



FLOODPLAIN ECOLOGY COURSE PUNCHES ABOVE ITS WEIGHT

Lanie Pearce is an experienced and passionate environmental educator with the Goulburn Murray Landcare Network. She lives near Barmah, in northern Victoria and the gateway to the world's largest River Red Gum forest - the Barmah National Park.

For the last four years Lanie has coordinated the Floodplain Ecology Course bringing together an eclectic mix of presenters and participants for a five-day immersion in floodplain hydrology, biodiversity, along with landscape and Indigenous perspectives.

Supported by the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority (CMA), and limited to just 30 places, the course is increasingly being recognised as the premier floodplain ecology course in south eastern Australia.

“Having the Barmah National Park in my backyard and being a local is a huge advantage when putting together a tailored program for the 30 course participants. I know the people who run the wetland cruises in the Barmah Forest, the local caterers, and the managers of the resort where we base the course. This makes the course that much richer,” says Lanie.

The course has evolved over time from a three-day event piloted by the Department of Sustainability and Environment in 2008, to a four-day course in 2011, to the current comprehensive five day schedule.

According to Lanie, the course focuses on the River Red Gum floodplain country of the Goulburn-Murray system in the vicinity of Barmah.

▲ *Main Image: Course participants explore the River Red Gum floodplain country in Barmah forest.*

It aims to promote awareness and greater understanding of the complex floodplain ecosystems in a drying climate, their ecological importance and values, the intimate connection of floodplains with the health of their parent rivers, and how in a dynamic political setting consideration of floodplains is important to the long-term sustainable use of our waterways.

Topics covered include geology and landscape history and climate; how floodplains are formed; geomorphology, hydrology and hydraulics of floodplains; floodplain soils, vegetation and fauna; cultural perspectives; and biogeochemical processes and functions on the floodplain.

Lanie says, "we market the course widely to Landcare and environment groups and also through past participants. In 2011 we had 20 participants who were drawn from either the then Department of Primary Industries or Landcare Networks. In 2014 we achieved much greater diversity with participants coming from a range of organisations including the Murray Darling Basin Authority, Catchment Management Authorities, Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation, the Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Parks Victoria, local government, the Commonwealth and Victorian Environmental Water Holders, the Superb Parrot project and local Landcare groups. Importantly we fund two places so that locals get the opportunity to participate.

"We get very good feedback about the quality of the course presenters and our evaluations show that this is often what attracts participants to the course. Regular presenters include Keith Ward, Goulburn Broken CMA who has done significant research into the vegetation of Barmah-Millewa Forest; Neville Rosengren, who has surveyed the geomorphology and geology of conservation sites in most parts of Victoria; Lindy Lumsden, a wildlife biologist with a passion for bats, their ecology, and introducing them to people; and Damien Cook, an experienced ecologist with expert knowledge of flora and fauna species of wetland ecosystems," says Lanie.

The presenters provide Lanie with their course notes and these are made available to all the participants.

Some participant quotes from the 2014 course feedback highlight its success:

"Another awesome day! Really thought the soils and hydrology section was great, and the animal sections highlighted why floodplains and wetlands are so important."

"I was impressed with all the presenters and struck by their passion for what they do."

A well organised and smoothly run course. An excellent variety of presenters. Wetland plants were a highlight. Great food and an excellent venue."



"I really enjoyed the integration of different disciplines in one space (different experts giving different perspectives on same thing); the high quality of speakers; and meeting lots of people passionate about floodplain ecology, especially the locals!"

In kind support for the course is received from the Goulburn Murray Landcare Network, the Goulburn Broken CMA, Goulburn Valley Water and the Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation.

This project is supported by the Goulburn Broken CMA, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme.

The Floodplain Ecology Course is held each year, usually in October. Enquiries to the Goulburn Broken CMA on (03) 5822 7700.



This project is supported by the Goulburn Broken CMA through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Programme