

Baluk Willam Nature Conservation Reserve

Comprising 67.5 hectares, Baluk Willam Nature Conservation Reserve is south-west of the Dandenong Ranges. The reserve is particularly significant for its flora and is a sanctuary for over a third of Victoria's orchid species. Parks Victoria aims to protect the diverse flora and fauna by maintaining the reserve in a natural state. Walking trails allow you to observe local bird life and the reserve's flora.



Echidna ©MT

How to get there

Baluk Willam Reserve is in the south-west portion of the Dandenong Ranges at Belgrave South, 33km south-east of Melbourne (Melway 84 D7). Access is via Courtney's Road.

Facilities are limited. There are no barbecues, picnic tables or toilets. Dogs, cats, horses, bikes or trail bikes are not permitted. For further information, please ring the Parks Victoria Information Centre on 13 1963 or visit the website at www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

Things to see and do

Walking trails enable visitors to enjoy activities such as bird watching and orchid viewing. Many of the native orchid species, such as the Green-Comb Spider Orchid, are best seen in spring, when they are in flower. Other autumn-winter flowering species include the Cobra Greenhood and various Helmet Orchids. These species are best seen between June and August.

Flora

Baluk Willam Reserve is valued highly for its flora diversity. This diversity arises from variations in topography, aspect, soil and drainage patterns.

A number of ecological vegetation classes can be recognised. These include shrubby foothill forest, damp sclerophyll forest, wet sclerophyll forest and heathy woodland (dominated by Silver-leafed Stringybark).

Note: All native plants are protected. Removal of native flora is strictly prohibited.



Green Comb Spider Orchid

Illustration from "Flora of Melbourne" reprinted with permission from APS Maroondah, Hyland House Publishing, 2001.

Of the 250 indigenous plant species recorded, 73 are orchid species. This makes Baluk Willam Reserve one of the most significant terrestrial orchid sites in Victoria. Several orchid species are rare or vulnerable in Victoria. Other significant flora species are Spreading Rope-rush, Cinnamon Wattle and Stiff Sword-sedge.



Other Parks in the area to visit:

Churchill National Park
(Melway 82 D9)

Lysterfield Park
(Melway 108 D2)

Dandenong Police
Paddocks
(Melway 81 K11)

Cardinia Reservoir Park
(Melway 210 E2)

Aura Vale Lake Park
(Melway 126 D5)

Dandenong Ranges
National Park,
Sherbrooke Forest
(Melway 75 J7)

Caring for the environment

Help us look after this park by remembering these guidelines:

Please take all rubbish home with you, as no bins are provided

Fires are not permitted

Dogs, horses, bikes and trail bikes are not permitted

Firearms are not permitted

All native plants and animals are protected

Please don't just throw this park note away. Keep it, return it for others to use, or recycle it

Fauna

A great deal is yet to be discovered about the fauna of the reserve. The secluded nature of the reserve and its closeness to other parks such as Lysterfield Park, Churchill National Park and the Birds Land Reserve, suggest that it may have significant fauna. Numerous bird species are known to use the reserve.

Of significance are the recorded sightings of the Southern Boobook Owl and Powerful Owl.

Hakea, *Casuarina* and *Acacia* plants are important food resources for cockatoos and other parrot species in the reserve. Tawny Frogmouths, Laughing Kookaburras and a number of honeyeater species are present. Brown Antechinus, Bush Rats, Swamp Rats, Swamp Wallabies, possums and echidnas also inhabit the reserve.

Fire

Little is known about the fire history of the reserve before 1983, although several small fires are said to have occurred in 1969, 1972 and 1976. In 1983, the entire reserve was burnt during the Ash Wednesday fires.

The challenge for the future is to develop appropriate suppression methods and a fire regime that protects and enhances the natural values of the reserve, and protects neighbouring properties from wild fire.

Heritage

In 1899, a 12.5ha portion of what is now known as Baluk Willam Reserve was gazetted for use as a watering site for stock. This classification was revoked in 1981, at which time the land became known as Ash Reserve. Between 1959 and 1983, the area was used as a campsite for the Girl Guide Association. Several small ironclad buildings, since demolished, were erected during this time.

The remaining 55ha of Baluk Willam Reserve was originally a privately owned block known as 'Bullen's Land'. The block appears to be one of the few properties in the area to have remained in a relatively natural state. An adobe house was built at the site early last century, but was dismantled in the 1960s. In 1977, the land was purchased and set aside as a reserve following recommendations by the Land Conservation Council.

Both Ash Reserve and Bullen's Land were later renamed 'Baluk Willam Flora Reserve', as suggested by the Wurundjeri people. Meaning 'meeting of the clans', the name reflects the

area's previous land use by Aboriginal people. Today the reserve is primarily used for the protection and study of its flora and fauna.

Threats to the reserve

One of the greatest threats to Baluk Willam Flora Reserve is the plant disease *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, also known as Cinnamon Fungus or Root Rot. The disease is caused by a soil-inhabiting water-borne fungus, which attacks the root system and inhibits plant growth and survival. Altered drainage patterns, erosion, siltation problems and transfer of soil by boots, horses' hooves and bikes spread *Phytophthora*, and are cause for concern in the reserve.

Recreational activities such as horse riding and trail bike riding are contributing to erosion and the spread of weeds in the reserve. Although it is currently in fairly good condition, weed invasion could reduce the reserve's flora quality.

Threats to wildlife include predation by foxes and domestic animals such as cats.



Brown Antechinus ©MT

Future directions

The primary purpose for establishing Baluk Willam Reserve was to protect the botanical values of the area, which are of State significance. Continued management will aim to maintain the reserve in a relatively natural state. This will include ongoing research, monitoring and public education.

Further information

The Friends of the Baluk Willam Reserve have a long history of active involvement in the reserve's management and a good knowledge of the reserve. If you would like to join the Friends Group, please contact Parks Victoria on 13 1963. For those with a general interest in our native orchids, become involved with The Australasian Native Orchid Society. Visit their website at www.anos.org.au.

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