

**Submission to VEAC Central West Investigation Draft Proposals Paper.** From Roger Thomas,

As a naturalist living in Ballarat, I know the following areas quite well, and feel qualified to raise the points below. I visit these places – sometimes alone, sometimes with others - for bird observing, botanical surveys, bushwalking, and general enjoyment of the natural environment.

### **Wombat Block**

Recommended as a National Park. This will protect special birds such as the Powerful Owl, Olive Whistler, Red-browed Treecreeper, Spotted Quail-thrush, Painted Button-quail, Gang-gang Cockatoo, Rose Robin, Rufous Fantail and Cicadabird. Many bird observers from Ballarat and beyond travel to Wombat Forest to see these birds. The streamsides and gullies of the Wombat forest are habitat for large numbers of many different species of birds, especially during the spring and summer months.

The Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo nests here in small numbers. Nesting sites of this species are scarce in central Victoria, and it is generally agreed that this long-lived bird is declining because of lack of suitable large nesting hollows.

Numerous plant species occur in the proposed National Park. Mountain Gum (*Eucalyptus dalrympleana*) is at the western limit of its range here. Also, the Wombat Forest has been found to support more than 400 species of fungi, with increasing interest being shown in these in recent years.

Wombats and Greater Gliders also occur and require more protection than has been provided by a State Forest classification.

Current negative influences include off-road vehicles, which cut up otherwise attractive walking tracks and maintenance tracks. Deer are becoming an increasing problem, so Parks Victoria will require suitable funding to reduce their numbers.

As Melbourne increases rapidly to the west, more pressure will be put on this forest for active (often motorised) recreation, which often occurs at the expense of biodiversity values. Accordingly, a National Park status should provide appropriate protection.

### **Mt Cole - Pyrenees Block**

I note with pleasure the recommendation for the raising to park status of much of this block.

There are parts of the Mt Cole block, however, that seem to have missed out on the protection they deserve. For instance, the complete range of the Mt Cole Grevillea (*Grevillea montis-cole*) is not protected, nor are all the gullies containing tree-ferns. Illegal removal of tree-ferns continues, and would likely be more strongly deterred by National Park status. The Penny-leaf Flat-pea (*Platylobium rotundum*) is likewise not protected at all its known sites, nor is the locally scarcer form of Dwarf Boronia (*Boronia nana* var. *pubescens*).

Clear-fell logging should not occur within sight of the much-used Beeripmo Walk, the route of which is currently recommended as part National Park and part State Forest.

**Trawalla Forest**, east of Beaufort. Areas of Candlebark (*Eucalyptus rubida*) and Yellow Box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*) in particular deserve at least Bushland Reserve status because they are significant for both resident and migratory birds, including several officially-listed declining woodland bird species. Numerous species of wildflowers and other native plants occur in the Candlebark – Yellow Box EVC also.

**Musical Gully**, north of Beaufort, should be accorded Bushland Reserve status for its bird and plant species. Central Highlands Water effectively manages a reservoir adjoining. The reservoir land and a Bushland Reserve would complement each other, with the benefit of reserving more populations of the Ben Major Grevillea (*Grevillea floripendula*).

### **Summary**

I am concerned at the current/recent campaign by some active “bush user groups” to oppose your recommendations so that they can continue their harmful and dangerous activities such as off-road driving and riding, cutting hollow trees, and shooting.

Your recommendations appear to be well-thought-through, and based on science. I am pleased to note the proposed conservation of many different Ecological Vegetation Classes, for example. I trust that science, rather than vocal opposition, drives the eventual outcome.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

- Roger Thomas,