



NATURE TRAIL NOTES AND INFORMATION

Welcome to the RJ Chambers Flora and Fauna Reserve in Pakenham Upper – the largest Council-managed reserve in Cardinia Shire. With six different walking trails, the 121.4 hectare reserve is home to 88 bird and 336 indigenous plant species. Count how many you see!

In the early 1900s and again in the 1960s, the area was selectively logged and a saw mill operated nearby. In 1972, the former Shire of Pakenham purchased the land from WH Shelton and the then Shire engineer Ron Chambers proposed that the bushland be used 'to preserve the area for public enjoyment'.

Walkers and horse riders are reminded not to leave the paths, to avoid creating new unwanted trails, to minimise the spread of weeds or trample native vegetation. Horse riders can use Kangaroo Trail and Lyrebird Walk only. The numbers in this leaflet refer to the blue numbered posts along the track. But don't just look for the posts, keep an eye out and listen all the way.

NATURE TRAIL – RJ CHAMBERS RESERVE

1. Bush food for bees

Bushy needlewood (*Hakea decurrens*) and furze hakea (*Hakea ulicina*) are two shrubs that form part of the understorey. Stiff spiky needles provide birds with good protection from predators and the flowers from both plants provide nectar for native bees. More than 1,500 different species of native bees exist in Australia in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colours including slim and shiny, fat and furry; red, blue, green and traditional black and yellow.



Bushy needlewood (*Hakea decurrens*)
Photo: Stuart Hall

2. On the rocks

Scattered rocky outcrops provide unique habitats for a variety of plant communities including the yellow rice flower (*Pimelea flava*) and honey pots (*Acrotriche serrulata*), a member of the heath family. This shrub, only 15–20 centimetres high, has many erect branchlets with pointed, dark green, soft hairy leaves. The tiny clusters of green bell flowers are full of nectar. Also growing between the rocks are spiny-headed mat rush (*Lomandra longifolia*) prickly tea-rose (*Leptospermum continentale*) and button everlasting (*Helichrysum scorpioides*).

3. The locals

The yellow-tailed black cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus funereus*) can be seen flying overhead. Predominately black with yellow stripes on their tails and a yellow patch on their cheek, their distinctive flying pattern is characterised by a slow, deep, fluid, flapping motion. Their call is a distinctive eerie wailing, audible for long distances.

Their favourite food is seed from native trees like she-oaks, hakeas and introduced pine trees. They use their chisel-like beaks to shave off the tops of seeds, cones, and woody fruits.

The rare beautiful firetail (*Stagonopleura bella*) can also be seen if you look carefully. It has a bright red beak and tail and a grey body with pink legs; it has a black mask on its face and a pale blue eye-ring.



Yellow-tailed black-cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus funereus*)
Photo: Arthur Grosset ©

4. The silver banksia

Silver banksias (*Banksia marginata*) are a low shrub with stiff leaves, dark green above and silvery-white beneath. Yellow flower spikes are displayed from September to April and later become woody fruits. Honeyeaters feed on the nectar and pollinate the flowers. This nectar is also a tasty treat for sugar gliders and possums who often make their homes in hollows in nearby eucalypt trees. Distinctive scratch marks on the outside of hollows provide clues to where they may be living.



Silver banksia (Banksia marginata)
Photo: Stuart Hall

5. The giants of the forest

Mountain grey gums (*Eucalyptus cypellocarpa*) grow as tall as 60 metres on southern slopes in areas with high rainfall. Their bark is smooth and grey, except at the tree base and is shed in long strips. White flowers are produced from December to July. The horizontal cuts that often appear on the trunk are caused by insect larvae.

6. A change of scenery

As you walk through the reserve, look for changes in the types of plants and the vegetation structure. Three different vegetation communities exist in Chambers Reserve: lowland forest, damp forest, and riparian forest. Most of the reserve is lowland forest, classified as locally common.

As you walk along Echidna Path, ascending from Swampy Creek in the gully, the vegetation community changes from damp forest community to lowland forest. Mountain grey gums (*Eucalyptus cypellocarpa*) are the dominant trees in the damp forest community, with messmate (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) and narrow-leaved peppermints (*Eucalyptus radiata*) taking over as you rise up the hill.

7. Prescribed burning

Look uphill to see a significant change in the vegetation community – the trees along this slope have black charred trunks. In 2003, this area had a prescribed burn, sometimes called a controlled burn. Prescribed burns aim to reduce the amount of fuel for potential bushfires and increase biodiversity. Some Australian plants such as hakeas use fire and smoke to assist with opening seed pods and help with germination. However, too-frequent fire activity can reduce the success rate of germination if plants fail to reach seeding maturity before being burnt.

Traditionally, Indigenous people completed fire activities, burning grass and bushlands to regulate different animal species that relied on particular plants that only germinated after fire.

8. Long runs for little creeks

Four creeks run through Chambers Reserve: Bourkes, Shelton and Swampy Creek which all join Toomuc Creek. Toomuc Creek begins north of Chambers reserve near Paternoster Road and runs along the western boundary of the reserve. The head water begins here and travels 30 kilometres as it drains south through the town of Pakenham into Western Port Bay.

A common plant growing along these waters is fishbone water fern (*Blechnum nudum*) with its green distinctive branches resembling fish skeletons.

9. Swamp sedge land

This swamp sedge-land community is home to locally and regionally significant plant species including several species of sedges: the common tall sword-sedge (*Lepidosperma elatius*), tall sedge (*Carex appressa*) and the red-fruited saw-sedge (*Gahnia sieberiana*), with its light-brown flower from spring to early summer. They also produce a small round red fruit and grow up to 3 metres high.



Tall sword-sedge (Lepidosperma elatius)
Photo: Stuart Hall

10. A home for many

Many animals call this reserve 'home', but the one you are most likely to see traces of is the common wombat (*Vombatus ursinus*). Wombats dig large burrows in the ground and feed on grasses and leaves. Being nocturnal animals, they may be a little hard to see during the day.



Short-beaked echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*)
Photo: Stuart Hall

You might also see traces of the short-beaked echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*). Look for disturbances in the soil and scratchings where they have looked for ant and termite nests. Echidnas dig distinctive shallow holes with a deeper hole in the middle and probe for food using their long pointy nose.



Agile antechinus (*Antechinus agilis*)
Photo: Laura Levens

Other little animals you might hear rustling in thick undergrowth are the agile antechinus (*Antechinus agilis*) and the dusky marsupial mouse (*Antechinus swainsonii*), which has light brown fur with a grey tint.

You may also see animal scats (droppings) throughout the reserve. Wombats are known to drop their scats in strange places including on top of rocks, branches, and dirt mounds. Usually, their scats are found in groups of four to eight cube-shaped pellets.

11. Forest understorey

Dusty miller (*Spyridium parvifolium*) and common cassinia (*Cassinia aculeata*) are distinctive species that form the understorey along this section of the track.

Dusty miller has small round leaves which are predominantly green with a white edge along the top which gives the leaves a dusty look. It's tiny white flowers are quite fragrant from July to October.

Common cassinia is a robust shrub with slender, dark green leaves up to 4 centimetres in length and displays small, off-white, dense flowerheads from November to February.

12. Wetland

The small wetland ahead is home to many water plants and invertebrates. The water is fresh and deep enough for tall rushes and sedges to grow. Swamp gums (*Eucalyptus ovata*), medium-sized trees with dark, rough bark that sheds in ribbons from higher up the trunk, are the dominant trees growing around the dam. The dam was originally built for fire fighting.

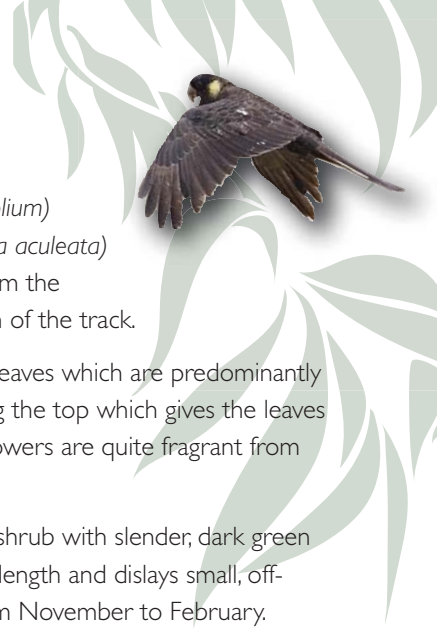
13. Kangaroo trail

The Kangaroo Trail is characterised by rocky outcrops and the dominant mid-storey of paperbarks, hakeas and grevillea, including the yellow hakea (*Hakea nodosa*) and mountain grevillea (*Grevillea alpina*). The yellow hakea is a compact shrub growing 1–3 metres, with needle-like leaves that are slightly prickly. It has a beautiful small clustered yellow flower from April to August.

After the yellow hakea finishes flowering, the mountain grevillea begins to flower, producing red, yellow, and white flowers from August to December. Growing to 2.5 metres, this shrub is covered with small hairs and has small, narrow oval leaves. Look for small birds foraging throughout this middle-lower storey of plants.





Yellow hakea (*Hakea nodosa*)
Photo: Upper Beaconsfield Indigenous Plant Nursery




RJ CHAMBERS FLORA AND FAUNA RESERVE

Lyre Bird Walk – 1.6kms
Kangaroo Trail – 1 km
Hakea Circle – 500m
Acacia Walk – 1.1kms
Echidna Path – 770m
Wombat Track – 540m

 Self-guided trail
 Horse riding track


 Sign post

 Toilet

 Parking Lat 37° 59' 13" S
Long 145° 29' 36" E

 Picnic area

 Playground

 10m contour



HOW TO GET THERE

RJ Chambers Flora and Fauna Reserve is located on Bourkes Creek Road, Pakenham Upper (Melway ref: 313 G8). It is a 10-kilometre drive south of the Emerald township. From Emerald, travel south on Beaconsfield-Emerald Road, then turn left onto Bourkes Creek Road. Travel along this scenic road for about 3.8 kilometres.

- Please leave everything as you find it along the way and enjoy your walk.
- Please note, this walk is steep in some sections and may be difficult for some visitors.




CARDINIA

We hope you have enjoyed the walking trail. Feel free to take the notes home, or please return them to the box at the beginning of the walk.