

MERRI GROWLER

The Friends of Merri Creek Newsletter

February – April 2011

Incorporating the newsletter of Friends of Edgars Creek

The 2011 Friends' Committee

Fourteen members and one non-member attended the FoMC Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 24 November 2010, after an emotional 'Welcome to Country' by the Wurundjeri Elder, Uncle Ringo Terrick, who then told us about the Merri Creek Cultural Heritage Project that he's coordinating for the Wurundjeri Tribe Land & Cultural Heritage Council.

The following members were elected to the 2011 Committee:

Office Bearers

President David Redfearn

Vice-President Ann McGregor

Secretary Ray Radford

Treasurer vacant

Membership Secretary Monica Williamson

2 Committee Members vacant

Unfortunately, Simon O'Connor has stepped down as Treasurer after taking over from Colin Abbott early in 2010. Simon found that his time was limited by the demands of work and a baby. In future, MCMC will do the bookkeeping work, so this role will be much easier.

The vacant Committee member positions were held by Christabel McCarthy, who is completing her Masters degree in Geospatial Technology, and Ruth Shiel, who needs a break after five years on the Committee.



Welcome to the first Merri Growler

We hope you like the new name for our newsletter, which was proposed by Life Member Brian Bainbridge after we invited members' suggestions. Inside, we've also used the name Merri Musings, as suggested by three members. These changes are accompanied by a smart new layout by Dean Lombard, plus four extra pages for this issue.

If you're interested in taking a role on Committee, please phone Ray on 0422 989 166 or email: merricreek@bigpond.com

Sub-Committee Coordinators

Regeneration Group Nicole Lowe

Litter Group Paul Prentice

Streamteam Irene Baker

Newsletter (layout) Dean Lombard

These coordinators remain the same except for the Regeneration Group, where Nicole Lowe has replaced Christabel McCarthy.

Representatives to MCMC

FoMC will be represented on the Merri Creek Management Committee by Trevor Hausler, Ann McGregor, Allie Dawe, Paul Prentice, Nicole Lowe and Sandra Simpson. Sandra is new to this role, replacing Christabel McCarthy.

Substitute Reps to MCMC

David Redfearn, Pascale Pitot and Yasmin Kelsall agreed to be Substitute Representatives to MCMC.

Afterwards we chatted over drinks and nibbles. Those who left last were amazed to hear a Growling Grass Frog calling from the dam at CERES!

Ray Radford (Secretary)

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President's Report

As given at the AGM on 24 November 2010

Another year with another set of challenges and it again gives me great pleasure as President to report to our membership and our community.

Our ever hard working Secretary Ray Radford has covered most of our activities quite comprehensively in his Secretary's Report so, as usual, I will focus on the broader strategic issues. But first the well deserved thank-yous.

I would like to thank all members for their commitment during the year, those who held office and those who organised and carried out the many tasks that befall an organisation such as ours. Our efforts are all voluntary, a true labour of love and any time given to FoMC is immensely appreciated. Special thanks to Ray as FoMC Secretary, for making the job of the committee so much easier; and to my fellow committee members for coming out to our meetings in rain hail and shine (with a lot more rain in 2010!!).

Now to some of the issues that we faced in 2010, starting with the good news.

We win Landcare Award

First of all, a massive pat on the back to all those wonderful people who have been part of our journey for over 20 years! It was enormously exciting for FoMC to win the 2010 Port Phillip and Westernport Landcare Award in the category *Community Group Caring for Public Land*.

These awards celebrate the environmental contribution of individuals, community groups, schools and councils, and the presentation by Dr Kate Auty, the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, took place on Saturday 11 September at Zinc, Federation Square, Melbourne. In the words of the judges, *"The Friends of Merri Creek have shown great leadership and innovation in regards to protecting and enhancing the environs of the Merri Creek."*

Since 2000, over 61,800 indigenous plants have been planted by FoMC, with almost 3000 people attending the 265 events and activities organised by FoMC in the last six years—a great achievement.

This award is great recognition for our work and the honour is shared by our members and all those who have helped out at any of our events. This award is particularly special for us as an urban-based group, when Landcare tends to be associated with rural-based groups.

Next year, FoMC will represent the Port Phillip and Westernport catchment in the same category at the Victorian Landcare Awards.

Edgars Creek parkland win

On 2 July, the parkland along Edgars Creek Coburg, which was under threat of residential development by its owner VicRoads, was gifted as public open space to be managed by Moreland City Council. This is a fantastic win for the community and for the environment! Congratulations to all those who worked to achieve this goal.

Platypus sighting

On Thursday 16 September, Friends of Merri Creek Secretary, Ray Radford was lucky enough to see a Platypus about 30cm long for about 20 minutes in

the Thornbury/Coburg area of Merri Creek. According to the Australian Platypus Conservancy, this is the first really confirmed record for Merri Creek since the Conservancy conducted trapping surveys (with negative results) in 1995.

Now for some not so good news: Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) expansion

In 2010, the State Government passed legislation, after much controversy, to significantly expand the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) to cater for an eventual Melbourne population of 5 million. One expanded area covers most of the Merri Creek catchment from north of Craigieburn to Wallan. In response, FoMC presented our vision of parklands, habitat links and landscapes that sustain ecosystems and provide recreation space.

FoMC made vigorous representations to politicians and government agencies seeking protection for creeks, wetlands, significant native vegetation, volcanic cones, Aboriginal and historic heritage. We envisaged a network of habitat links to connect larger conservation reserves within and beyond the Merri catchment. Green wedges would have been retained between growth corridors, and rural communities and landscapes sustained, complementing the habitat in conservation areas.

The UGB legislation poses a grave threat to the grasslands and species of National and State significance to the north of Melbourne as well as other areas on the urban fringe. The whole process was carried out with undue haste, allowing almost no time for adequate community consultation or proper assessment of the environmental values of the area. *This arguably is the greatest long-term challenge that we have ever faced and we will need to draw on every ounce of our knowledge, experience, energy and passion to ensure that the values of the catchment are safeguarded.*

Electricity terminal station campaign

In June, SP Ausnet, which operates the Brunswick Terminal Station (BTS) proposed a significant expansion of the terminal station, something that would seriously compromise the visual amenity of the adjacent residential area and the parklands on Merri Creek. A strong campaign by local residents has resulted in re-consideration of the



design. FoMC will continue to support a much improved low-impact design for the BTS.

Merri Creek Parklands (Marran Baba)

Planning continues for the new parklands, with Parks Victoria mainly focusing on a master plan for Galada Tamboore. We will keep members aware of developments as they occur through our web site and newsletter.

Northern sewerage works

Two major sewerage projects are now well under way, both of which will help protect Merri Creek from wet weather sewage overflows and ensure that the sewerage system can cope with growth in the northern suburbs.

Growling Grass Frog Trust Fund

Geoff Heard has now completed his six year research project into the habitat requirements of the Growling Grass Frog (GGF), assisted by the GGF Trust Fund.

Geoff's PhD project was designed to examine key aspects of the conservation biology of *L. raniformis* in urbanising landscapes around Melbourne, with a particular interest in the species' habitat requirements. Geoff found that the GGF is in decline in the north of Melbourne due to the various effects of urbanisation and has developed guidelines for GGF habitat management.



Funding has now been obtained to extend this research work for another three years. The project, being run out of the University of Melbourne, will develop a monitoring protocol for the species, which will offer clear guidance for future conservation strategies.

Merri Creek Wetlands

The City of Moreland has allocated funding for the exploration of wetlands along the creek in Moreland. FoMC lobbied the council for some years regarding this, so we look forward to helping them to create new wetlands.

Membership

It is most gratifying that we continue to get a steady stream of new members. We hope that these new people will become actively involved and be our future.

Bird Surveys

FoMC continued the quarterly bird surveys along various parts of the creek, in conjunction with Birds Australia. The survey is most ably organised by Ann McGregor and is well supported by FoMC and the community. This will increase our understanding of bird population patterns

along the creek. So far, over 90 bird species have been spotted.

We are most grateful for the support and advice offered to us by Stuart Dashper of Birds Australia, and we also thank the participants.



Challenges for 2011

This list is by no means exhaustive but I see our key priorities for 2011 as:

- Continuing to campaign to ensure that the Merri Regional Park delivers real protection to the *whole* of the upper Merri corridor;
- Demanding that all development proposals not proceed in areas of high environmental significance nor without rigorous assessment in those areas yet to be comprehensively studied;
- Work with the Wurundjeri people to protect Merri Creek's heritage values;
- Working with other groups, the community and government to ensure appropriate development along the whole of the Merri but particularly in the upper Merri and to secure the protection of sites of significance;
- Working with the councils on wetland creation along the creek;
- A continued commitment to the good governance and operations of MCMC;
- Exploring opportunities to further educate and engage our community in the values of the creek and its environs;
- Implementation of the recommendations of the research into the protection and improvement of the Growling Grass Frog habitat; and
- Membership, the next generation and succession planning.

Finally I would like to give my thanks to all of you for your fantastic support and hard work during 2010 and hope that we all emerge from the Christmas break refreshed for the challenges of 2011.

David Redfearn (President)

Merri Musings

Urban Growth Boundary update

Although we do not know how the new State Government will treat the newly expanded Urban Growth Boundary (UGB), the new Planning Minister, Matthew Guy, has said that he would review (read 'expand') the UGB every two years. This might actually be impractical, but it does signify the Government's general intent. Nevertheless, FoMC will continue our fight to preserve important environmental values.

Melbourne Water works The Waterways Alliance, on behalf of Melbourne Water, is working to improve a 4.8 kilometre section of Merri Creek between Bell St and the Yarra River. Weed control works began in December, in preparation for tree removal in the early 2011. Invasive weeds including willow trees, desert ash and blackberry will be removed and replaced with around 5,000 native trees, shrubs and aquatic plants.

Sections of the shared Merri Creek Trail will be temporarily detoured at times during the tree removal works to ensure the safety of work crews and the community. For more information please contact: Kirsten Lingard of the Waterways Alliance on 9235 1409, or visit the website: www.melbournewater.com.au

SP Ausnet prunings This year there will be some dramatic pruning to prevent possible damage to the high voltage powerlines. Although this is regrettable, FoMC reluctantly supports the pruning on the basis that taking no action could be dangerous.

Dights Falls works Since November 2009, Melbourne Water has been working to replace the ageing Dights Falls Weir and build a new fishway on the Yarra River in Abbotsford. The project, which should finish in mid 2011, also involves landscaping.

Wurundjeri liaisons We look forward to continuing our newly established liaison with the Wurundjeri Tribe Land & Cultural Heritage Council and their Elder, Ringo Terrick.

Successful grants

Once again, FoMC has been very successful with the following grant applications, thanks to the great support of Katrina Roberg, MCMC's Conservation Program Manager.

Three Melbourne Water Community Grants

\$20,000 for Life on the Edge – reinforcing urban revegetation to cope with recreation pressure, which involves revegetating narrow strips between the new shared path north of CERES and the established revegetation.

\$20,000 for View from a bridge: Consolidation of Creekside restoration along Merri Creek in Reservoir, which involves establishment of low maintenance shrub and tree vegetation in areas that have yet to be brought into intensive management, from Broadhurst Avenue to MacKenzie Street Reservoir. Added to this is an extra Support Grant of \$1000 for postage and printing of four newsletters.

\$19,990 for MECCARG's Rosemary Grevillea escarpment & Pentridge quarry: part 4 which involves enhancing the biodiversity values and improving the quality of remnant vegetation at the MECCARG site.

Victorian Volunteer Small Grants

\$3664 for another marquee for shelter and two augers to drill holes for easier planting.

EPA Alternative Sentencing Payment

\$2500 which will be used to extend plantings between Rushall Station North Fitzroy and Queens Parade Clifton Hill.

Rain cancelled event For the first time, a FoMC activity was cancelled due to heavy rain on Sunday 28/11/10. The Community Indigenous cultural event was meant to feature planting of semi aquatics and Indigenous story-telling, but unfortunately rain had the final word.

The great Murnong (Yam Daisy) Harvest

Heavy rain on Saturday 13th November 2010 didn't stop the second Murnong Harvest celebrations of the Merri and Edgars Creek Confluence Area Restoration Group (MECCARG) alongside Merri Creek near Murray Rd Coburg.



Wurundjeri Elders Alice Kolasa and Kitty Coombes welcomed about 60 people to Country, followed by the hardy Jindi Worabak dancers, before harvesting, cooking and eating the Murnong.

Wurundjeri Elder Bill Nicholson said: "MECCARG have managed the ecological restoration of their Coburg site by Merri Creek, careful of Indigenous cultural heritage, so the area suits an extraordinary Wurundjeri celebration to mark the Murnong harvest."

MECCARG is committed to restoring the Murnong, which was a traditional staple food of Aboriginal people of South East Australia, but is now close to extinction.

Merri mostly muddy

Merri Creek has been more or less muddy since heavy rains in January 2010.

Whenever the muddiness (turbidity) started to clear a little, some more heavy rain brought it back, so that the creek is starting to resemble a mini Yarra River.

A lot of the mud, if not most, is known to come from development sites in the north of the catchment which obviously have inadequate erosion control. Although the relevant authorities, Melbourne Water, the EPA, and Mitchell Shire Council, were notified, the problem has not improved.

Melbourne Water, which can intervene to ensure that appropriate controls are in place, has visited the suspect development sites. However, they only instructed one developer to rebuild a failed sediment bund and diversion weir.

The EPA was unable to establish the cause of the turbidity, but they did see poor site practices and raised these with Mitchell Shire Council, which has primary responsibility for ensuring that developers manage sediment on sites in the upper catchment.

Although Mitchell has managed to get the developers to employ some controls, such as putting a few hay bales near stormwater drains, this has proved to be inadequate.

Melbourne Water believes that the present turbidity levels

will not cause severe issues with aquatic fauna, but they acknowledge that any increase in turbidity is a further stress on the system. They add that they want to ensure that sediment and other development related water quality issues are adequately addressed in the future.

However, FoMC is concerned that increased development in the upper Merri under the new expanded Urban Growth Boundary could mean that the Merri may now be more or less permanently muddy.



Our Streamteam Coordinator, Irene Baker, and team monitor the Merri's water quality monthly

Ray Radford (Secretary)

Stormwater flow reversed

In recent years, water authorities have reversed their view on stormwater.

In the 1970's, the traditional approach was to get the water away from an area as quickly as possible, – by using barrel drains, or concreting creeks etc. However, water authorities now try to keep the water in an area as long as possible, – by using stormwater harvesting techniques such as rainwater tanks, retention ponds, raingardens, or wetlands.

Research has shown that in formally drained areas there is actually *too much* stormwater going into our waterways. In natural areas, stormwater seeps slowly through the ground and much of it is lost through evaporation, or taken up by vegetation, before it reaches the waterways. However with urbanisation, almost all of the rain is chan-



*Galada Tamboore after heavy rain last year
(Photo: Nicole Spillane)*

nelled from impervious surfaces such as roofs, roads, and pavements, through pipes directly into waterways. This not only wastes

water but also creates more erosion, dramatically alters natural flows and brings untreated pollutants into our waterways, causing a loss of biodiversity.

This unfortunately means that extra water from the desalination plant and the north-south pipeline is not only unnecessary, but would actually harm waterways!

When the City of Brisbane mandated rainwater tanks for all new developments, the demand for water from the mains supply fell by half, showing that stormwater harvesting methods can halve our water usage from the main storage supplies, as well as greening and cooling our cities.

A demonstration project at Little Stringybark Creek in Mt Evelyn aims to show how stormwater harvesting techniques can be used to restore an urban waterway. The project, coordinated by the University of Melbourne and Monash University, is testing the design and implementation of on-ground solutions, with the support of local government, water authorities and residents.

FoMC is continuing to lobby for stormwater treatment wetlands in Darebin and Moreland. You too can help by asking how your Council uses stormwater harvesting techniques to break the link between impervious surfaces and waterways.

Ray Radford (Secretary)

Birds along the Merri in true spring

The Satin Flycatcher, a new species for the Merri surveys list, was recorded at Galada Tamboore during the survey on 14 November 2010. Most of the warm weather migrants have arrived: the Sacred Kingfisher (2 sites), Australian Reed-Warbler (6 sites), and Brown Songlark (2 sites). No Rufous Songlarks or Olive-backed Orioles were reported, unlike the survey in November 2009.

The breeding season has been a plentiful one after the good rains, and 21 species were reported nesting or with fledged offspring. Tawny Frogmouths were nesting at two sites, and a family with two young were recorded at a third site. There were 20 young Little Pied Cormorants in a colony at Coburg Lake. At Edwardes Lake, Chris Neeson took a rather startling series of photographs of a Purple Swamphen tearing apart a Dusky Moorhen chick, and feeding tidbits to its family.



A Purple Swamphen with the carcass of a Dusky Moorhen chick at Edwardes Lake Coburg, by Chris Neeson

Two Wedge-tailed Eagles were reported at Galgi Ngarrk (Craigieburn Grasslands), and two at Bababi Marning (Cooper St Grasslands) a week later. Was it the same pair?

A total of 76 species was recorded across the 10 regular survey sites (excluding Kalkallo Common), and this was comparable with the 2009 total.

Total bird numbers (estimated 1959) were a little less than in November last year (estimated 2322) – perhaps some were hiding in the thigh-high grass at the five native grassland sites! The most numerous species were Common Starling (222), Rock Dove (128), Rainbow Lorikeet (114), and Greylag Goose (100). The latter are multiplying rapidly from some ‘dumped’ individuals at Coburg Lake.

Sites with the greatest diversity were Kirkdale Street – Merri Park (36 species), Galgi Ngarrk (32 species), Blyth Street – Moreland Road (31) and Galada Tamboore (30).

The ‘other fauna’ list was quite diverse: Common Froglet (many), Striped Marsh Frog, Spotted Marsh Frog, Rabbit, Hare, Eastern Grey Kangaroo, Swamp Wallaby and Tortoise.

The next surveys will be held on 20 February, and 27 February at Bababi Marning and Kalkallo. Watch out for snakes at the native grassland sites, and wear boots, thick pants and preferably gaiters.

Ann McGregor (Merri Birdwatch Coordinator)

First Merri Birdwatch survey for 2011

Bird surveys will be held from 8.45-10.30am at eleven sites along Merri Creek, including Kalkallo Common near Kalkallo Creek (a Merri tributary), as listed below. Beginners welcome, BYO binoculars if possible, but no dogs please, as they reduce the number and variety of birds to be seen. The contact for all Birdwatch events is Ann McGregor 0429 386 102.

Surveys at the following nine sites are on 20 February & 22 May

Bababi Djinanang (Jukes Rd Grasslands), Fawkner:
Meet on Merri Path at end of Jukes Road, Fawkner (Melway 18 A2).

Egan Reserve – Harding Sreet – Strettle Reserve – Normanby Avenue:
Meet at the bluestone steps at end of The Grove, East Coburg (Melway 30 A3).

Coburg Lake Reserve:
Meet near the car park, Lake Grove, Coburg (Melway 17 H10).

Edwardes Lake:
Meet at the playground adjacent to Griffiths Street, Reservoir (Melway 18 E5).

CERES – Moreland Road:
Meet at the seats on the path at rear of CERES, East Brunswick (Melway 30 B7).

Merri Park – Phillips Reserve:
Meet at the end of Victoria Street, East Brunswick, at BBQ shelter (Melway 30 B8).

Hall Reserve – Yarra Bend Park:
Meet at the Rotunda, Hall Reserve, Clifton Hill (Melway 2D D1).

Galgi Ngaark (Craigieburn Grasslands):
Meet at the O’Herns Road gate off Hume Highway, Somerton (Melway 180 E6).

Galada Tamboore:
Meet at the end of Hatty Court, Campbellfield (Melway 7 K6).

Surveys at Bababi Marning (Cooper St Grasslands) and Kalkallo Common are on 27 February & 29 May

Bababi Marning:
Meet near the Istrian Club, Cooper Street, Campbellfield (Melway 180 K10).

Kalkallo Common:
Malcolm Street, Kalkallo; turn off the Hume Highway at the Kalkallo Hotel (Melway 367 F2).

Merri Creek Parklands (Marran Baba)* – Galada Tamboore

Update No. 10 on the new park north of the Western Ring Road, from Andrew Shannon, Team Leader Community Engagement and Communications, Urban Parks, Parks Victoria.

With the construction of a new section of trail and a new footbridge over Merri Creek there will soon be the opportunity to easily explore the wonderful Galada Tamboore in Campbellfield. The new trail runs from Somerset Rd in Campbellfield (Melway 7 J7) and links through to the Whittlesea Community Gardens in Lalor (Melway 8 B4). This section of Merri Creek includes the Galada Tamboore Gorge, which is of State significance for its geomorphology; and the Barry Road Grasslands, which are of National significance, containing many rare and threatened native wildflower species.

In providing a defined access into Galada Tamboore, Parks Victoria aims to increase the awareness of this fascinating landscape. Illegal entry by vehicles, particularly four wheel drives, has been a long-running problem, degrading the vegetation, accelerating erosion, and creating a hostile atmosphere. It is hoped that bringing people in to discover its value in a managed way will assist in changing that pattern.

The linking trail between the new creek bridge and the pedestrian bridge over the Hume Freeway will remain unsealed at this stage, as access from the freeway for concrete trucks could not be negotiated during the construction period, but it will be sealed later.

With the assistance of Angela Foley of Merri Creek Management Committee, pupils from Campbellfield Heights Primary School helped to promote the new trail by appearing in the summer edition of Parks Victoria's *Parks*



New footbridge at Galada Tamboore (Photo: Parks Victoria)
Discovery magazine, enjoying an educational session on the creek.

Wet weather prior to Christmas has delayed construction but it is hoped to have the trail open by March 2011.

Merri Creek Management Committee has produced a very informative booklet "Galada Tamboore, Campbellfield" which outlines the importance of the area in more detail. The booklet can be downloaded from their website.

**Naming: Marran Baba, which means "body of mother" in the Wurundjeri language, has been proposed for the whole of the new parklands.*

Nature in the city

With this article, FoMC member Sandy Simpson won a creative writing contest on the subject 'Our environment... Your favourite places' in a special environmental edition of the Victorian Dept. of Human Services publication, Over the Fence.

Drops of dew sparkle on native grass like the colours of Rainbow Lorikeets. This is my favourite place in Royal Park, where the last Grassy Red Gum woodland remnants remain in the City of Melbourne; they are now classified as 'regionally endangered'. While I weed around the indigenous plants, tiny superb Fairy Wrens flit from shrub to shrub, the male a striking electric blue. A single Grey Shrike Thrush, high atop a tree, sings a glorious melody of notes, a Kookaburra's laugh rings out and sometimes screeching Yellow Tailed Black Cockatoos arrive in flocks. I may even glimpse a White's Skink, a small reptile that is now rare in urban areas, the only surviving population in Melbourne CBD. Grateful for the opportunity to care for the environment and to help others, I walk back to my flat feeling sanguine and happy.

Dick's witticisms

Here are some more witty one-liners from FoMC Life Member and active Regeneration Group participant, Dick Harcourt:

Everyone has a photographic memory, but some never develop it.

**I just got lost in thought.
It was unfamiliar territory.**

**Seen it all, done it all,
can't remember most of it.**

**On the other hand,
you have different fingers.**

The natural look

Icy seas and steamy jungles, verdant valleys and forbidding deserts, luxuriant wetlands and sprawling grasslands, with their albatrosses and hummingbirds, shrews and elephant seals, anacondas and skinks, mosses and cacti, lichens and fungi – what a rich planet we have.

However this grand diversity of environments, and of species adapted to them, can cause enormous problems when the connection is disrupted. “A weed is simply a plant in the wrong place”, like eucalypts which are so right for Australia and so wrong for Spain, California and South Africa, or the aggressive Cootamundra and willow wattles which outcompete others by pollinating them to produce hybrids.

Similarly, the impact of cane toads, Pacific sea stars, foxes, rabbits and feral animals on this country is all too well known. But a South Australian visitor at a Friends’ Network Conference told us how members of a shooters’ association had been roped in to get rid of some four-legged pests; and how brilliant is the “Charlie Carp” enterprise that turns these invasive fish into fertiliser.

Again, how brutally efficient at overpowering everything else are the dense masses of broom, or the water hyacinth which suffocates waterways; and nothing grows beneath pine plantations. Here in the Merri catchment the most dangerous thing is the aggressive Alligator Weed: strange to think that for each of these plants and animals there’s a part of the world where they exist in harmony with their surroundings.

So there are the never-ending tasks of uprooting, smothering, chopping and/or poisoning herbaceous or woody weeds; ecological burns also destroy some of them, while fire-tolerant ones are made easier to target with herbicides, often the only practical solution. Comparatively few biological controls (insects, mites etc. that attack specific plants) have been found so far to do the job for us, although I was delighted to find a laminated sheet at the MCMC offices that illustrated about sixty of them, including the Spider Mites that help us to combat Gorse.

The Koorie peoples’ long-standing use of fire to maintain the grasslands has several advantages: the clutter of dead material is eliminated, some indigenous species are enabled to germinate, wildflowers and grasses are renewed; nutrients get back into the soil much more quickly than they would through decay. Saplings are killed off so that they don’t create a woodland, but a few big trees survive to give shade to the kangaroos and sustenance to the Mistletoebirds.

Some weeds such as Chilean Needle-grass and Serrated Tussock are very insidious, hard to tell apart from local plants; most, however, have a distinctly alien, jarring



An ecological burn of native grassland by Merri Creek Management Committee staff at the Aurora estate in Epping North.

aspect, so that their removal leaves a grassland, wetland etc. with a gratifyingly normal, consistent appearance, the way they were meant to be. As our Secretary once wrote, that’s what Friends are for...

Milder activities include planting, mulching and seed collecting, wildlife reports, nature walks and water testing; and the icing on the cake, the final cosmetic touch – litter-blitzing. There’s so much satisfaction in contributing to the beauty and health of the planet by doing a bit of tidying, along with such great colleagues in the scavenging and hygiene business as crocodiles’ flying toothpicks, hyenas and vultures, dung beetles and maggots, and the bacteria that operate septic tanks.

Actually, what they’re doing is recycling, in accordance with the cosmic principle of letting nothing go to waste; whereas we can only sweep the trash under the carpet, such as the toxic cigarette butts and throwaway polystyrene cups. However we can also match them by keeping glass and plastic, steel and aluminium, paper and cardboard in circulation; and even go to the next level, reusables, as does the creature that wears another one’s empty shell – the hermit crab.

With the flourishing native vegetation, and the rubbish and weeds’ eradication, what we achieve by hook or by crook is that the place has a lovely natural look!

Paul Prentice

John Batman's outstations

Remarkably, two of John Batman's sheep station sites survive, in rural landscapes on the Merri Creek near Craigieburn.

After discovering two 'Batman's Sheep Station' sites on historical plans some years ago, Robert Hoddle's field book was retrieved, and from its bearings and measurements surveyor Peter Knights generously transposed the exact locations of the huts, tents and sheepyards onto modern plans. A preliminary inspection of the sites by archaeologists Gary Vines, Roger Luebbers and Jeremy Smith identified artefacts, and probably the redgum tree from which Hoddle had taken a key bearing.

Craigieburn and Melbourne's northern plains are sometimes regarded as a dry and flat wasteland of rocks and thistles, a 'greenfields' urban development site devoid of heritage constraints. History, however, suggests a different story.

It was these northern and western grasslands and open woodlands – for millennia shaped for hunting by the fires of the Wurundjeri people – which lured European squatters, and resulted in the foundation of Melbourne. The district had presented the most 'charming and gratifying site' to William Hovell, while Batman described the Yuroke-Craigieburn district as 'richer than any high land I have seen before'. Batman's partner JT Gellibrand described a 'vale' of 'about 20,000 acres of the richest quality and finest herbage I ever saw'.

It was on this Merri Creek that in August 1837 Batman established his outstations, perhaps due to a drought, or intensifying competition for land nearer Melbourne. There are records of Batman prosecuting his shepherds under the Master & Servants Act, and it is also quite possible that more remote locations had the advantage of removing workers from temptations to abscond to hotels.

The upper Merri Creek pastures remained famous amongst squatters, and an early painting was made of the Kinlochewe hotel overlooking the open woodlands on which Batman's flocks grazed. In what was surely one of Melbourne's first tourism ventures, in 1841 the hotel advertised its views over 'Australia Felix'. Melbourne celebrated its distinctive (compared to heavily timbered

Sydney) open woodland pastures, which were frequently described as 'just like a gentleman's park' and a delight to gallop through.

In 1838 the land between the Merri and the Darebin Creeks was subdivided and sold, becoming Victoria's first farming district. In the 1840s the Merri Creek had two flour mills and was a leading wheat growing region. The heritage of this early farming era, including the ruins of stone buildings, and possibly unique dry stone 'cultivation' paddocks, remains little known or explored. A preferred route for the Craigieburn bypass would have obliterated one of the Batman sites; it had not been identified by VicRoads. 'Heritage' studies of State authorities such as the Growth Areas Authority still display the most desultory approach to European cultural heritage.

During inspection of the southern site, now grazed and perhaps ploughed at one stage, short grass enabled a number of artefacts to be found, including the stem of a clay-pipe and mid nineteenth century glass. The northern site is now part of an archaeological precinct, perhaps the mysterious 1840s Scottish tenant farming settlement of Kinlochewe.

The surrounding redgum woodland plains are integral to the northern site. They are a surprisingly intact representation of Melbourne's original landscape, and clearly illustrate the rationale of the outstation. Together with the outstation site they are an outstanding expression of the reason for European settlement of Port Phillip.

While one site is on the Victorian Heritage Inventory, neither has heritage overlay or Victorian Heritage Register protection. The threat is more acute given the removal of Green Wedge zoning north of Melbourne. The massive expansion of the Urban Growth Boundary will engulf the remnant woodland landscapes between the Merri Creek and Plenty River. While the government plans to protect the high-profile grasslands of the western region, it has not undertaken to acquire any redgum woodlands. It is apparently content to leave other values – such as the

woodland ecosystems, and post-contact cultural heritage – to the much later Precinct Structure Plan stage. This is a deeply flawed de facto planning process.

The Merri Creek valley is a rare repository of our scant foundation era heritage, and requires a properly resourced thematic cultural heritage study. It is to be hoped that the government will acquire land, including the Batman sites, for a major park in the upper Merri Creek valley.

David Moloney Industrial Historian

Article and photo reprinted from the newsletter of the National Trust (Vic), Victorian News, August 2010, with permission from the author.



Tawny Frogmouths in the Merri Merri Parklands

Tawny Frogmouths (Podargus strigoides) are found throughout Australia and Papua New Guinea. They rely on their camouflage mastery by freezing in position, compacting their feathers, closing their eyes to slits to merge with the branch they are sitting on. They can ruffle their feathers to imitate different textures in the bark of the tree in which they roost.

Key features are:

- Nocturnal predator related more to nightjars than owls;
- Hunt from a low perch and wait for food to come;
- Foraging strategy is: scan, perch, pounce sallying in clearings;
- Use beak rather than talons to catch food;
- Eat beetles, grasshoppers, snails, small animals, frogs, moths;
- Roost from 1-25m high;
- Territory size range from 20-80ha.

They have the following special adaptations:

- Wide wings for gliding from their perch;
- Primary feathers provide a notched end to the wing to improve lift at slow speeds;
- Feathers are fringed to reduce turbulence and noise during gliding;
- A wide gape for capturing prey;
- Large (yellow) eyes;
- Relatively weak legs and talons.

Tawny Frogmouths' life history:

- Breed August to December;
- Probably pair-bond for life;
- Build a nest using sticks and re-use nest sites;

- Parents share incubation (30 days) and rearing;
- Nestlings grow from 20-200g in about 25 days;
- Nestlings fledge at about 30 days (70% of eggs fledge);
- Longest lived recorded at 14 years plus.

It is best to see them foraging near dusk. Their calls include the common deep "oom oom oom" (70 seconds) and a variety of alarm and threat calls, screams, clucks and hisses.

Tawny Frogmouths don't like:

- Being disturbed – cats and dogs frighten or attack a Frogmouth when they come to ground;
- Garden pesticides – may poison birds if they eat contaminated insects and slugs.

Please keep cats and dogs indoors at night.

It appears that Tawny Frogmouths are expanding along the Merri Creek as revegetation management creates more perching and nesting sites, food sources and clearings.



Bruce McGregor

NEWSFLASH!! Ngarri-djarrang is official

Darebin City Council has notified FoMC that the Wurundjeri name, Ngarri-djarrang is now the official name for the Reservoir site previously known as Central Creek grasslands. Although FoMC and MCMC have been using the Wurundjeri names for these grassland sites for some time, Ngarri-djarrang is the first of the Merri Creek grasslands to have its Wurundjeri name registered with the Register of Geographic Place Names. The name is pronounced "Nyaree-jar-rang" and means 'thigh,' making up a part of the mother's body (Marran Baba). Hopefully, it won't be too long before her other body parts officially come together.

Help wanted on FoMC Committee

Treasurer: *The bookkeeping work will be done by MCMC, so the role will mainly be to oversee MCMC's work and to attend bi-monthly Committee meetings.*

Committee member: *These two vacancies present a great opportunity to contribute and learn how the Committee works without having the responsibility for a particular portfolio.*

FoMC office Volunteer: *This role involves a couple of hours once a fortnight during a working day, to check the mail and do the banking at the FoMC office in Brunswick Town Hall.*

All the above roles would suit someone who would like to do more for the group, but is unable to participate in our events. If you're interested, phone Ray on 0422 989 166 or email: merricreek@bigpond.com.



Friends of Edgars Creek Focus

This page is devoted to the Friends of Edgars Creek, as their previous newsletter Meanders Quarterly is no longer in publication.

2010 was an exciting year for the Friends of Edgars Creek (FoEC), with the acquisition of a custom-built trailer and water pump, new website, T-Shirts and much more in addition to our usual plantings, walk and talks and weeding events. We have lots of fun events scheduled for 2011 so please check out the FoEC website www.foec.org.au for all the latest news, photos and information in relation to Edgars Creek and its friends.

See you down the creek!

Sylvia Page

Secretary, Friends of Edgars Creek

FoEC welcomes contributions of stories, photos or suggestions for inclusion in FoEC Focus or on the FoEC website. Email to edgarscreek@gmail.com



The Friends of Edgars Creek Committee with their custom-built trailer.

Appreciating Edgars Creek parkland

Amongst the rush of day-to-day schedules, Edgars Creek and the surrounding parkland is a sanctuary. Instead of hard edges and fences that are too close, there is an expanse of open space. Branches sway in the breeze, ibises feed in the grass, ducks navigate the currents, water gurgles over rocks, kookaburras chortle. Whenever I come to the park, I breathe deeply, awake my senses, and settle into the dirt track under my feet. I stay longer than I intend, as there is always something to experience, to discover. Each season beckons in its own way. Each change of weather brings its own drama. The storms and snags of my own urban negotiations though, fall away. I leave lighter, yet so much richer. There is a natural wealth that I have come to cherish deeply. And I am delighted that others do too, and am very appreciative of the effort put in toward preserving the creek parkland for the ongoing benefit of the community.

One of many visits to Edgars Creek

It's early March (2010), the time of year when days noticeably shorten. At the confluence of Edgars and Merri Creeks, I step out onto the flat rock. Water happily skips past to one side, still pools loiter quietly to the other. Edgars is not flowing. With anticipation, I head upstream to the little waterfall, wondering what will be found. Usually, heavy rain entices me to be thrilled by the gush of water over the edge of the rock slab. But the prospect that there will be no fall of water is just as exciting. The track curves down to the rock slab which stretches out across the creek, pushing into the banks, still somewhat damp on the far side. An unimpeded crossing, no jumping or detours over the footbridge required. I cross, and with relish place my feet where normally water trickles past.

Being a friend of Edgars Creek, there have been many such moments since we met, almost two years ago. In the meantime, we have become quite intimate, each meeting a different conversation. The creek swells then subsides, swelters then shivers, its mood in constant flux. I too bring my changing seasons, my shifting perceptions. Just as the creek never flows in the same way, I never walk the same path.

My meanders continue upstream before I return to the waterfall. Again I savour the uninterrupted rhythm of my feet across the rock slab, and on the bank, pause to look upstream over the pool, then downstream to the rubble of crumbling rock. A rush of warmth wells up, a feeling of being at home. Yes, I have found a place where I belong. In getting to know Edgars Creek, I am slowly sinking roots into my new neighbourhood.

Four days later, after a deluge that soaks Melbourne's feet, the creek gushes once more.

Angie Pötsch

Member, Friends of Edgars Creek



Last year's final Friends of Edgars Creek planting (September)

EVENTS

FEBRUARY

Saturday 5 MECCARG* Site Preparation

Meet at the Merri path just south of Murray Rd bridge Coburg, 1-3pm. Wear sturdy footwear and gloves. Bring a bucket and digging tool if you can. Phone Dave and Nic 9354 9664.

Sunday 6 Litter Clean-Up - East Brunswick

Alister St East Brunswick, 10am-12 noon. Melway 30 C9. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 6 Streamteam Water Quality Testing

Upstream of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller St, Nth Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway 30 C10. Phone: 9354 9885.

Sunday 13 Gorse removal – Kalkallo Common

Malcolm St Kalkallo, next to the Cemetery - turn off the Hume Highway at Kalkallo Hotel, 10am-1pm. Melway 367 F2. Light refreshments provided. Funded by the Australian Government's Caring for Our Country. Phone Ben at MCMC 9380 8199.

Sunday 20 First Bird Survey for 2011

8.45-10.30am at nine sites along the creek. See page 6 for details.

Sunday 27 First Bird survey for 2011 at Bababi Marning & Kalkallo Common

8.45-10.30am. See page 6 for details.

MARCH

Saturday 5 MECCARG* event

Meet at the Merri path just south of Murray Rd bridge Coburg, 1-3pm. Wear sturdy footwear and gloves. Bring a bucket and digging tool if you can. Phone Dave and Nic 9354 9664.

Sunday 6 Streamteam Water Quality Testing

Upstream of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller St, Nth Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway 30 C10. Phone: 9354 9885.

Sunday 6 Moreland Council, Sydney Rd Street Party

Sydney Rd Brunswick, 12 noon-7pm. Melway 29 G8. Look for the Friends' stall near the Brunswick Town Hall. If you can help staff the stall, please ring Ray Radford 0422 989 166.

Sunday 13 Litter Clean-Up – East Coburg

Bell St East Coburg, 10am-12 noon. Melway 30 A1. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 20 Woody Weed Removal – Bababi Marning

Bababi Marning (Cooper St Grasslands), near Istrian Club, 10am-1pm. Melway 180 K10. Help with a "search and destroy" of woody weeds. Light refreshments provided. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 27 Wetland Weeding – Merri Park

Merri Park Wetlands, near cnr of Sumner Ave & Winifred St Northcote, 10am-1pm. Melway 30 C8. Funded by Darebin City Council. Light refreshments provided. Phone Ben at MCMC 9380 8199.

APRIL

Saturday 2 MECCARG* event

Meet at the Merri path just south of Murray Rd bridge Coburg, 1-3pm. Wear sturdy footwear and gloves. Bring a bucket and digging tool if you can. Phone Dave and Nic 9354 9664.

Sunday 3 Litter Clean-Up - Craigieburn

Aitken Creek near Axminster Dr Craigieburn, 10am-12 noon. Melway 386 J10. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 3 Streamteam Water Quality Testing

Upstream of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller St, Nth Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway 30 C10. Phone: 9354 9885.

Sunday 10 FoMC Hand Weeding - Strettle Wetland

Friends' site near Strettle wetland Thornbury, 10am-1 pm. Melway 30 B3. Help look after the site managed by the Friends with the support of the Darebin Bush Crew. Light refreshments afterwards. Phone Lisa 9484 1751.

MAY

Sunday 1 Litter Clean-Up - Coburg

Murray Rd Coburg, 10am-12 noon. Melway 18 A11. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 1 Streamteam Water Quality Testing

Upstream of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller St, Nth Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway 30 C10. Phone: 9354 9885.

Saturday 7 MECCARG* event

Meet at the Merri path just south of Murray Rd bridge Coburg, 1-3pm. Wear sturdy footwear and gloves. Bring a bucket and digging tool if you can. Phone Dave and Nic 9354 9664.

Sunday 15 Riparian Planting – Bababi Marning

Bababi Marning (Cooper St Grasslands), near Istrian Club, 10am-1pm. Melway 180 K10. Join an interesting streamside planting alongside this amazing native grassland. Light refreshments provided. Funded by Parks Victoria & a Melbourne Water Community Grant. Phone Ben at MCMC 9380 8199.

Sunday 22 2nd Bird Survey for 2011

8.45-10.30am at nine sites along the creek. See page 6 for details.

Sunday 29 2nd Bird survey for 2011 at Bababi Marning & Kalkallo Common

8.45-10.30am. See page 6 for details.



Friends of Merri Creek Inc.

ASSOC. NO. A00246451

PO Box 93, Moreland, Victoria 3058

Phone: (03) 9389 8633

Email: merricreek@bigpond.com

Web: www.vicnet.net.au/~fomc

Editor: Ray Radford

Assistant Editors: Paul Prentice, David Redfearn

Layout & Design: Dean Lombard

Members' contributions are most welcome; please send to admin@mcmc.org.au by Friday 18 March 2011

This newsletter was produced with software donated by Gifts in Kind International

* MECCARG = Merri & Edgars Creek Confluence Area Restoration Group.