Wombat Forest Society, (Oct 1995). The case for inclusion of the Wombat Forest under Commonwea Deferred Forest Areas. Submission to Federal G'ment's Forest Taskforce, Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet

FLORA and FAUNA REPORT

The Flora and Fauna Committee of the Wombat Forest Society approached our report in the following method
We sought to identify ecosystems and habitat areas. We have then applied a protection and maintenance plan.
The Flora and Fauna section of the Wombat Forest Society Community Management Plan is based on the the current 1995 situation where no environmental impact study has been done in the Wombat forest. All studies upon which this section of the plan are based, have been conducted by members of the Wombat Forest Society, or through liaison with individuals who either in a personal or professional capacity, have undertaken relevant studies within the Wombat Forest.
Various ecosystems have been isolated as operating within the Wombat Forest.

Valley Rainforest System

Many valleys and gullies occur throughout the forest. It is in these areas that remaining pockets of rainforest exist. Most of the valleys contain creeks or streams. They occur at various points throughout the forest. The Amblers Lane Clear Creek area; the upper reaches of the Werribee River system; the Deep Creek areas; and of course the Lerderderg Creek areas. All appear to contain three storey growth eg. Hazel Pomaderis - Blackwoods and Lightwoods (lightwoods are rare) - various ferns and small shrubs as well as large trees such as stringybarks and swamp gums. It is on the upper banks of these valleys that rarer shrub species occur : eg. Grasstrees - Grevillea Repens, Grevillea Obtecta.
Many of these valley systems also host butterfly hatching areas; possibly through density of vegetation and the protection offered by the valley sides. A micro climate has been created enabling this ecosystem to operate.
It would appear that the removal of timber from the tops of the slopes above these valleys would damage the balance of this ecosystem.



Swamp Systems

Another obvious system operating in the Wombat Forest features swamps and bogs. The western part of Wombat Forest incorporates many small swamps and some bogs. These areas are at the head-waters of most of the western forest creek systems. They are heavily populated with fauna due to their inaccessibility to humans. They are home to possums, swamp rats, eagles, snakes, and koalas. A positive identification of a leadbeaters possum occurred in similar forest type in the north eastern side of the Wombat Forest.

Some drainage of these areas has occurred The forest edge in the western part of the forest encroaches into farming land. Many water birds live and breed around the western edge of the forest. A lot of the farming land contains drainage lines and much of it is underwater in the wettest winters.
Swamp gums also occur in these wetter areas.

Other Ecosystems

A number of native grasslands also exist in the Wombat Forest. They occur at Spargo Creek and Carrolls Crossing. It is assumed that other grasslands also exist but the information is not currently available.

The Orchid and Fungi Ecosystems

Very little information is currently available concerning the fungi of the Wombat Forest. Blackboys Bread is well distributed. Some two areas have been identified as autumn fruiting areas. These have a high distribution of various fungi. The length of the fruiting season is dependant on the onset of the autumn frosts. Most fungi are killed by the frosts but not all. Bracket Fungi was widely distributed but is now sparse. Some very large examples occurring at Barkstead.

An interdependent relationship of fungi with various orchids is assumed to exist.



Example of Potato orchid -
Photograph by Wendy Bone

BIRDS of the WOMBAT FOREST

List compiled by Monty Kirby (Naturalist and member of the Wombat Forest Society) follows:-

Pelican
Black Swan
Mountain Duck
White eyed Duck
Black Duck
Wood Duck
Grey Teal
Pink eared Duck
Mallard
Black Cormorant
Blue Winged Shoveler
Pied Cormorant
Little Pied Cormorant
Little Black Cormorant
Yellow Billed Spoonbill
Royal Spoonbill
White Ibis
Straw necked Ibis
White faced Heron
Nankeen Night Heron
Straw necked Heron
White Egret
Cattle Egret
Red necked Avocet
Black Winged Stilt
Buff Banded Rail
Spotted Crake
Marsh Crake
Black tailed Native Hen
Western Swamp Hen
Dusky Moorhen
White Eared Honeyeater
White Plumed Honeyeater
New Holland Honeyeater
Crescent Honeyeater
Brown headed Honeyeater
Yellow winged Honeyeater
Yellow tufted Honeyeater
Yellow faced Honeyeater
White Naped Honeyeater
Fuscous Honeyeater
Eastern Spinebill
Red Wattle Bird
Noisy Miner
Easter Shrike tit
Coot
Spurwing Plover
Snipe
Hoary headed Grebe
Little Grebe
Swamp Harrier
Wedge tailed Eagle
Square tailed Kite
Black shouldered Kite
Little Eagle
Peregrine Falcon
Brown Falcon
Little Falcon
Australian Goshawk
White Goshawk
Grey Butcherbird
Kookaburra
Sacred Kingfisher
Azure Kingfisher
Powerful Owl
Masked Owl
Barn Owl
Boobook Owl
Barking Owl
Tawny Frogmouth
Owlet Nightjar
Spotted Nightjar
Australian Raven
Little Raven
Grey Currawong
Pied Currawong
Nankeen Kestrel
Yellow tailed Black Cockatoo
Gang -Gang
Crimson Rosella
Eastern Rosella
Purple crowned Lorrikeet
Musk Lorrikeet
Little Lorrikeet (Blue winged Parrot)
Spotted Quail Thrush
Ground Thrush
Grey Thrush
Pipit
White throated Treecreeper
Red Browed Treecreeper

Bird List Continued :-

Orange winged Sittella
Silver eye
Rufous Whistler
Golden Whistler
Olive Whistler
Mistletoe Bird
Spotted Pardalote
Striated Pardalote
Little Thornbill
Yellow tailed Thornbill
Buff tailed Thornbill
Striated Thornbill
Brown Thornbill
Red browed Finch
White fronted Chat
Blue Wren
White winged Chough
Reed Warbler
Little Grassbird
Brown Songlark
Rufous Songlark
Magpie
Satin Flycatcher
Restless Flycatcher
Brown Flycatcher
Diamond Dove
Common Bronzewing
Brush Bronzewing
Crested Pigeon
White browed Scrub Wren
White winged Triller
Olive backed Oriole
Welcome Swallow
Tree Martin
Fairy Martin
Black faced Cuckoo shrike
Little Cuckoo shrike
Cicada Bird
Yellow Robin
Rose Robin (Pink Robin)
Flame Robin
Redcapped Robin
Scarlet Robin
Pallid Cuckoo
Fantailed Cuckoo
Golden bronze Cuckoo
Horsefield's Cuckoo
Golden headed Sisticola
Brown Quail
Stubble Quail
Little Quail
Peewee
Rufous Fantail
Grey Fantail
WillieWagtail
White browed Wood Swallow
Dusky Wood Swallow
Masked Wood Swallow
Spine Tailed Swift

Introduced Species-:-

Blackbird
Goldfinch
Greenfinch
Indian Myna
Starling

The following birds are protected under the international JAMBA and CAMBA agreements:-

Cattle Egret
Red Necked Stint
Lathams Snipe
Japanese Quail

Orchids of the Wombat Forest

List compiled by Monty Kirby

Redbeard Orchid
Musky Caladenia
Onion Orchid
Hyacinth Orchid
Potato Orchid
Pink Fairies
Tall Greenhood
Slender Sun Orchid
Elbow Orchid
Caladenia Conjesta
Parson's Bands
Nodding Greenhood
Waxlip Orchid
Bird Orchid
Austral Ladies Tresses

Some Plant Families in the Wombat Forest

List compiled by Helen Morningstar.

Liliaceae	eg. Blue Flax Lily
Orchidaceae	Orchids
Xanthorrhoea	eg. Grass Trees
Asteraceae	eg. Daisies &* Everlastings
Boraginaceae	eg. Austral Forget - Me - Nots.
Campanulaceae	
Droseraceae	eg Sundews
Epacridaceae	eg. Heaths
Fabaceae	eg. Peas
Brunoniaceae	eg. Blue Pin Cushion
Geraniaceae	eg. Magenta Stork Bill
Goodeniaceae	eg. Goodenias
Haloragaceae	eg. Millfoils
Myrtaceae	eg. Tea -Tree
Mimosaceae	

Biodiversity in Previously Logged Forests.

The *primary ecosystem operating* in the Wombat State Forest is the Lerderderg Gorge. An *inaccessible* geographically contained system. This system maintains currently reasonable biodiverse structural stability.
The ecosystems which would have led from the Lerderderg Gorge are now extinct to a great degree. They are, or would have been, systems operating around Ballan - Bachus Marsh. Farming has eliminated these systems. Any remnant native and natural vegetation or faunal species in this area require high priority searches and immediate protection.
Farming areas surround most of the Wombat Forest, thus separating or creating links with other geographically complete ecosystems.

The geographically *natural protective ecosystem* for the upper reaches of the Lerderderg is the remaining Wombat Forest. It is a separate, although overlapping system, and it is this system which is currently under severe biodiverse structure and species extinction threat.
It is the *protective systems destruction* and /or simplification which will spell the destruction of any biodiversity of the Lerderderg.
Therefore the primary ecosystem is typified in native logged forests by inaccessibility. Biodiverse structure and species mix remain in the Wombat Forest by default rather than management. Species and structure are explained elsewhere in this document. Inaccessibility is typified by lack of man -made stress, such as :- building, roads, drainage, sewerage, septic tanks, farming and industrial runoff, telephone and power cables, weed infestation, feral animals, campers, walkers etc.
The Lerderderg is by no means a perfectly preserved ecosystem. The Wombat State Forest is currently facing species extinction for its largest species group - the Plant group: and for possibly its smallest species group - the Owls.
It is vital that throughout Australia we examine all ecosystems within an *isolation* , *protection*, and *maintenance* plan in mind.

Pressures exerted by logging in the three years from 1992 -1995 in the Wombat Forest have resulted in collapse of the biodiversity. Code of Forest Practice breaches are not being monitored, and the current code does not respect biodiversity. Forestry in the Wombat has created a monoculture.
Forestry practices have actively sought monoculture.
Coupes have recently been thinned in the Barkstead area. Species mix there has been changed.
Blackwoods have been poisoned; and as they are a minimal percentage of the overall amount of trees, this results in species change and biodiversity extinction. Peppermints are treated in similar fashion.
Thinning is carried using undiluted "Roundup "
"Soil ecology is an undeveloped science, and includes various plant systems and symbiotic relationships with nemotodes, bacteria and fungi. By simplifying our forest systems we are possibly simplifying and reducing biodiversity in the rhizosphere".quote Rod May -secretary NASAA> This simplification can easily be seen in the harvestable areas of the Wombat.
A messmate forest with an understorey of prickly moses and wire grass answers the higher needs of foresters and the lowest of a biodiverse infrastructure.
In the Wombat Forest the remaining birds, animals, and plants cluster in the relatively inaccessible,although much shallower [than the Lerderderg] valleys. They also inhabit large riparian marsh area, such as are typical of the western side of the Wombat.

The inaccessibility of these areas is now under threat. The Code of Forest practice is not sufficient to protect these. Hostile areas are being created around and through these mini-environments.

No adequate procedure was entered into before logging of the forest began this particular time; i.e. the last three years. The biodiverse and environmental destruction that is occurring is unforgivable, but not untraceable.

Farming on all sides of the forest is causing death for many species. Owls, echidnas, and kangaroos are being forced from the forest to forage, and are being killed in increasing numbers. This is a result of destruction of their habitat within the forest.
Destruction of riparian zones within the Wombat State Forest has been a feature of recent logging practice. Logging has occurred as close as six metres from streams; sometimes closer. Marsh areas which are often hundreds of metres wide and not as apparent in summer as in winter have been given little respect. The Wombat Forest Society suggests that a protective zone of thirty metres be applied from the edge of the flat of these marshes.

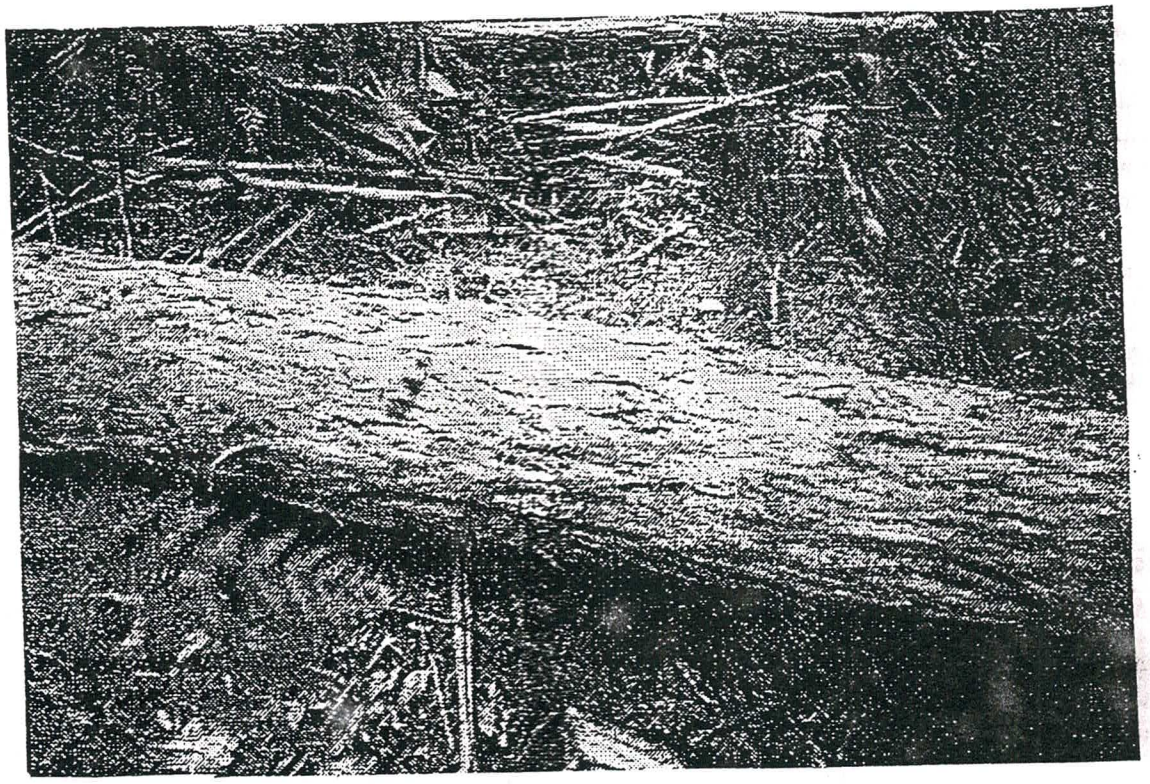
The timber industry has managed to maintain some remnant biodiversity through default; not through conscientious management. Inaccessibility spells biodiversity. Its not too late to improve and protect currently identifiable pockets of biodiversity. If the timber industry wishes to continue within native forest it *must* change many current practices. Maintenance of a timber industry as it is now, amounts to farming in the forest. A return to selective felling should be encouraged. Instead three years of cutting has left an exhausted forest. Industry and Goverment must aknowledge the current styles of logging as insurmountable stress to the forest.

The belief that some forests can be traded off, and others preserved in the name of biodiversity, is flawed. All logging within all native forests, as it is currently practiced, destroys Australias unexplored biodiverse heritage.

The Wombat Forest Society challenges the Federal and State Government's right to remove our source of biodiversity. Our unique genetic biodiversity is based on a continuous and continuing quantity of species.

The Code of Forest Practices and Its Continuing Relevance to the Environmental Management of the Wombat Forest

The Code of Forest Practices is a system currently in place to protect and maintain environmental and other forest values.
Its policing is in the hands of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The amount of breaches currently occurring within the Wombat Forest would indicate that the policing of the Code is inadequate.



The above picture shows a marked seed tree which has been cut down. The tree was first marked in accordance with Code of Forest Practice procedure and was later felled. This would indicate that misdemeanours are being perpetrated by forest operators. Many other breaches of the Code of Forest Practice have been documented by the Wombat Forest Society. These are available on request to the society.

Recommendations

* The Flora and Fauna Group recommends that Code of Forest Practices misdemeanours be recorded after each coupe is cut; and that some contractors may lose points on their licences, in accordance with the law; and that the environmental component of the act be adhered to.

* The Flora and Fauna Group recommends that an Enviromental Impact Study of the Forest be done in order to protect the identified ecosystems; and to maintain the forest values for the following identified (as vulnerable) species -

Powerful Owls
Peregrine Falcon
Phasogales
Blackwoods
Swamp Gums
Orchids
Eagles
Koalas
Grevillea Repens
Wild Cherry
Peppermints
Fungi

Trees in the Forest

We believe that the original forest species mix is endangered through stringybark monoculture push.

A number of powerful owl sites are well documented. It needs to be ascertained whether sufficient food (possums etc.) are available to these birds; and what are the possibilities for future breeding to increase the diminishing numbers.

As an interim measure to a full environment impact study we recommend -
* A mini environmental study impact study be applied before the cutting of each forest coupe.
* An environmental understanding of the interrelationship of various ecosystems must be demonstrated by the person drawing up and marking each coupe. What for instance distinguishes a habitat tree? Do coupes contain a species mix of food and habitat of high sufficiency to enable a particular bird or animal to roost, feed or breed?
* Animals and plants of low conservation value but of high food and /or shelter value, shall be preserved to maintain the status of higher conservation value plants or animals eg. possums which provide food for the powerful owl; trees which provide food for the states koalas.
* An integrated ecosystem plan to be drawn up and implemented for the Wombat Forest.
* Corridors to be maintained across hostile areas (areas being logged); and barriers between areas of similar habitat recognised and/or eliminated.

It would appear that two different types of forest operate within the confines of the Wombat State Forest.
One maintains original forest and ecosystem types.
One has been given over solely to forestry management practices.

* It is important that each coupe be identified as to the environmental importance. It seems that ecosystems are being actively reduced, and forest types being deliberately changed within the Wombat. Large areas of peppermint for instance are rapidly declining.
* Mapping of the various systems operating within the forest must be carried out through an environmental impact study to protect and maintain what is now vulnerable and threatened in the Wombat State Forest.

Mammals of the Wombat Forest and their Status

Eastern Grey Kangaroo	Common
Black-tailed wallaby	Common
Koala (Plentiful but threatened.	throughout Victoria, not seen '61-75)
Brush-tailed Possum	Common Lutino's observed
Bobuck Possum	Scarce
Greater Glider	Scarce
Yellow-bellied Glider	Scarce
Ring-tailed Possum	Common (Does not rely on hollows)
Sugar Glider	Common Rarely seen
Feather-tailed Glider	Common
Tuan	Scarce
Brown Antichinus (Stewartii)	Common
Dusky Antichinus (Swainsonii)	Scarce
Allied Rat	Common
Fat-tailed Dunnart	Scarce
Eastern Water Rat	Common
Echidna	Common
Platypus	Common

Introduced Species

Fox	Common
Cat	Common
Hare	Scarce
Rabbit	Common
Black Rat	Common
House Mouse	Common

REPTILES OF THE WOMBAT FOREST and THEIR STATUS

Goulds Goanna	Scarce	
Southern Blue-tongue	Common	
Tree Dragon	Scarce	
White Bellied Skink	Common	
Copper-headed Skink	Common	
Orange-bellied Skink	Common	
Lerista Bouganvillii	Scarce	(Almost Legless)
Red-Bellied Black Snake	Common	
Copper-head Snake	Common	
Brown Snake	Common	
Whip Snake	Common	
Tiger Snake	Common	
White-lipped Snake	Scarce	