, working with the Upper Deep Creek Landcare Network. The Newham and District Landcare Group, a member group of the network, is well underway with its Cobaw Biolink between the Cobaw Ranges, Hanging Rock and the Macedon Ranges.

Links to the Melbourne Ark

The Piper Biolink fits into an even wider network of biolinks through central Victoria. The Central Victorian Biolinks is

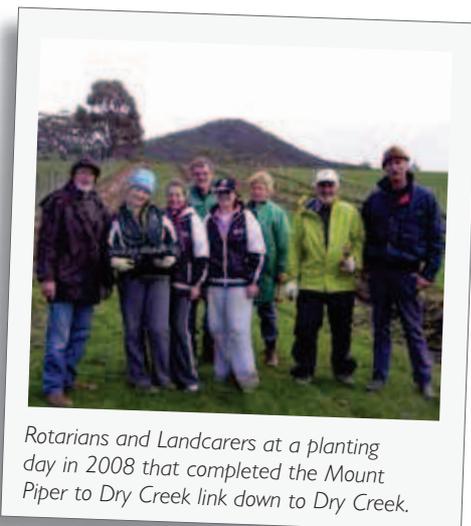
a project set up by Landcare networks to promote and enable large-scale landscape connectivity. A regional plan is currently being developed – the Melbourne Ark Project – that will link the Strathbogie Ranges and Eastern Ranges in a wide arc westwards, through the Piper Biolink zone, over Mount William and along the Great Dividing Range, to the Brisbane Ranges.

The Melbourne Ark Project will link up the wetter forests of central Victoria to provide a resilient landscape for biodiversity as global warming changes the distributions of plants and animals.

These are large-scale and long-term projects. They will gather momentum as Landcare and other community groups work together to promote biolinks in their local communities. The biodiversity benefits from these projects are broad, but they are also local, with landholders reaping the rewards of healthier ecosystems across the farming landscape.

Rod Caplehorn from Broadford worked with his neighbour to fence either side of their common boundary to create part of the Piper Biolink.

“My grandfather cleared the land and got a lot from it, but we now have a lot of



Rotarians and Landcarers at a planting day in 2008 that completed the Mount Piper to Dry Creek link down to Dry Creek.

problems. I want to put a bit back into the place. All the linking and other revegetation and erosion works that we have done will benefit me and future generations,” Rod said.

Peter Mitchell is a Landcare Project Officer in Broadford, Elyse Kelly is secretary of the South West Goulburn Landcare Network and Sonia Sharkey is a Landcare Facilitator based at Mitchell Shire. Sonia’s position is funded through the Victorian Local Landcare Facilitator Initiative.

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For more on the Central Victorian Biolinks go to www.centralvicbiolinks.org.au