



NATURE NEIGHBOURS

**BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOUR
TO OUR NATURE RESERVES**

Protecting our natural areas



If you live near a nature reserve you're a Nature Neighbour – this is your guide to caring for and enjoying your reserve next door.



ARE YOU A NATURE NEIGHBOUR?

If you live next to, or near, one of our many nature reserves in the City of Greater Geelong (the City), you're a Nature Neighbour. You get to enjoy the many health and lifestyle benefits of connecting with nature at your doorstep. And you're in a special position to help us protect and enhance the nature reserve next door.

We created this guide to help you get to know your reserve and better understand why and how you can make a difference. The following information, ideas and tips are just the start of your journey. To delve deeper, visit the City's website for more detail or get in touch with our team. Together, we can safeguard your neighbourhood nature reserve for the enjoyment of future generations.

Welcome on board nature neighbour.



WHAT ARE NATURE RESERVES?

Our nature reserves are public conservation areas with important environmental values. They contain locally indigenous plants, habitat for native animals and remnants of native vegetation.

Some nature reserves include wetlands and other interesting geological features. Many are woodlands supporting eucalyptus or other native trees. Others are covered by indigenous shrubs or grasses. Our coastal areas are also nature reserves.

We mainly manage our nature reserves to protect and improve their natural values so most have limited facilities for visitors.

WHAT DO NATURE RESERVES LOOK LIKE?

Every reserve is different. They often look untidier than other parks and gardens. That's how they're meant to be – they're wild, natural spaces. Often you'll find logs and rocks on the ground. Maybe scattered or tangled clumps of shrubs, or tall grass tussocks with wildflowers growing in between. All these natural features provide places (or habitats) for indigenous animals to live.

HOW BIG ARE NATURE RESERVES?

Some nature reserves are large, up to hundreds or thousands of hectares in size - including City managed reserves on our coasts and waterways such as Barwon River or Sparrovale-Nubitj yoorree Wetland, as well as National and State Parks like You Yangs National Park, which is managed by Parks Victoria.

Others are small town-sized blocks on local street corners or natural 'wild' areas at the back of your favourite sporting oval.

Even cemeteries and roadsides can have important environmental values. Some of the best remaining native vegetation in our region exists on roadsides, which can also act as corridors for wildlife to travel.



WHERE ARE OUR NATURE RESERVES?

The City manages many nature reserves located right across our region, from the Brisbane Ranges in the north, across the hills and plains, around the bay, and down to the coastal dune systems in the south.

OUR NATURE RESERVES



COASTAL WOODLAND



LAKE & WETLAND



NATIVE GRASSLAND



GRASSY WOODLAND



WATERWAY



WHY ARE OUR NATURE RESERVES IMPORTANT?

Our nature reserves are places of rich biodiversity and provide the essential ecosystem services we need to live healthy lives. Our natural areas are a vital source of food and fuel, they also provide us with clean air and water.

Since European settlement, up to 90 per cent of our municipality's indigenous vegetation has been cleared. What's left is fragmented. These remnants are often interspersed with housing, industrial and agricultural land and are consequently threatened by weed invasion, pest animals and human activity.

To preserve biodiversity we need to protect the variety of our ecosystems — from the tiniest plant and animal species to the largest vegetation types, wetlands, oceans and more. By focusing on our region's ecosystems and nature reserves, we contribute to biodiversity throughout Australia, and our planet.

WHAT ECOSYSTEMS EXIST IN OUR NATURE RESERVES?

Nature reserves in the City occur on a vast array of landscapes from inland hills and escarpments, valleys, plains, streams, and lakes, to coastal headlands, river mouths, flats and sand dunes. They support a range of remnant ecosystems including woodlands, shrublands, grasslands, and wetlands.

Each ecosystem has its own unique range of habitats, plants and animals. Many support rare or threatened ecosystems, including Plains Grassland, Plains Grassy Woodland, Grassy Woodland, Coastal Alkaline Scrub and Coastal Saltmarsh.

Keen to learn more about the ecosystems in our nature reserves? Visit our website.



- **Biodiversity (biological diversity) is the variety of all living things on Earth — the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, along with their genes and ecosystems.**
- **An ecosystem is a group of organisms living together in a particular area, and interacting with each other and the non-living elements (like water and soil) around them.**
- **An ecosystem can be very small, like a puddle or a mossy ledge under a large rock. Or it can be big like a forest, or as vast as an ocean.**





THE LAY OF THE LAND

A SNAPSHOT OF OUR REGION'S ECOSYSTEMS

Waterways are essential lifelines for our wildlife, providing habitat and facilitating movement through the landscape. They connect the country to the coast.

Native grasslands have largely been cleared as they mainly occurred on prime agricultural land in the northern region of the city. Today, grassland remnants are critically endangered and are highly valued for conservation.

Grassy woodland remnants are also critically endangered in our region and provide important habitat for many plants and animals.

Lakes and wetlands act as refuges for many rare or threatened species.

Coastal areas in the Geelong region contain important habitat for indigenous plants and animals, for example wetland birds and marine animals like seals and penguins.

Corio Bay has several wetlands that are internationally important as habitat for significant migratory bird species and Coastal Saltmarsh.

Coastal woodlands or tall shrublands, such as those dominated by Moonah, are important for dune stability and provide valuable habitat and links to salt marsh communities that are essential habitat for many birds, including the critically endangered Orange-Bellied Parrot.

Remnants are areas of native vegetation that have never been cleared for farming or other purposes.

Native plants and animals that grow naturally in a particular location are called 'indigenous'.



HOW DO WE LOOK AFTER OUR NATURE RESERVES?

Managing our many nature reserves is challenging. No two are the same. We carefully plan works for each reserve to:

- Encourage the natural regeneration of indigenous plants (for example, fencing to keep vehicles, machinery, livestock and pest animals out).
- Revegetate disturbed areas with appropriate indigenous plants.
- Control pest plants (environmental and noxious weeds).
- Control pest animals such as foxes and rabbits.
- Reduce soil erosion and salinity.
- Improve stormwater quality and the health of waterways and wetlands.
- Conduct planned burns.



We need your support to protect and improve our nature reserves. Can you help us?

WAYS YOU CAN HELP LOOK AFTER OUR NATURE RESERVES



With your help, we can do even more to protect and enhance nature reserves within the City. Here are some easy ways you can help look after our special places so your family, your neighbours and future generations can enjoy them for years to come.

BE A RESPONSIBLE PET OWNER

This is a biggie. For many people, pets are a much-loved part of life. But they belong at home with you and your family, not wandering uncontrolled in your neighbourhood nature reserve. Be a responsible pet owner and a great nature neighbour by:

- Stopping your pets wandering freely into nature reserves.
- Attaching bells to your cat's collar to help prevent it hunting native wildlife.
- Keeping your cat inside your house or garage between sunset and sunrise.
- Keeping your dog on a leash when enjoying nature reserves and other conservation parks where dogs are permitted.
- Scooping the poop – cleaning up after your dog.





STOP YOUR GARDEN PLANTS GOING BUSH

Your garden plants can easily spread and invade adjoining nature reserves. Once there, they compete with (and sometimes replace) indigenous plants. Many of our worst environmental weeds are introduced plants that have spread from private gardens or dumped garden waste. Weed control in reserves is critical, but it takes time and money. You can help by stopping your garden plants or lawn grasses spreading. For more details, ask about our *Garden Plants Are Going Bush* brochure.

JOIN A 'FRIENDS' GROUP

We're lucky to have many active 'friends' groups involved in restoring vegetation in our local reserves. Why not join a group and meet your neighbours, get active, connect with nature, have fun and learn about your local environment? To discover nature volunteer groups near you, visit geelongaustralia.com.au/naturevolunteers.

RESPECT YOUR BOUNDARIES

It's tempting to let parts of your property (garden, lawn, play areas), possessions (compost bins, play equipment) or outbuildings creep into the nature reserve next door. In reality, you're shrinking the boundaries of the reserve. Planting into or mowing the borders of the reserve to 'tidy up' isn't neighbourly, either. Those indigenous grasses, low shrubs and ground-layer plants are critical for biodiversity and wildlife habitat. That's why we don't mow them. Remember: you share the right to enjoy our local reserves with everyone – respecting boundaries helps maximise and protect the natural values for all.

Heavy penalties apply for dumping garden and other wastes on public land.

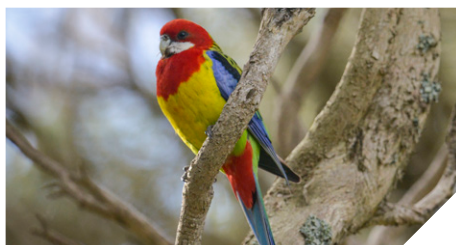
You can help by reporting any sightings of rubbish dumping to our customer service on 5272 5272.





LOVE YOUR LOCAL PLANTS AND ANIMALS

The more you learn about the plants and animals in your local nature reserves, the more connected you'll be. Why not get the kids involved? Or do some research online? You could keep a nature diary, sketch book, or photo album of what you see or share what you see with others using the iNaturalist app, or join your local field naturalists club. The more you watch, the more you see – and hear and smell. A lizard scurrying through the leaf litter. Eucalyptus scent in the air. Maybe you'll notice bird numbers declining or native animals reappearing after a pest animal control program. The seasons changing, new tracks forming, signs of pest animals – there's a lot more going on than first meets the eye!



GET FIRE READY

We manage nature reserves with wildfire risks in mind, especially the potential impact on neighbouring properties. But being fire ready is everyone's responsibility. Find out what you can do – check cfa.vic.gov.au for the latest how-to info on fire safety at home, preparing your house and property ahead of the season, and creating a bushfire survival plan.

KEEP A NATURE FRIENDLY GARDEN

Even native Australian plants can become weeds where they don't normally grow. Instead, why not choose locally indigenous plants for your garden? Because they've evolved to the local conditions, they'll not only do better than non-indigenous species, they'll need less looking after and will help provide food and shelter for wildlife. For more information, ask about our *Indigenous Plant Notes* brochures or check our website.



LIVING WITH YOUR WILD NEIGHBOURS

Being home to many indigenous animals is one of the best things about our region's nature reserves. Your neighbourhood reserve could be one of the last refuges where they get the shelter, food, or breeding areas they need to survive. These tips will help you learn to 'live and let live' with your wild neighbours in the reserve next door.

THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT SNAKES

- Snakes are active in warmer months; keep watch and tread carefully.
- Keep your dog on a short leash while walking in your reserve.
- Don't get too close — given a chance to, snakes will usually retreat. Most snake bites happen when people try to handle or harm them.
- Snakes are protected by law.

SWOOPING BIRDS

During spring, it's natural survival behaviour for some birds to protect their nesting sites by swooping people and animals in their territory. Magpies are notorious swoopers, and also protected by law. Your best solution is to avoid entering swooping hotspots during the breeding season (August to October). Learn more about magpie behaviour, including how to minimise your risk of being swooped, and access a swoop information kit at wildlife.vic.gov.au.

INJURED WILDLIFE

You may at times come across wildlife that is injured or stressed. If so, contact Wildlife Victoria on 03 8400 7300 for advice. If the injured wildlife is a marine animal, you can contact the Marine Response Unit on 1300 245 678.

ENJOYING OUR NATURE RESERVES



Your neighbourhood nature reserve may be one of the reasons you live where you live.

It's a privilege to live near natural areas where you can connect with the world around you. The benefits to health and wellbeing are many. We encourage you to visit, understand and enjoy our nature reserves – it's part of learning how to care for them and becoming a good Nature Neighbour. Why not grab a plant book or bird guide and enjoy getting to know some of the local residents?

When you visit, please follow these simple guidelines to enjoy nature without doing harm. Enjoy!

LEAVE IT AS YOU FOUND IT

Nature knows best. Natural places evolve and change over time. Features such as rocks, fallen trees and vegetation, and standing dead trees make great habitat for wildlife and are vital to the ecosystem. They need to stay where they are. It might seem incidental, but when you cut or remove vegetation, collect firewood, remove rocks, or even pick wildflowers, you can cause changes that eventually damage the environment and reduce biodiversity. Consider your reserve a "no take" zone where you carry out only what you carried in.

TREAD LIGHTLY

- Stay on formed tracks to reduce the impact of foot traffic on soil and vegetation, and to help protect vulnerable plants from Cinnamon Fungus disease.
- Don't drive your vehicle off the road.
- Keep gates closed on fenced reserves.
- Where dogs are permitted, keep your pooch on a lead and scoop the poop as you go. Don't take your dog into reserves that have signs asking you not to.
- Enjoy your lunch or a snack in the reserve, but don't leave your litter behind.
- Don't pick the wildflowers — instead, take photographs as keepsakes.

BY THE LAW

Looking after our natural places is not just the vibe, it's the law.

All our nature reserves, along with the indigenous plants and animals within, are protected from disturbance under state or federal legislation. Many support rare or threatened plants, animals and ecosystems that also have legal protection. In fact, most of our indigenous plants and animals are protected by various environmental laws regardless of where they occur.

Clearing indigenous vegetation, even on private land, is also governed by law. Vegetation removal is generally illegal unless you have a permit issued by Council or State Government, or if you're following the strict guidelines and regulations for bushfire safety. For more info, visit the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) website.

FEED YOUR CURIOSITY



Drop into one of our customer service centres (see our website for locations), or phone or email us for more information, including:

- Notes about particular nature reserves in the Geelong region.
- Information about our lakes, creeks, rivers and wetlands, including our 'Wetland Wanderings' self-guided tour notes.
- Lists of indigenous plants growing in different areas of the Geelong region.

- Maps of vegetation types of the Geelong region.
- Information about garden plants going bush — plants that readily become weeds.
- Pest and plant animal control information.
- Suitable places to walk your dog, or responsible pet ownership information.
- Local environment, field naturalist, and friends groups in the Geelong region.
- Information about State and National Parks, and other reserves in the region (Parks Victoria's Park Notes).

USEFUL CONTACTS

CITY OF GREATER GEELONG

Telephone: 5272 5272
(8.00am-5.00pm Monday–Friday)
Email: contactus@geelongcity.vic.gov.au
PO Box 104, Geelong, Vic 3220
www.geelongaustralia.com.au

BELLARINE CATCHMENT NETWORK

www.environmentbellarine.org.au

PARKS VICTORIA INFORMATION CENTRE

Telephone: 13 19 63
Email: info@parks.vic.gov.au
www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

GEELONG LANDCARE NETWORK

Email: geelonglandcarenetwork@gmail.com

SURF COAST & INLAND PLAINS NETWORK

www.landcarevic.org.au/groups/corangamite/scipn/

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE ACTION (DEECA)

Telephone: 13 61 86
www.delwp.vic.gov.au

We Acknowledge the Wadawurrung People as the Traditional Owners of the Land, Waterways and Skies. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

We Acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are part of our Greater Geelong community today.



**City of Greater Geelong
is a certified One Planet
Living council**

CITY OF GREATER GEELONG

Wadawurrung Country

PO Box 104

Geelong VIC 3220

P: 5272 5272

E: contactus@geelongcity.vic.gov.au

www.geelongaustralia.com.au

CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE

Wurriki Nyal Civic Precinct

137-149 Mercer Street

Geelong VIC 3220


8.00am – 5.00pm

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