

# SWAN BAY ENVIRONMENT TRAIL

Enjoy a stroll by the shores of Swan Bay, a Ramsar wetland of international significance. The numbers in this leaflet refer to markers along the walk / cycle track.

**Short walk:** from markers 1 to 14 is 1.5 km one way.

**Medium walk:** from marker 1 to DEDJTR is 2.5 km one way.

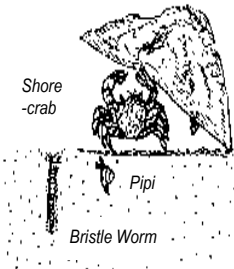
**Long walk:** from marker 1 to Murray Rd saltmarsh boardwalk

## 1. FILTERING PONDS

Frogs live among the reed-like Cumbungi in the wetland ponds to the left of the track. After rain, stormwater flows into the ponds. The Cumbungi and other plants filter pollutants from the stormwater before it enters Swan Bay.

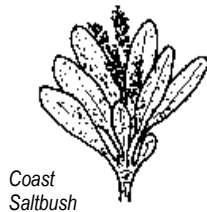
## 2. SWAN BAY MUDFLATS

Extensive mudflats -rich in plant and animal life- are exposed at low tide.



**At low tide** crabs, marine snails and worms hide among seagrass, burrow in the mud, or shelter beneath rocks to protect themselves from predators and dehydration. **At high tide** pelicans and cormorants can be seen roosting on the stormwater pipe.

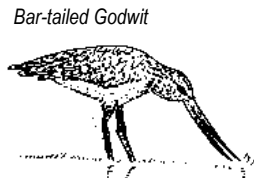
Along the shoreline the silvery Coast Saltbush grows. A scaly, waxy surface on the leaf protects this plant from salt winds. Growing nearby is the scrambling, smaller leaved Marsh Saltbush, a plant of State significance.



Coast Saltbush

## 3. SWAN BAY –IMPORTANT HABITAT FOR BIRDS

From October to April thousands of migratory shorebirds (waders) reside at Swan Bay. They feed on the mudflats at low tide and roost along the shoreline at high tide.



Bar-tailed Godwit

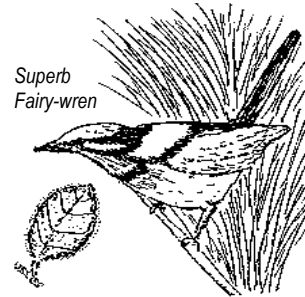
Orange-bellied Parrot



Beaded Glasswort

Further along the track Coast Pomaderris shrubs and Common Tussock-grass, planted by Swan Bay Environment Association, grow in an area once densely infested with weeds. Understorey plants such as these provide essential habitat for many small animals.

Common Tussock-grass



Superb Fairy-wren

Coast Pomaderris

## 4. REMNANT COASTAL MOONAH WOODLAND

Moonah, Coast Wirilda, Coast Beard-heath and Coast Tea-tree form the basis of this woodland, together with a diverse mix of understorey shrubs, herbs and grasses.

The interpretive sign at this viewing platform will enable you to identify some of the local native (indigenous) plants in this woodland as well as invasive weed species.

Coastal Moonah Woodlands were once extensive along the coast. They are now listed as a 'threatened' woodland community under Victoria's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act.

## 5. BIRDS OF SWAN BAY

Indulge in bird-watching at this viewing platform, using the interpretive sign to identify the birds. At low tide look for spoonbills, egrets, herons and ibises feeding in the shallows. In the distance look for Black Swans resting on the mudflats. At high tide Cormorants sit on the wooden posts with their wings outstretched to dry.

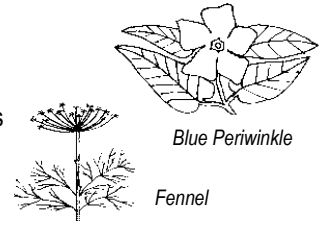
## 6. LOOK AROUND YOU

How observant are you? See if you can spot the plants that are native to this area and those that are not.

Saltmarsh plants fringe Swan Bay and its islands and connecting wetlands providing important winter habitat for endangered Orange-bellied Parrots. Habitat destruction, competition with introduced birds and feral animal predation are major causes of these Parrots' decline.

## Weeds...

Fennel and Blue Periwinkle are some of many serious environmental weeds in this woodland pocket. They compete with and smother native ground flora.



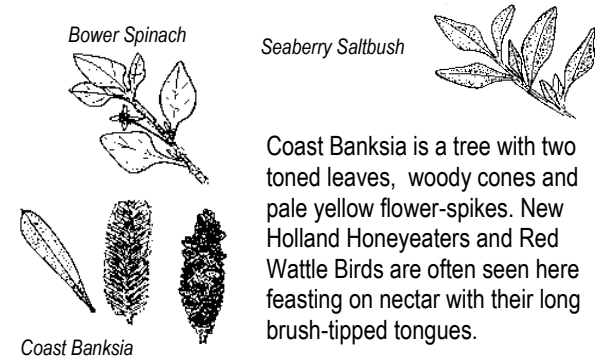
Blue Periwinkle

Fennel

## Look for these local plants....

Seaberry Saltbush, a waist high plant bearing red berries in autumn, grows in profusion along the track's edge.

Bower Spinach, an edible fleshy-leaved plant with a stalked yellow flower, trails and climbs through the woodland.



Bower Spinach

Seaberry Saltbush

Coast Banksia

Coast Banksia is a tree with two toned leaves, woody cones and pale yellow flower-spikes. New Holland Honeyeaters and Red Wattle Birds are often seen here feasting on nectar with their long brush-tipped tongues.

## 7. FOOD AND SHELTER

The dense-canopied tree to the right of the track is a Moonah that is hundreds of years old.

The indigenous people of this area, the Wadawurrung, used Moonahs for shelter and food, making a sweet drink from the flowers. They collected food and medicine from the flowers, roots and leaves of many of the plants you have seen on this walk.

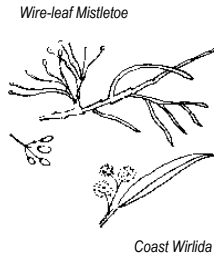
Small orchids, daisies and mosses once grew in the shelter of Coastal Moonah woodlands. Many of these plants have been displaced by weeds or through land clearance.

## 8. SWAN BAY CATCHMENT

Look out over Swan Bay to the Bellarine Hills. Notice that much of the vegetation has been cleared from the hills. Yarram Creek which drains the western part of the Swan Bay catchment has suffered serious erosion and siltation due to vegetation loss. Groups such as Bellarine Catchment Network work with landowners and land managers to protect, restore and link up remnant indigenous vegetation and reduce erosion and nutrient run-off to Swan Bay.

## 9. INDIGENOUS PARASITE

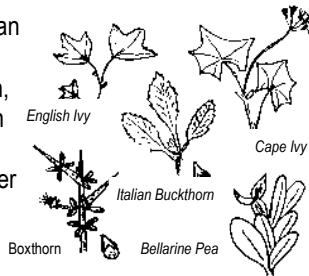
Adjacent to Queenscliff Primary School near Stokes St, Wire-leaf Mistletoe grows and feeds on the Coast Wirilda trees. In summer the distinctive red, tubular flowers, followed by green berries make the mistletoe easy to spot. Mistletoe birds eat the berries and deposit the sticky seeds onto the host plant.



## 10. RUNAWAYS

As you walk along the track you will see many environmental weeds invading the Coastal Moonah woodland. Most have been dispersed from residential gardens by birds, wind, water or dumped garden rubbish.

English Ivy and Cape Ivy can be seen climbing through Moonahs. Italian Buckthorn, Bellarine Pea and Boxthorn grow vigorously. These plants, introduced from other countries, flourish as their natural predators are absent.



Many native animals surviving in our remnant Coastal Moonah Woodlands depend directly on indigenous vegetation for food and shelter. Changing conditions can lead to local extinction of our flora and fauna. Learn to recognise and remove environmental weeds from your garden.

## 11. DRAINS TO THE BAY

How many stormwater drains can you see at the Dod St. intersection? They and other drains discharge into Swan Bay. Polluted stormwater is a threat to Swan Bay ecosystems. It increases nutrients promoting excessive algal growth which, reduces sunlight available to plants.

As you continue along the trail admire the tall Moonah trees flanking the trail and peer in under the Moonah canopy. *To find trail markers 12 and 13 turn right at the next track. (see map). This will take you to the Swan Bay shoreline.*

## 12. LICHEN

Look at the orange lichen growing on the branches of the Common Boobialla tree. Lichen is composed of a fungus and an alga that grow together as a single unit, benefiting each other. Lichens are slow-growing. They do not damage their host plant. Air pollution and human damage are threats to lichens. Some varieties of lichens are utilised by birds (nest-building) and insects (camouflage).

## 13. SANDHOPPERS, SEAGRASS AND SNAILS

*Swan Bay is part of the Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park and regulations apply to the flora and fauna here. Take care as mudflats can be easily damaged by trampling.*

At first glance a mudflat can appear lifeless, but its pitted surface gives evidence of the many animals that make use of it. Look for the obvious tracks and trails of marine snails and shorebirds and subtle signs indicating that pipis, burrowing crabs and worms live beneath the surface.

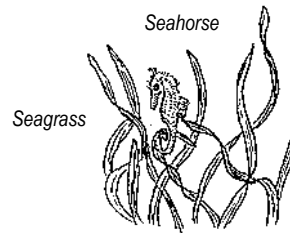
Dead seagrass washes up along the shoreline. At low tide, dead seagrass provides food, shelter and moist conditions for tiny sandhoppers, crabs and marine snails. Decaying seagrass is a rich food source for sandhoppers, worms and snails. These, in turn, are eaten by fish and birds.



Sandhopper (magnified)

## 14. SWAN BAY SEAGRASS

Swan Bay's extensive underwater seagrass meadows support a myriad of marine life. They are important fish nurseries.



Black Swans are often seen from this viewing platform grazing peacefully on the seagrass meadows. In winter most of the Black Swans disperse to nearby inland waters to breed.

*The Short Walk ends here. For the Medium and Long Walk, continue along the walk / cycle track.*

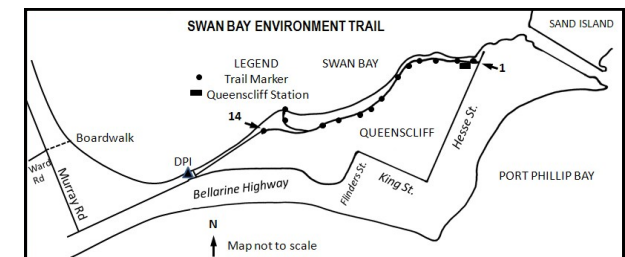
## DEDJTR QUEENSCLIFF – SALTMARSH GARDENS

DEDJTR (Dept of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources) carries out innovative scientific research and monitoring for the sustainable use and management of our aquatic resources. Sixty thousand indigenous saltmarsh plants have been planted around the DEDJTR building which houses research laboratories and aquaria. As part of its water-efficient design, stormwater from the site is filtered through saltmarsh ponds to minimize impact on Swan Bay.

*The Medium Walk ends here. To complete the Long Walk, continue along the Bellarine Highway walk / cycle track to Murray Rd and walk along Murray Rd to its intersection with Ward Rd. The saltmarsh boardwalk path commences opposite the Ward Rd intersection. **BEWARE OF TRAINS as you cross to the boardwalk.***

## MURRAY RD - SALTMARSH BOARDWALK

Three interpretive signs located along the boardwalk will give you an insight into the special plants that grow in Swan Bay's saltmarsh zone and the animals that use this important wildlife corridor.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Leaflet revised and produced by **Bellarine Catchment Network**. And **Swan Bay Environment Association**

Funding support from Swan Bay Environment Association.

Text and illustrations by Sue Longmore, and Bellarine Catchment Network (BCN).

SBEA and BCN Websites:  
[www.sbea.webuda.com](http://www.sbea.webuda.com)  
[www.environmentbellarine.org.au](http://www.environmentbellarine.org.au)

Other BCN publications:  
 Coastal Plants of the Bellarine Peninsula  
 Inland Plants of the Bellarine Peninsula  
 Indigenous Wildlife of the Bellarine Peninsula

