

Site 85. Provence Rise Reserve, Rowville

Narrow roadside verge and a small council reserve in two parts, retaining surprisingly rich remnant ground flora.

Summary of significant features:

- **State significance:** a substantial population of the spear-grass, *Austrostipa rudis* subsp. *australis*, which is listed as Endangered under Victorian legislation;
- **State significance:** part of a patch of the regionally-vulnerable vegetation type, Valley Grassy Forest;
- **Locally significant:** viable populations of plant species threatened with dying out in Knox.

Boundaries

The site comprises two council reserve lots (one each side of Provence Rise) and the abutting road verges, as outlined with magenta dashes on the aerial photograph on p. 560. The total area is 0.21 ha.

Land use & tenure: Council reserves and road reservation.

Site description

The two lots in this site were reserved as a result of the first edition of this report when the property of which they were part was subdivided. The reserves contain most of the original lot's natural assets other than some individual trees, which are protected under a planning permit condition. The reserves are being intensively managed as compensation for the loss of other, less significant, vegetation due to the subdivision.

The reserves were, until the subdivision, periodically grazed by a goat. Small wildflowers that are characteristic of the local Valley Heathy Forest in its natural state persisted surprisingly well, including *Arthropodium strictum*, *Bossiaea prostrata*, *Drosera aberrans*, *Drosera auriculata*, *Coronidium scorpioides*, *Tricoryne elatior*, *Veronica plebeia*, *Viola hederacea* and at least twenty *Ranunculus lappaceus* (which faces imminent local extinction in Knox). The groundcover is dominated by indigenous plants, particularly *Microlaena stipoides*. Shrubs, however, have been decimated. The road verge has been recently planted with indigenous species to complement the reserves, including shrubs.

The previous landowner suppressed the regrowth of Forest Burgan (*Kunzea* sp. (Upright form)), thereby allowing groundcover species to flourish. Since the land was reserved, the burgan has been allowed to proliferate and form a dense thicket west of Provence Rise. The indigenous groundcover has declined considerably as a result, resulting in the apparent disappearance of *Ranunculus lappaceus*.

Relationship to other land

This site demonstrates the richness of ground flora that could result on the adjoining Fruitful Vine Church property (Site 84) if burgan were to be suppressed there. These two properties are well ecologically connected to other habitat, as discussed under the heading of the Fruitful Vine Church.

Bioregion: Highlands Southern Fall (on the rather diffuse boundary with the Gippsland Plain bioregion).

Habitat types

Valley Grassy Forest (EVC 47, **regionally Vulnerable**): 0.21 ha in area, of which 800 m² is in good ecological condition (rating B), 800 m² is in fair ecological condition (rating C) and 500 m² is in poor ecological condition (rating D). 76 indigenous plant species found.

Canopy trees: Dominated by *Eucalyptus goniocalyx* with *E. radiata* sub-dominant and minor *E. cephalocarpa*;

Sub-canopy trees: Dominated by *Exocarpos cupressiformis*, with scattered *Acacia melanoxylon* and minor *A. mearnsii*;

Shrubs: Having been decimated by the history of grazing, shrubs are now represented only by *Leptospermum continentale* (moderately abundant) and a dense patch of regrowth of '*Kunzea* sp. (Upright form)' that threatens to out-compete many other species beneath it.

Risk Wild indigenous vascular species

E *Viola hederacea*, Ivy-leaf Violet*

Introduced species

Acacia baileyana, Cootamundra Wattle
Acacia ?floribunda, White Sallow-wattle
Acacia longifolia subsp. *longifolia*, Sallow Wattle
Agapanthus praecox, Agapanthus
Agrostis capillaris, Brown-top Bent
Aira elegantissima, Delicate Hair-grass
Anthoxanthum odoratum, Sweet Vernal-grass
Briza maxima, Large Quaking-grass
Cenchrus clandestinus, Kikuyu Grass
Centaureum erythraea, Common Centaury
Chrysanthemoides monilifera subsp. *monilifera*,
 Boneseed
Cirsium vulgare, Spear Thistle
Ehrharta erecta, Panic Veldt-grass
Erigeron sumatrensis, Fleabane
Genista linifolia, Flax-leafed Broom
Genista monspessulana, Montpellier Broom

Introduced species

Holcus lanatus, Yorkshire Fog
Hypochaeris radicata, Cat's Ear
Juncus articulatus, Jointed Rush
Lilium formosanum, Lily
Lonicera japonica, Japanese Honeysuckle
Lotus subbiflorus, Hairy Bird's-foot Trefoil
Paspalum dilatatum, Paspalum
Phalaris aquatica, Toowoomba Canary-grass
Pinus radiata, Monterey Pine
Pittosporum undulatum, Sweet Pittosporum
Plantago lanceolata, Ribwort
Prunella vulgaris, Self-heal
Romulea rosea, Common Onion-grass
Rubus anglocandicans, Blackberry
Sonchus oleraceus, Sow-thistle
Taraxacum sect. *Taraxacum*, Garden Dandelion
Trifolium sp., Clover
Vinca major, Blue Periwinkle
Vulpia bromoides, Squirrel-tail Fescue

Notes concerning some of the significant plant species

Listed as Endangered under Victorian law

Austrostipa rudis subsp. *australis* (a subspecies of Veined Spear-grass): Fairly abundant, west of Provence Rise on 2nd October 2024. Additional plants are very likely to be detectable in peak flowering/seeding season (December).

Locally threatened

Ranunculus lappaceus (Forest Buttercup): Twenty individuals were seen west of Provence Rise in 2002, at least some of which were still present in 2005. None were seen in 2024 despite a fairly concerted search.

Veronica plebeia (Trailing Speedwell): A patch with a diameter of ½ m was seen in the northeastern corner of the site in 2002 and 2005. None was seen in 2024, perhaps due to the brevity of the survey.

Fauna habitat features

The large eucalypts and the ecological condition of the habitat suit a range of fauna such as forest birds, bats, reptiles and invertebrates.

Significance ratings

The following is an assessment of the site's biological significance against the Department of Energy, Environment & Climate Action's standard criteria (Amos 2004).

Richness of Flora

Approximately 75 indigenous plant species were recorded in the site. To have so many species within 0.2 ha stands out on the local scale, but it would have to stand out at the regional scale to qualify for recognition under the standard criteria of Amos (2004).

Regionally Threatened Ecological Vegetation Class

Valley Grassy Forest is listed by the Department of Energy, Environment & Climate Action as Vulnerable in the Highlands Southern Fall bioregion. Criterion 3.2.3 of Amos (2004) treats any 'remnant patch' of such vegetation as being of State or Regional significance, depending on the habitat score. For these purposes, a 'remnant patch' is defined as a continuous area of at least 0.25 ha in which the cover of native understorey is at least 10% throughout. The habitat score of both parts would easily exceed the threshold for **State** significance. However, applying the criterion literally, the part of the reserve west of Provence Rise is too

small to qualify. The part east of the reserve is not too small because it is part of a remnant patch that extends into the Fruitful Vine Church property.

Threatened Plants

The spear-grass, *Austrostipa rudis* subsp. *australis* is listed as Endangered under Victorian law. It also occurs outside Victoria. Its population in this site is quite sizeable and viable. Any known habitat for such a species meets criterion 3.1.2 for **State** significance.

Some of the locally-threatened plant species seen in the 2024 survey have viable populations (in combination with neighbouring vegetation), thereby meeting criterion 3.1.5 for **Local** significance.

Threats

- Displacement of indigenous flora and fauna by Forest Burgan;
- Human-induced climate change, which is predicted to cause more severe droughts, heatwaves and storms, as well as substantially lower rainfall (particularly in winter);
- Further deterioration of the mediocre health of the reserve's eucalypts, which are quite vulnerable to the abovementioned droughts and storms;
- Displacement of indigenous ground flora by Kikuyu Grass. Agapanthus is scarce but could become serious if not controlled;
- Loss or decline of plant species whose populations are so small that they are vulnerable to inbreeding, poor reproductive success or elimination by incidents such as being struck by a falling tree limb.

Strategic planning

The previous (2010) edition of this report led to the reserve being covered by Schedule 2 of the Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO2). There only material change since 2010 to the reasons for applying ESO2 is that the spear-grass *Austrostipa rudis* subsp. *australis* has been discovered in the reserve and listed as Endangered under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*. That change does not represent any need to amend application of ESO2 to the reserve.

Information sources used in this assessment

- Detailed vegetation data and mapping compiled by Dr Lorimer on 5/6/02 for the first edition of this report;
- Observations of Wood Duck and Common Froglet noted incidentally on the same day;
- Additional intensive botanical survey for 13 hours by Dr Lorimer and Matthew Dell in March 2005 to guide the design of the Provence Rise subdivision and the associated land management plan;
- Two brief re-inspections of the site by Dr Lorimer following subdivision, including March 2008 for the second edition of this report;
- A botanical survey of the site by Dr Lorimer on 2nd October 2024 for this edition, compiling a list of wild indigenous plant species and checking for changes in features relevant to this report compared with pre-existing information;
- Records of flora and fauna observations stored in the Atlas of Living Australia;
- Aerial and satellite imagery from between 1976 and 2025;
- The Victorian Government's 'NatureKit' website;
- Maps of geology, topography and strategic planning information produced by agencies of the Victorian Government.