

Site 104. Ferntree Gully Ridge

A treed residential area on a prominent ridge. Melway ref. 74 B3

Site Significance Level: *Local*

- There is a substantial number of mature trees, including remnant eucalypts, that provide rudimentary habitat for native birds, bats, possums, frogs and insects;
- The tree canopy helps to provide some degree of habitat connection between several more substantial sites of biological significance.

Map – See page 497.

Boundaries

This 47.4 ha site is shaded tan on the map on p. 497. It does not include Site 3 (End of The Avenue, Ferntree Gully) that lies at its southern tip. The boundary aligns with property boundaries except where it crosses roads.

Land use & tenure: Freehold residential land and associated streets.

Site description

This site includes a prominent, 1.1-kilometre long ridge and the Blind Ck valley, the latter being at the site's northern end. The southern end skirts Site 3, 130m from Ferny Ck.

The ridge is formed from a band of hornfels, created where Lower Devonian siltstones became covered by the Dandenong Ranges volcanic flows during the Upper Devonian Period. The subsoil is clay and the topsoil is a shallow clay loam.

Francis Crescent (just southwest of Blind Ck) follows the foot of the ridge. To its north and east, the topsoil is alluvium that has washed down Blind Ck and some of its tributaries.

The site stands out on a satellite photograph as more heavily vegetated than its surroundings. This is because many properties have large trees. A significant proportion of the trees are remnant eucalypts. On the ridge, the dominant remnant eucalypt is Bundy (*Eucalyptus gonicalyx*) – an excellent species for fauna habitat. There are also many trees that are native to other parts of Australia, which generally have greater habitat value than trees from other continents.

The tree canopy appears to provide basic habitat needs for native birds, bats, possums, frogs and insects.

Relationship to other land

The site provides a treed link between the Blind Creek habitat corridor (Site 33) and the Ferny Creek habitat corridor (part of Site 66). It may serve as a corridor for fauna movements between the two creeks, but there is no observational data to test that hypothesis.

It is also apparent from the map on p. 497 that the site abuts the Dandenong Ranges Buffer area (Site 99) and is close to several other sites of biological significance, particularly the railway corridor (Site 88), Koolunga Native Reserve (Site 5) and the Vaughan Road bushland (Site 6). The Dandenong Ranges National Park is 900 m away.

The author observed substantial numbers of parrots on the Ferntree Gully ridge, beyond what could be supported by the ridge on its own. This indicates that the parrots move through the area and rely on other areas to fulfil some of their habitat requirements. In this sense at least, the site functions as either a habitat corridor or an ecological 'stepping stone'.

Significance ratings

Ecological Integrity and Viability

The value of the site as a corridor or ecological 'stepping stone' fits the description 'Important at local scale - Link between individual remnant habitat blocks or within subcatchment', to which criterion 1.2.6 of Amos (2004) attributes **Local** significance.

Locally Threatened Plant Species

The site contains some locally threatened plant species that have viable populations in combination with neighbouring native vegetation. Eucalypts are the most conspicuous examples. Such occurrences meet criterion 3.1.5 for a site of **Local** significance.

Threats

- Loss of canopy trees due to residential subdivision and development;

- Eucalypt dieback disease.

Management issues

The habitat value of the site could be enhanced by planting additional indigenous trees and understorey species (e.g. Sweet Bursaria, *Bursaria spinosa*) that suit insect-eating birds. This applies particularly to properties that have little existing cover of native or indigenous trees.

Administration matters

- This site is worthy of inclusion within the proposed Vegetation Protection Overlay Schedule (Volume 1, Section 5.5) because:
 - It contains (in the words of the VPP Practice Note on Biodiversity) ‘scattered living food trees with an exotic understorey’;
 - It is a site of Local biological significance;
 - Most of the properties involved are too small to be affected by Clause 52.17 of the Knox Planning Scheme, which might otherwise provide some of the trees with some protection; and
 - Some of the habitat trees are not native to Victoria and are therefore not protected by Clause 52.17;
- This site lies within a much larger area covered by the existing Schedule 3 to the Vegetation Protection Overlay of the Knox Planning Scheme. The author believes that the overlay area can be contracted to the site described here because the land that has been omitted here has no biological significance and is unlikely to acquire any in the foreseeable future.

Information sources used in this assessment

- An inspection of the area by Dr Lorimer in 2003 for the specific purpose of finding sites of biological significance and determining the distribution of trees that represent reasonable habitat for native fauna;
- General observations by Dr Lorimer while surveying the end of The Avenue (Site 3), the Blind Creek Corridor (Site 33) and the railway corridor (Site 88);
- Aerial photography from February 2001, April 2003 and February 2007; and
- Satellite imagery of the district.