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MAGAZINE



■ Article by Stephen Read

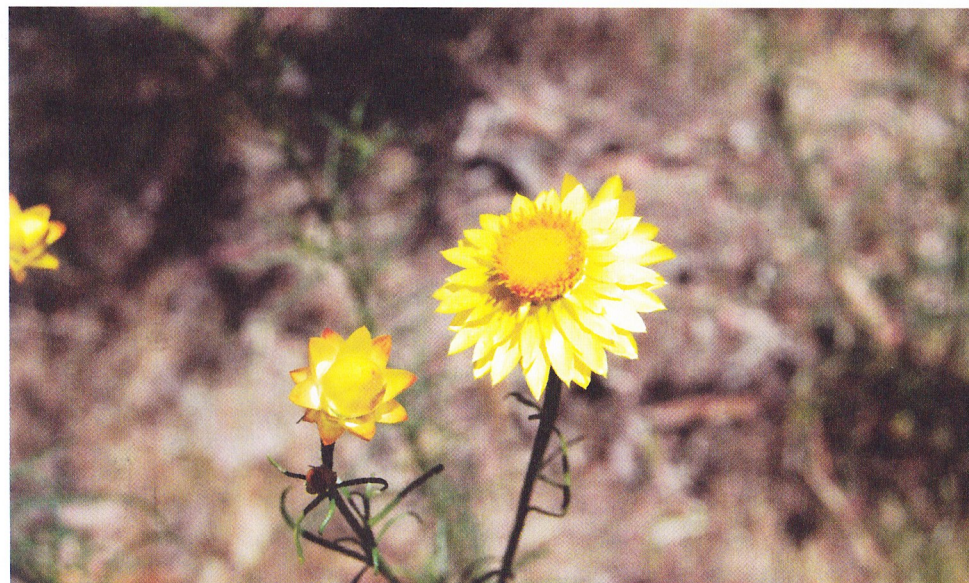
SAVING KYNETON'S ENDANGERED WOODLAND

Grassy woodland, rich with wildflowers and orchids once dominated the area north of Kyneton. Sadly, time moves on and much of the woodland is now endangered, with only a few small pockets of this once diverse and beautiful landscape still remaining.

Conservation of natural places is vital; in nature nothing is a "wasteland." Unfortunately, it has taken us a few hundred years to realise its importance. Kyneton Bushland Resort (KBR) is the latest organisation to champion this dwindling woodland, a vegetation type that is of local interest and national importance. Along with concerned private landholders and the nearby Bald Hill and Black Hill reserves, KBR forms a valuable link in the landscape. As luck would have it, the conservation effort won't need to start from scratch. The lack of grazing over the past three decades has allowed many rare plants to survive in large

numbers and the hard work by the KBR staff in recent years has almost eradicated many of the serious environmental weeds.

I am excited to have been asked to develop the master landscape plan for the Kyneton Bushland Resort (KBR). Balancing the activity of the resort and fire zone guidelines with the conservation of the woodland is not easy. Well-defined paths and roads will go some way to protecting the bush from wayward traffic. KBR is fortunate to have existing vegetation and a richly diverse seed bank waiting for the opportunity to grow. All that is needed in most cases is a few minor adjustments to management practices and the bush will return. My plan is to use what already exists and work within the fire regulations to allow informal native meadows to grow around each villa. This area will need to be mown during the fire season, however by encouraging the



local plants to thrive the landscape should look lush all year. Natural regeneration of trees, shrubs and grasses will be encouraged throughout the rest of the site. In the absence of controlled fire, a mosaic of mown areas will allow the landscape to regenerate with a similar effect to traditional controlled burning. Some of the species that have been lost to the area, including the *Banksia marginata* (silver banksia), will be reintroduced to the site. Reintroduced species will be used ornamentally around the buildings of the resort, in this way they can be included in the landscape even though the provenance of the seed may not be known.

With the master plan almost complete and the hard work starting on the roads and paths, in the next few months things may look worse before they get better. However in the coming years, the woodland will once again thrive with a sea of wild flowers lapping at the edges of the resort villas.

So why is the woodland so important? Apart from the obvious aesthetic and habitat values, the answer might not always be clear. Two hundred years ago swamps were regarded as wastelands. We now know that swamps and wetlands are vital in keeping waterways

clean and provide many ecosystem services. Today, wetlands are considered so important that new developments are now constructing artificial wetlands where once they would have had to fill them in. We are only now beginning to discover the importance of grassy woodlands. As a landscape designer, the research into local plants is useful when designing for difficult sites, including rooftop gardens and balconies or any place where the soil is shallow and the conditions harsh. Gardeners can also learn something from the landscape management at KBR. One of the most common questions I have from my rural clients is how to garden with rocky, shallow soil and windy sites. Regardless of the style, the answer is always to work with what you have. If it is windy, choose plants that bend! If the soil is rocky choose plants that naturally grow in those conditions. If you don't like natives - that's fine, there are plenty of exotic plants that naturally grow in similar conditions, soil and climate that we enjoy in Central Victoria. The challenge is to find them and use them well.



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