

Successful wetland restoration

KATRINA WEATHERLY

MEMBERS of the Hamilton to Coleraine Railway Landcare Group and other visitors attending a field day at Mt Koroite, Coleraine, donned their rubber boots to wade through the waters and rich ecosystem created by a restored wetland on the property.

"The site is a fantastic example of how productive agriculture and restored wetlands can successfully co-exist in our rural landscape," Mark Bachmann, Principal Ecologist and Manager with Nature Glenelg Trust (NGT) said.

The Mt Koroite wetland restoration was a project set up when Alex and Topsy Baulch contacted NGT after attending a talk Mark gave about wetland restoration in mid-2012.

Unfortunately Alex passed away last year, before the wetland site was completed. So the project has been brought to fruition by Topsy who fenced off the wetland with help from the Glenelg Hopkins CMA.

Mark Bachmann paid tribute to Topsy and the late Alex Baulch.

"There's a touch of sadness to this day, with Alex not being here. He was an important person for us, and he leaves a truly living legacy with the restored Mt Koroite wetland now teeming with water birds, frogs and recovering aquatic plant life," Mark said.

Mark recalled that Alex and Topsy Baulch stand out as being the first landowners in the Hamilton district to express an interest in NGT's wetland restoration program on private land.

"Over the following months we got to know Alex and Topsy and were

delighted to help bring their vision for the Mt Koroite wetland to life," Mark said.

And today that wetland is a vision splendid.

"The bird life has changed dramatically in both the variety and number of birds and the regeneration of plant life has also altered dramatically," Topsy said.

And for Topsy the Nature Glenelg Trust not only funded earthworks for the project but demonstrated professionalism, excellent scientific knowledge and a 'can do attitude'.

"We wanted to create something better from the site and NGT have enabled us to do it well," she said.

"NGT are a dream to work with, really good at listening and working with farmers."

Alex and Topsy Baulch's decision to restore their wetland was significant because it reflected a reversal of the trend to drain swamps and wetlands in recent decades.

Throughout South West Victoria, changes and intensification in land use has meant 60 per cent of wetlands have been drained.

"We have moved away from a large number of semi-permanent and permanent wetlands, so the nature of wetlands has been changed," Mark said adding that "everything has become more seasonal and ephemeral where we do have wetlands left."

Topsy and Alex Baulch had the foresight to see this, prompting their approach to Nature Glenelg Trust to restore their wetland.

Mark Bachmann revealed how the two way flow at Mt Koroite made it a complicated site.

"Alex explained to us, the different way the water can move. Sometimes the drain connecting the swamp with the dam flows one way, but

other times it flows in the reverse direction."

For Lachlan Farrington, Project Manager with Nature Glenelg Trust, this distinctive bi-directional flow determined the technical design of the wetland restoration and made it different to the techniques adopted at most wetland restoration sites they work with.

"The main design had to consider that, depending on local rainfall, water could enter the wetland through the drain or could leave the wetland through the drain.

"The design utilises a weir gate allowing high velocity surface inflows to enter via the drain when open and the water level in the wetland is low. When the wetland is full, the gate helps reduce outflow drainage," Lachlan explained.

In the days before the digging of dams, it was conventional to create a waterhole by placing an earthen bank to hold water in a swamp for longer.

This is demonstrated at Mt Koroite, where a beautiful old property plan shows a bank holding water in the swamp. But at some point in time that earthen bank was breached and the swamp drained.

"So for a while it was made wetter, then drainage had dried it out," Mark explained.

But by creating a simple back fill the swamp now looks remarkably different, with a significant return of wildlife and ecosystems.

"Wetlands are highly adaptive ecosystems with rapid restoration and recovery potential. In a year that hasn't had a heap of rain it's making a huge difference," Lachlan Farrington said.

"If it hadn't been restored, this wetland would probably be dry by now.

"It shows the amazing



FROM left: Paul Mould, owner of Mt Koroite, Tony Lithgow GHCMA, Topsy Baulch, project instigator with her late husband Alex Baulch, Susan Kamp, Landcare facilitator, Lachlan Farrington, project manager with Nature Glenelg Trust and Mark Bachmann, Nature Glenelg Trust.

transformation possible within a few short years," Mark said.

The Wetland Restoration Field Day was held with funding received from the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) and with thanks to Paul and Megan Mould, the new owners of Mt Koroite.

Nature Glenelg Trust are currently delivering the 'Wetland Restoration on Private Land project' under funding from the Australian Government. For more details on this project you can contact Lachlan Farrington (Lachlan.farrington@natureglenelg.org.au or 0401208717) or visit www.natureglenelg.org.au.



LACHIE Farrington, project manager with Nature Glenelg Trust outlines the project to visitors.