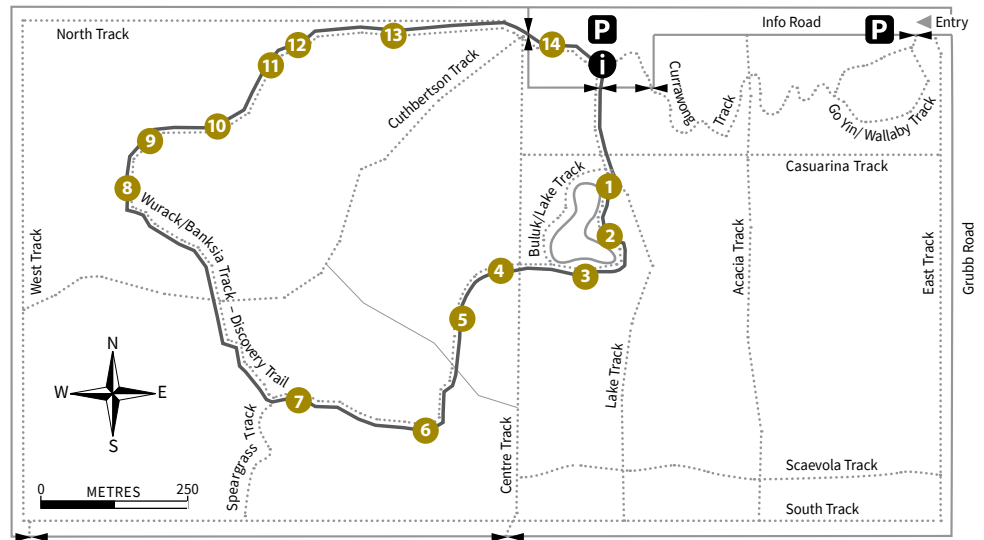


DISCOVERY TRAIL



Welcome to the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve Discovery Trail. Walk the trail and learn about the amazing diversity of this reserve, one of the largest remaining patches of bushland on the Bellarine Peninsula.

Follow the numbered signs and you will discover the complex world of ants, curious brush-tongued birds, meat eating plants, the endangered Bellarine Yellow Gum and a whole lot more.



The Discovery Trail circuit is approximately 3km long and takes around 1 hour to walk.

To learn more about the reserve or the Friends of Ocean Grove Nature Reserve visit: fognr.org.au

The Discovery Trail is an initiative of the Friends of Ocean Grove Nature Reserve.

1 The ultimate 'Dream Team'

As you walk the trail, keep a look out for Meat Ants on the paths. These seemingly insignificant insects are a highly organised army with specialist tasks. Each colony includes a queen, soldiers to defend the nest, builders and food collectors. Ants are in fact the ultimate 'Dream Team'. Ants have the most complex chemical communication of any animal, a key to their success. They 'talk' by touching with their antennae and can also use their antennae for smell, touch, taste and hearing. Ants are a critical part of the environment. Their tunneling puts air into the soil, helping plants to germinate and grow. They are also a food source for lizards, echidnas and many birds.



3 Curious feeders

This wetland is ephemeral, regularly drying out in summer. When filled, water birds such as ducks and cormorants can be seen here. When it is dry, woodland birds such as wattlebirds and their honeyeater relatives are common. Honeyeaters have an amazing paintbrush-shaped tongue to soak up nectar. In one second they can lick ten times or more and completely empty a flower of its nectar!



Brush tipped honeyeater tongue

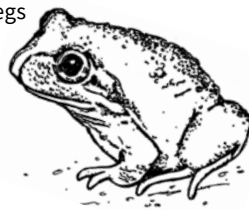


New Holland Honeyeater

2 Listen to the frogs' chorus

When rains fill this wetland you will hear a chorus of frogs, especially as night nears. The aptly named Pobblebonk Frog calls for a female suitor with a loud 'bonk' sound.

This burrowing frog uses its stubby back legs like shovels to burrow into the moist soil during the day. Other frogs include the Ewing's Tree Frog, an agile climber with specially designed suction cups on its toes. Its quick repetitive 'cree...cree...cree...' can be heard from the water edge.



Pobblebonk Frog

4 What's on a wallaby's menu?

If you stop and quietly look about you may spot a Black Wallaby. This small wallaby has a black/grey back and yellow/orange chest. It is a browsing animal and prefers a diet of leaves, soft shoots, low woody shrubs and flowering plants. Look out for wallabies further along the trail. They are well camouflaged against the bush vegetation and often can't be spotted until you are very close and you'll see them quickly hop away.



Black Wallaby

5 'Prime Real Estate' for butterflies

In summer this woodland is alive with the beautiful (and unfairly named!) Common Brown Butterfly. It is just one of more than 12 butterfly species that can be found in the Reserve. These butterflies emerge in spring, laying eggs on the Thatch Saw-sedge and Spiny-headed Mat-rush. After autumn rain the larvae emerge to enjoy a ready supply of food.

Common Brown Butterfly and Thatch Saw-sedge



6 It's a death trap!

Look closely at the ground in the winter months and you will see delicate Sundews ready to snare their insect prey. Sticky 'dew' at the tips of each tentacle traps their prey. The tentacles then slowly fold over the insect and ooze plant enzymes to digest the tasty meal.



Sundew

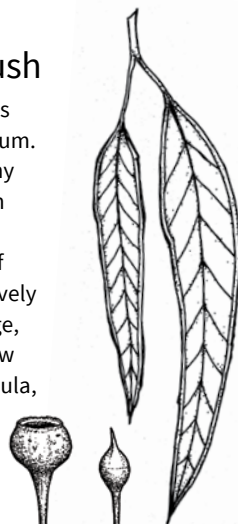
7 Fire: A delicate balancing act

For around 40,000 years, Aboriginal people practiced fire management as a tool to promote open grassy woodlands, perfect habitat for collecting a range of plants and hunting game. When Europeans colonised, this regular burning abruptly stopped, altering the landscape and causing a decline of trees, such as the Bellarine Yellow Gum. On the other hand, when fire occurs too frequently it can be just as devastating, killing established vegetation and creating scrub dominated by Prickly Hedge-Wattle, Golden Wattle and Black Sheoak. To protect species diversity, Parks Vic in collaboration with the Friends Group now conduct selective vegetation removal and cool burns within the Reserve to help re-establish an open grassy woodland habitat.

8 Protecting priceless bush

The gum tree approx 3 metres behind this post is an endangered Bellarine Yellow Gum. This tree provides nesting places for many birds and is a valuable source of nectar in winter when little else is flowering. The Grassy Eucalypt woodland habitat of the Bellarine Peninsula has been extensively cleared to less than 2% of its former range, leaving the few remaining Bellarine Yellow Gums in scattered pockets on the Peninsula, mostly around Ocean Grove as well as Torquay. This reserve helps protect some of the last remaining trees.

Bellarine Yellow Gum fruit, bud and adult leaf



9 Prickly Hedge-Wattle: Friend or foe?

This spiky wattle provides safe nesting for many small birds. A range of insects and other invertebrates feed on the leaves and pollen. However thick growth of this plant can take over areas and stop all other plants from growing, especially after a fire when thousands of seeds germinate. In a fire this plant burns ferociously and can kill established vegetation. It has been both a safe haven for some species and an environmental pest for others.

10 Cockatoo dining

Look closely at this fallen tree trunk and you will see evidence of moth larvae burrows. They bore into the hardwood and make a door out of grass and twigs bound by silk. The Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos can still find them, stripping off bark with their powerful beaks to feast on the larvae. These large parrots are mostly seen in flocks during winter flapping slowly over the tree tops and calling loudly 'whee-la, whee-la'.



Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos

11 Ancient sentinels

Grass trees, unique to Australia, grow only 1-2 cm per year making many of these grass trees over 100 years old. The closely packed foliage protects the growing tip during fire, making them very fire tolerant. In fact, fire promotes flowering. One flower spike can produce up to 10,000 seeds!



Austral Grass Tree

12 The silent assassin

Despite their fire tolerance, grass trees can be devastated by the water mould *Phytophthora cinnamomi*. It attacks the roots, slowly cutting off nutrients and water. Grass trees killed by *Phytophthora* may appear to be incinerated by a 'ray gun' while other healthy plants surround them. You will see examples of this along sections of the track. It is vital to keep to the tracks to prevent movement of soil and the spread of this deadly disease.

13 Nature's Ark

Walking through this reserve, try to imagine the Bellarine Peninsula as it once was, covered in native vegetation and supporting a myriad of unique Australian wildlife. However, looking through these ageing Lightwood trees we are reminded that these important remnant patches are surrounded by farmland, industry and houses. With less than 5% of the original vegetation of the Bellarine Peninsula remaining, reserves such as this one are like 'Nature's Ark' protecting our indigenous plants and animals.



14 Help bring back the bush

This area was previously planted with 'exotic natives' such as Sallow Wattle, hakeas and bottlebrush in an attempt to attract nectar-feeding birds. However some plants have 'gone feral', with new seedlings spreading further into the reserve.

Friends of Ocean Grove Nature Reserve have helped remove many of these exotic plants, allowing natural regeneration of local species.

Here and in other areas they are working to 'bring back the bush' by planting indigenous trees and removing weeds. You can get involved in protecting this unique reserve by joining the Friends Group and participating in their activities.

