

Friends of Merri Creek



NEWSLETTER

Nov 2004
–Feb 2005

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2004 Annual General Meeting

2.00pm Saturday 13 November, 2004

CERES Environment Room, Lee
Street East Brunswick

AGENDA

Presentation on the New Merri Creek Park
by Brian Bainbridge

Election of the 2005 Friends Committee

Election of six Friends Representatives to MCMC

We aim to conclude meeting by 3.30pm.

Afterwards, help celebrate the big year by socialising
with other members over drinks and nibbles.

All members are invited to attend the AGM

Have your say in running the Friends' group, elect our Committee and find out why the Friends want to extend the new Merri Creek Park. Afterwards, join us for drinks, nibbles and a chat.

Interested in being on the Committee?

If you are even vaguely interested in a role on the Friends Committee or as a representative to the MCMC, or in volunteering for one of the various Sub-Committees, please ring Ray Radford on 0422 989 166. Also contact Ray for a Nomination Form, which must be received before 12 November. However, nominations will be welcomed for any vacancies at the AGM. An election will only be held if the number of nominations exceed the vacancies.

Check Your Membership

Please note that only financial members can vote at the AGM or nominate for positions. If you wish to vote but are currently unfinancial, your membership fee and application form will need to be received before Wednesday 10 November. Unfortunately, memberships cannot be approved at the AGM. ❀

New Merri Creek Park Plan delayed again

Parks Victoria will now not be releasing the draft concept plan, for the new major park along Merri Creek north of the ring road, for public comment until at least November.

This is the fourth time that the release date has been amended. Originally it was supposed to be March, then it changed to June and, in the last Newsletter, we reported that the release date had blown out to October. Now it's November ...maybe.

Please check the Parks Victoria website at www.parkweb.vic.gov.au for the proposal and ensure that you urge Parks Victoria to extend their proposal to protect other significant areas as indicated on the Friends' website. See the 'Proposal for a Merri Creek State Park', prepared by FoMC and Victorian National Parks Association on the FoMC website: www.vicnet.net.au/~fomc. ❀

Help plan our 2005 plantings

Join us at a Friends' Planting Group Planning Meeting

6.00pm Wednesday 24 November,
MCMC Office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick

Participate in the planning of our Planting and
Hands-On Activities for 2005. With Barb Miles,
MCMC Parkland Management Team Coordinator.

Definitely not vegetating!

The Friends' Planting Group are not out of the woods yet, in fact they've really been letting the grass grow under their feet.

They saw folk risen from their slumber to congregate in number, propagate some flora once seen by an early explorer, and then both older and younger annihilate their hunger at that architectural wonder, the Hall Reserve Rotunda.

The most interesting part was Koorie elder Ian Hunter's demonstration of the didgeridoo and the boomerang: he thought the return-to-sender missile stemmed from a lucky discovery rather than deliberate design. He soon had us launching it with a



fair degree of success: a memorable moment.

Same spot, ten days later: tidying and weeding with the help of an exponent of physical and environmental health, a Ms Cathy Freeman. (A picture of her happened to turn up later in the Sunday Age.) Meanwhile the Aitken Creek in Craigieburn had also got the best of both worlds – herbage in, garbage out! It all helps to keep the scene clean, green and serene.

Our reciprocal visit to the Darebin Creek started with a tour of the magnificent Parklands in Alphington led by veteran ranger Peter Wiltshire: his detailed, authoritative talk about pollution control and methane collection, the history of the area going back to 19th century wagon traffic and olive groves, animal pests including exotic ducks and mosquito fish, human pests including

greenie extremists, noteworthy trees and the planned Aboriginal Healing Trail was fascinating and inspiring. What a colossal amount of expertise can be acquired, leadership provided and valuable work achieved by one dedicated individual.

We did get to do some planting with our eastern neighbours, following a lavish morning tea in the offices of the Darebin Creek Management Committee, and recognised in them the same earnestness and enthusiasm, even possessiveness, that we have.

Friends members, Leslie Fraser, Pascale Pitot (kneeling), Dick Harcourt, Nicole Lowe, Ray Radford, and Jack Svendsen with Olympic Gold Medallist Cathy Freeman at Merri Park for a publicity photo.



Up in the wild north, the Jukes Rd moors with their gale-force winds, unkindness of ravens (that's their collective noun, not necessarily their character), scrubby vegetation and grey rocks by the stream put us in mind of *Wuthering Heights*, however the casuarinas, wattles etc. we were introducing, plus the complete absence of chilblains and frostbite, meant that the resemblance only went so far.

Like the football, planting will be missing from our lives for the next few months and there'll be nothing to do – apart from a bit of planning, letter-writing and stall holding, weeding, spraying and mulching, seed collecting, species monitoring and ecological burning... Roll on Autumn 2005.

Paul Prentice (Active Planting Group member)

Friends of Merri Creek news

Threatened species funding

The Friends have received a Threatened Species Network Community grant of \$6,503 from the World Wide Fund for Nature for restoration and expansion of the habitats of the critically endangered Golden Sun Moth and the vulnerable Striped Legless Lizard. It also aims to restore the native grassland community. Come along to Craigieburn Grasslands on 12th and 19th December and help to map the distribution and habitat of these amazing moths that were only discovered at Craigieburn twelve months ago (see the events calendar).

Member praise

Kathy Couzens of Northcote wrote the following words of praise when renewing her membership: "Great result with the grants! Keep it up!!!!... You guys don't stop!!! I'd like to be a part of the action with people like you! ACHIEVERS!"

Some planting group happenings

The people who came along to our planting behind CERES in Brunswick on Sunday 17 September were treated with a couple of visits by a flock of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos. About 15 of these magnificent birds flew above and around the planters before perching in trees close by. And later they did the same thing again. What a wonderful reward for the planters, who included some members of CERES.

The liaison planting and tour with our neighbours, the Friends of Darebin Creek, on Sunday 19 September was a huge success. Ranger, Peter Wiltshire, took us on a most interesting tour of Darebin Parklands that included a leachate pool, lighting methane gas from the old tip underneath the parklands, an old Cobb & Co. stagecoach route, a lookout point (nicknamed "Mt Puffalo"), breeding native fish, and a Tawny Frogmouth sighting. Also see the article, "Definitely not vegetating" for more about this great tour. 🍀

Friends oppose wetland removal

The Friends of Merri Creek have opposed Moreland Council removal of a wetland/stormwater treatment pond from Pentridge Village and its replacement with an underground stormwater treatment tank.

Although the tank would provide a similar level of water treatment as a wetland, the tank would not provide habitat



for native wildlife, such as frogs and birds, as would a wetland.

Moreland Council officials have said that the planning permit never specified a wetland, but only an “extended sediment pond.” However, independent stormwater experts have now confirmed that an extended sediment pond includes wetland functions and could reasonably be described as a wetland. Council officials have also claimed that the tank system is cheaper to manage than the wetland system, but, despite our requests, no evidence has been supplied to support those claims.

There is also the issue that the developer has made no secret that he expects to build on that part of the land that would have been allocated to the wetland, thereby depriving the community of some open space.

This issue received some publicity in the Moreland leader and the Moreland Community News. The Friends considered a legal challenge to Moreland’s decision to unilaterally change the permit and a discussion was held with the Moreland CEO, Peter Brown.

Ray Radford (Secretary)

Friends at the forefront of planning

Along with our neighbouring Friends groups, the Friends of Darebin Creek and the Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek, we have had two productive meetings with officers from the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) about strengthening planning controls along waterways.

At one of these meetings, all of the Councils on the three creeks were invited to attend.

These meetings stemmed from a meeting that we had with the Minister for Planning, Mary Delahunty, in June. Along with the other Friends groups, we are concerned about the way that the revegetation works that are done along waterways makes these areas attractive to developers, whose buildings then make the waterway environments less enjoyable.

Without stronger planning controls, the waterways could lose their function as wildlife corridors and as a venue for passive recreation in urban bushland settings.

Specifically, the Friends groups are concerned that development along waterways could cause: loss of vegetation and habitat; overshadowing of paths and trails; loss of visual amenity; loss of the bush “feel” in an urban environment; and possible barriers to future paths and/or present trails. The Friends groups believe that the waterways should be covered by appropriate design and development guidelines that included setback provisions and whereby any development close to waterways requires a planning permit.

DSE and the Councils are currently considering the best way to protect our waterways. One of the suggested methods is for a new “waterways overlay” which, if it were adopted, would enable development to be controlled along

all waterways throughout Victoria. The work by the Friends groups on this issue, thereby places us right at the forefront of a major progressive planning development. Watch for further announcements about this.

Ray Radford (Secretary)



Housing units, on the Creek bank near Moore St Coburg, had their foundations undercut by floods in late December 2003. (The photo has been retouched to highlight the undercutting.) Just one of the problems that occur when development is too close to waterways.

Merri nature notes

Spring has well and truly arrived. Grassland wildflowers are appearing including - yellow Bulbine Lilies, Buttercups and Star Lilies; bright red Running Postman; cream/white Clematis, Sundews and Milkmaids; pink and mauve Flax-lilies, native Geraniums, Lomandras, Vanilla and Chocolate Lilies. Native grasses are looking splendid with a flush a new growth, flowers and new seedheads forming.

Butterflies are emerging, especially on the warmer days. Painted Ladies - large (5cm wingspan) orange-tan butterflies with black markings and white spots. Seen in urban areas as well as grasslands. An occasional tiny Grassland Blue and Pea Blue butterflies can be seen resting in the MCMC garden.



Painted Lady butterfly

Photo: Brian Bainbridge

Tiny Flower Spiders, coloured to suit the flower in which they sit, wait in open blooms to catch unsuspecting insects that visit. Jumping Spiders stalk their prey through the foliage and blooms.

Birds are busy courting, nesting and raising young. In the creek you can spy ducks with ducklings. Swans at Coburg Lake have 3 cygnets. Wattlebirds are busy hunting insects for their noisy, ravenous young. Red rump Parrots and Eastern Rosellas are inspecting nesting hollows in old trees. Male Blue Wrens have donned their glorious blue 'breeding jackets'. At Jukes Rd, Cooper St, Craigieburn Grassland and beyond, the Richards Pipits are seen performing their courtship dances and songs over open ground. Brown Quail have been seen at Cooper St and Jukes Rd grassland, Yellow-rumped Thornbills with young at Hernes Swamp.

Other interesting bird sightings - Azure Kingfisher (Ceres & Alphington Wetland), Blue-winged Parrot (Jukes Rd G'land), Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater (Fawkner), Golden Whistler (Jukes Rd), 3 Whiskered Terns (Hernes Swamp), ~50 Fairy Martins (Hernes Swamp), Rufous Songlark (Hernes Swamp), Black Faced Cuckoo-shrike (Galada Tamboore, Jukes Rd, CERES, Holmes St), Tawny Frogmouth (Coburg Lake), White-winged Triller (Central Ck). Groups of 10 or more of our old friends the Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos can still be observed along the creek. The first Sacred Kingfisher for the season (6/10/04) Nth Coburg.

Another sign of the approach of spring on Merri Creek is the arrival of the Cuckoos. These were first seen, or more commonly heard, in the last week of August.

Cuckoos

The first sighted was Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo at Jukes Rd Grassland, also Campbellfield, Cooper St Grassland and now down at Northcote Golf Course. These are striking little birds (17cm) with a metallic bronze-sheen back and cap, and bars on their cream chest and tail. Their call is a descending whistle - 'few-ew'. To feed they sit in a tree watching for caterpillars, beetles, flies and ants. These are picked off the ground, leaves or branches and swallowed whole.

The next species sighted was the Pallid Cuckoo, again at Jukes Rd. This is a larger bird (28-33cm) with grey plumage, darker on the wings and back, and broad black and white barring under its tail. It has a somewhat hawk-like appearance in flight. Commonly the bird is heard, but not seen. Its call is a loud ascending whistle 'too-too-too', often repeated incessantly. The Pallid Cuckoo feeds predominantly on large hairy caterpillars, which are very common in our grasslands. The irritant hairs on the caterpillars protect them from most predators but don't seem to bother the cuckoo. Prey is spotted from low perch and pounced on.

The arriving Fan-tailed Cuckoo was heard first at Rushwood Drive. It is a slender cuckoo, 24cm - 28cm in length. Its mournful, descending trill often draws attention to its presence. Adults have a dark slate-grey back and wings with pale rufous below. The undertail has bold black and white bars. The Fan-tailed Cuckoo feasts on hairy caterpillars, also takes a variety of other insects and their larvae. Food is located from an exposed perch and is seized in flight or from the ground. The bird returns to its perch to eat the prey.

Cuckoo Breeding

These cuckoos are called brood parasites. They do not build nests or incubate their own eggs instead, they lay their eggs in the nests of other small (host) birds, which incubate the egg and raise the cuckoo chick as their own. The female cuckoo removes one of the host's eggs and replaces it with one of her own, repeating the process in 10 or more other nests. She must do this without being seen or the host may abandon the nest. Host species try to drive cuckoos away when they find them near their nests. Some also build nests consisting of a hollow ball with a side entrance in which they lay their eggs, but build a cup nest on top hoping to trick the cuckoo. The cuckoo egg usually closely resembles the host egg. It usually hatches more quickly and the young cuckoo instinctively forces the other eggs (or chicks) out of the nest.

The cuckoo species found on Merri Creek use the nests of many small birds including honeyeaters, woodswallows, whistlers, flycatchers, fairy-wrens, scrubwrens and thornbills. Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo, being small, mostly uses Fairy-wren nests. Pallid Cuckoos favour Willie Wagtail and Hooded Robin nests. Fan-tailed Cuckoo particularly use Brown Thornbill nests.

Wendy Moore (Friends of Craigieburn Grasslands)

The First Fifteen Years

It's remarkable how things sometimes have to go bad before they can come good... It's thirty years now since the floods of 1974 invaded the "Sumner Estate" of Northcote—land which, being a flood plain, should never have been built on in the first place. The aggrieved residents called for the Merri Creek to be concrete-lined: to them it was merely a drain which wasn't doing its job properly.

Alarmed environmentalists were galvanised into action to prevent this sacrilege, forming the Merri Creek Coordinating Committee (MCCC) to work with the local Councils of that era – Broadmeadows and Brunswick, Coburg and Collingwood, Fitzroy, Northcote and Preston.

Who were these pioneers? They included Bruce and Ann McGregor, unmatched in their length and quantity of service; George Smith who simply radiated goodness, who'd rafted the Franklin and kayaked the (flooded) Merri, and who was cut down in his prime by cancer; Allan Thomson and his sons Kelvin (now Shadow Environment Minister in Canberra) and Lex, of the Pascoe Vale Naturalists; Andre Rigoni, whose extensive creekside plantings near his home in North Fitzroy were nicknamed the Rigoni State Forest; and Louise Elliott, whose aggressive advocacy, against authorities' apathy, got us the footway on the Holden St rail bridge.

There was actually a much bigger threat than a mindless bit of hydraulic engineering: the plan to virtually wipe out these last 20 km. of creek valley with an extension of the Hume Highway to Hoddle St. I seem to recall seeing an artist's impression of a huge flyover towering above the High St rail bridge: it's scary to think of the blind car-worship and the callous indifference towards people, especially the elderly Rushall Park folk, that would foist such a monstrosity on the community.



The Merri Creek Coordinating Committee footbridge crosses Merri Creek from Merri Park in Northcote to just north of Sumner Park in Brunswick.

Typically stealthy and sneaky was the modest proposal to run a little two-lane track through Fawkner, which wouldn't worry anyone: once this toehold was established, of course, it would be open slather!

Well, the MCCC managed to get the freeway reservation removed south of Mahoney's Rd, but it could be restored at any time by the stroke of a pen. We weren't able to stop the Craigieburn bypass, though at least the Ring Road diverts its traffic. It will remain as a dagger pointed at the lower Merri for the foreseeable future; we have to remain vigilant, and keep the public aware of the importance of this and other environmental treasures to their urban existence, with the help of Councils, the media and the Path, among other things.

The shared footway was officially declared open in 1985, in the Capp Reserve Preston, by the then Prime Minister, local Member for Wills Bob Hawke. I organised a bike ride for the occasion, aided by the Melbourne Bicycle Touring Club; but there were some tricky sections, notably in Clifton Hill where cyclists had to clamber up to the Knott and scramble down from the Coulson Reserve – no footbridges! It was only much later with the Murray Rd underpass and the Fawkner-Reservoir bridges that the Path could be called complete.

Over the same period we were developing our revegetation skills. An early tree-planting above the Rushall cliffs was doomed to failure, with no mulching or weedmat; but just look at the place now. And step by step the exotics are being eradicated, and the indigenous vegetation replacing them is attracting our feathered friends.

1985 was the sesquicentennial (150th) year for Victoria and 1988 Australia's bicentennial of white settlement... wiser now, we recognise our status as guests of the Koorie nation and our duty to behave accordingly. The Merri Creek got its share of the celebratory grants being handed out, however some far-sighted people like David Redfearn and Ray O'Halloran realised that these gravy trains didn't come along every decade, and the creek needed something more permanent and official. So it was that the Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) was founded in 1989, with community representation from the equally brand-new Friends of Merri Creek, and civic and technical input from the seven Councils and the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, as they were then.

Sigrid Kraemers the inaugural Manager was followed by Rod McLellan, Tony Faithfull and now Luisa Macmillan; and it seems fitting that the present MCMC offices are quite close to the Sumner Estate (now protected by a levee bank) where it all began, and the arched footbridge commemorating the work of the Merri Creek Coordinating Committee.

Paul Prentice (Committee member)

I Love Rock'n'Roll, but...

Like Suzie Quatro, "I love Rock'n'Roll...", BUT, not on our creek or in our native grasslands.

Put down the phone or your pen, we are not about to have a Merri Creek Rock Concert. This is something far worse. The illegal, insidious and environmentally destructive practice of rock rolling to steal protected frogs and reptiles AND not replacing the rocks. So the damage is twofold. Not only are the animals stolen, but their homes, and those of countless other creatures that use rocks for shelter, are destroyed. (It's rather like living in a war zone. Someone blows the roof off your house, badly damages the interior and kills or kidnaps your family. And does the same to all your neighbours too!)

Unfortunately this abhorrent practice is becoming more common. Perhaps due to the increasing interest in unusual pets. Recently, when visiting Craigieburn Grassland Flora and Fauna Reserve I discovered three people engaged in this despicable activity. Despite my frantic attempts to contact a Park Ranger, Wildlife Officer or the Police, I was unable to get anyone out to the park to apprehend these offenders. This was partly due to it being late Sunday afternoon. I have subsequently spoken with the head ranger who has seen evidence of this practice too. They will be stepping up surveillance of the parks.

The Merri Creek and its parks and reserves are home to a stunning array of reptiles and frogs. At least eleven frogs (one third of the species found in Victoria) and 21 reptiles have been recorded. Some of these are extremely rare and endangered e.g. the Grasslands Earless Dragon and the Striped Legless Lizard. They are listed under Threatened Species legislation for special conservation attention.

Reptiles and frogs are important components of our native ecosystems. They are important food items for many creatures including our much loved Sacred Kingfisher. They also eat many insects, some of which can be pests for humans (e.g. mosquitoes) and agriculture.

Friends members spend many an enjoyable evening listening to and monitoring the frogs calling from Merri Creek. There is the unmistakable 'Bonk' of the Pobblebonk, the amazing growling call of the Growling Grass Frog or the far more common cricket like chirps of the Common Froglet. Finding frogs in the lower reaches of the creek, once again, is affirmation of the excellent work the community is doing restoring the health of Merri Creek.

Southern Water Skinks can be seen basking on rocks beside the creek or stalking their insect prey amongst the rocks and vegetation. These elegant skinks, up to 28cm long, have black and white markings on their sleek brown bodies. Long-necked Tortoises may be seen swimming in the creek, especially from vantage points such as the pedestrian

bridges. You may catch a glimpse of a timid Garden Skink dashing for cover. If you are very lucky you may see a Weasel Skink hunting amongst the vegetation.

Apart from their ecological and aesthetic values our reptiles may well hold important human health secrets. The Age recently reported that research has shown "that one compound in Australian snake venom, toxic in large quantities, may be effective in tackling cancer tumours." There is an existing example of "blood pressure drugs, derived from the venom of the Brazilian pit viper, have been on the market for over a decade, treating millions of people for high blood pressure worldwide." (The Age 30/6/04 A3 p. 6)

All native plants and animals are legally protected. This protection is even greater in our parks. However our native creatures are suffering severe declines due to habitat loss and destruction, as well as illegal collection in some cases. While rock rolling is interesting it can be a VERY damaging process. If you do still wish to do it, the rock should ALWAYS be CAREFULLY replaced after you have looked below it. If you find any creatures beneath the rock, ensure they are clear of the rock when you replace it, then allow them to move back under the rock. Otherwise they might get squashed. Native plants and animals should not be collected from the wild. Similarly the removal of rocks from our native grasslands for garden landscaping is severely degrading natural habitats.

If you see people engaged in, or evidence of, illegal animal, plant or rock collection, report it to Department of Sustainability & Environment or Parks Victoria. As the saying goes - When enjoying nature, leave only footprints; take only photos or memories.

Wendy Moore (*Friends of Craigieburn Grasslands*)

Some rocks that shouldn't be rolled at Curly Sedge Creek, Craigieburn Grasslands.



Secretary's Report: Friends Activities 2004

2004 Friends Committee

President: David Redfearn

Vice President: Ann McGregor

Secretary: Ray Radford

Membership Secretary: Julie Mason;

Treasurer: Colin Abbott

General Committee Member and Office

Coordinator: Jack Svendsen

General Committee Member and New

Members Welcomer: Louise Hayward.

Also on the Committee were these

Representatives of Sub Committees:

Planting Group: Gail Brammar, Litter

Group: Paul Prentice, Streamteam: Chris

Sullivan or Irene Baker, Newsletter Layout:

Dean Lombard. The Committee met

monthly from February.

Friends Representation on MCMC

The Friends representatives continue to be the most consistent members at the five meetings of the Merri Creek Management Committee, with most of them also attending one or two of the quarterly Sub-Committee meetings.

The Friends were represented on the MCMC by: Trevor Hausler as MCMC President, Ann McGregor as Secretary, Allie Dawe as Treasurer, plus Alan Brennan, Paul Prentice and Peter Mollison. The Substitute representatives, Harold Mackrell, David Redfearn, Julie Mason and Clair Dougherty each attended various meetings.

Planting and Hands-on Activities

Phew, this year was so packed with activities, that we often had a number of events on the same day. Once, on August 1st, we had four events, including two plantings! This schedule really did stretch our members - but they were up to it!

34 people planted 607 plants and spread some mulch at Merri Park, off Winifred St Northcote, for our PowerNet grant on 2/5. Another 34 people planted 550 plants at Robinson Reserve Preston on 16/5. 8 members did some woody weeding at Craigieburn Grasslands with the Friends of the Organ Pipes on 22/5. 72 people, including lots of staff from Citipower, planted 1650 plants at Merri Park wetlands Northcote on 30/5.

12 people planted 100 plants and tree-guarded 50 at Craigieburn Grasslands for our Parks Victoria grant on 20/6. 15 people planted 400 plants at Central Creek Grasslands Reservoir as part of our CMA grant on 4/7. 9 people planted 300 plants at Moomba Park Fawkner on 18/7. 23 people planted 950 plants at Merri Park wetland Northcote on 25/7.

8 people planted 200 plants and did some weeding at the Friends' site near Strettle Wetland Thornbury on 1/8. 6 people planted 615 plants, at Central Creek Grasslands Reservoir on 8/8. 27 people, including staff from CERES, planted 1154 plants and tree-guarded 80 behind CERES in Brunswick for our Melbourne Water grant on 15/8. 27 people planted 422 plants and enjoyed some boomerang throwing with Ian Hunter at Jukes Rd Grasslands Fawkner on 22/8. 10 people removed some woody weeds at Cooper St Grasslands Campbellfield on 29/8.

40 people planted 2000 plants at Hall Reserve Clifton Hill on 12/9. 17 people planted and tree-guarded 187 plants at Jukes Rd Grasslands Fawkner as part of our CMA grant on 26/9.

In addition, there were a couple of weeding mornings at our Friends plot near Strettle Wetlands, and lots of members attended other activities held by MCMC or one of the local Councils. There were also three photo shoots with Olympic Gold medallist Cathy Freeman, where those attending planted numerous plants and also cleaned-up litter and did some weeding.

That's an amazing total of over 9140 plants in the ground for year, absolutely thrashing last year's big record of 5690. Plus we still managed to do lots of staking, mulching and weeding as well!

For the first time we exchanged invitations to plantings with the Friends of Darebin Creek and members of both groups attended each other's plantings.

Once again we had the support of the Merri Creek Management Committee Parkland Management Team who helped us with most of the plantings and supplied barbeques later. Thanks also to the Darebin Bush Crew for resourcing the Friends' plot at Strettle Wetlands and to the Rangers at Craigieburn grasslands.

Coordinator: Gail Brammar.

Streamteam

The coordinator changed during the year but regular water quality testing continued, upstream of St Georges Road Bridge North Fitzroy.

Coordinator: Chris Sullivan, then Irene Baker.

Newsletter

Four Newsletters were distributed in February, May, August and October, with a wonderful layout by Dean. Thanks to Moreland City Council for photocopying and posting all the newsletters.

Layout: Dean Lombard.

Litter Clean-ups

Tons of litter was once again cleaned up in every month, except January: 1 person at Walker St East, Northcote on 1/2; 7 people at Alister St Nth Fitzroy on 14/3; 1 person at Murray Rd Coburg on 4/4; 4 people at Normanby Ave Thornbury on 2/5; 2 people at Imaroo St Fawkner on 6/6; 4 people at Arthurton Rd Northcote on 4/7; 9 people at St Georges Rd Nth Fitzroy on 1/8; 7 people at Harding St Coburg on 5/9; 2 people at Murray Rd Coburg on 3/10. Unknown numbers at Keady St Nth Coburg on 7/11 (2 in '03) and at Rushall Station Nth Fitzroy on 5/12 (5 in '03)

Coordinator: Paul Prentice.

Walks, Talks and Tours

A workshop was held about the new Merri Creek Regional Park on 28/7, attended by 17 people. Paul Prentice also organised two of his special "Triple Treats" featuring cycling, walking and canoeing on 21/3 & 17/10. Coming up is a tour of Cooper St Grasslands with Brian Bainbridge on 14/11 and two surveys of endangered Golden Sun Moths in December.

Other Activities and news

Thanks to Jack Svendsen and Warren Cooper for regularly staffing the office; to Simon D'Alfonso for keeping our website looking great; and to the members who updated our activities signs along the Creek.

Information stalls were held at the Yarra Community Festival on 15/2, the Sydney Road Street Party on 29/2, and coming up at the Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival on 20/11.

Again, over 400 people attended about 45 Friends' events and we also had input to a number of policies, plans and strategies. Most important were Parks Victoria's proposed new park north of the ring road and meetings with DSE (along with other Friends groups) to consider strengthening planning controls along waterways. Others include the Galada Tamboore Working Group, Melbourne Water's Merri Creek Improvement project, the Aurora Treatment Plant, Stages 1 & 2 of the Northern Sewerage Strategy; the Moreland Streetscape Strategy, the Hume Smart Growth Corridor. We also objected to Moreland's decision to replace a wetland at Pentridge Village with an underground tank.

Ray Radford (Secretary 2004)

Friends of Merri Creek events calendar

NOVEMBER

Sunday 7—Litter Clean-Up

Keady St North Coburg, 10am-12 noon. Melway map 17 J7. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 7—Streamteam water quality testing

Upstream side of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller Street North Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway map 30 C10. Phone 9354 9885.

Wednesday 10—Four Schools Habitat Survey & Water Testing

Lake Reserve Coburg, 12-3pm. Enter from Lake Grove and the schools will be monitoring the water between the two footbridges. Friends members are invited to meet and talk with students about their work. For further information, contact Jessica at MCMC on 9380 8199.

Saturday 13—Friends' Annual General Meeting

CERES Environment Room, Lee St East Brunswick, 2.00pm. Features a presentation by native flora expert, Brian Bainbridge, on the areas that need to be protected along with the Parks Victoria regional park process.

Sunday 14—Grasslands and Wildflowers Walk and Talk

Cooper St Grasslands, Campbellfield. Either meet outside the MCMC office at Lee St East Brunswick at 10am or outside the Istra Social Club, Cooper St Campbellfield at 10.30am. Melway map 180 K11. Ring Ray on 0422 989 166 beforehand, or Brian on 0419 545 098 on Sunday 14/11 only.

Saturday 20—CERES Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival

CERES Environment Park, Lee St East Brunswick, 3pm-9pm. This year's festival, "Precious Water, Potent Flame," will use Merri Creek as a stage. Don't miss this fabulous community festival. If you would like to help staff our stall at the festival, please ring Ray on 0422 989 166.

Sunday 21—Darebin Festival, Edwardes Lake Reservoir

Wednesday 24—Friends' Planting Group Planning Meeting

MCMC Office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick, 6.00pm. Participate in the planning of our Planting and Hands-On Activities for 2005. With Barb Miles, MCMC Parkland Management Team Coordinator.

Sunday 28—Weed Marking and Seed Collection

Craigieburn Grasslands, enter from O'Hern's Rd Somerton, 10am-12 noon. Melway map 180 F6. Or car pool outside the MCMC office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick at 9.30am. This is a most important task in our guardianship of the grasslands. Remember, native grasslands won't survive without human intervention.

DECEMBER

Sunday 5—Litter Clean-Up

Rushall Station, North Fitzroy, 10am-12 noon. Melway map 30 D11. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 5—Streamteam water quality testing

Upstream side of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller Street North Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway map 30 C10. Phone 9354 9885.

Sunday 12—Endangered Golden Sun Moth Survey 1

Craigieburn Grasslands, enter from O'Hern's Rd Somerton, 10.30am-12.30pm. Melway map 180 F6. Or car pool outside the MCMC office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick at 10am. This is your chance to help map the distribution and habitat of these rare and amazing moths. (Funded by our Threatened Species grant.) Please register your intention to come with Ray Radford or Barb Miles at MCMC on 9380 8199, by Thursday 9/12.



Sunday 19—Endangered Golden Sun Moth Survey 2

The same details as for Sunday 12 above, except that registration is requested by Thursday 16/12.

Saturday 25—Have a Merri Christmas!

FEBRUARY 2005

Sunday 6—Litter Clean-Up

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

Sunday 13—Rail and River Ride

Departs from lower Coburg Lake bridge (Melway map 17 J10) at 2pm, cycle to Queens Pde Fawkner, then to Queens Pde Clifton Hill via Upfield bike route and Capital City Trail; return by Merri path. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

MARCH 2005

Sunday 13—Litter Clean-Up

Normanby Ave Thornbury, 10am-12 noon. Melway map 30 B5. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

PO Box 93, Moreland 3058
Phone 9389 8633

Friends of Merri Creek Inc.
Association No. A0024645L

Email admin@mcmc.org.au
Web www.vicnet.net.au/~fomc

Local research on the Growling Grass Frog volunteer frog watchers wanted

Geoff Heard of La Trobe University, Bundoora, has initiated a population study of the Growling Grass Frog in the Merri Creek Corridor. The project will span three years and follows on from previous research upon the distribution and habitat requirements of the species in this region.

Geoff's field-work will consist of monitoring some 17 wetlands along the Merri Creek over the next three summer seasons. Monitoring will involve fortnightly spotlight surveys between October and March in each year to catch and mark individual frogs for later recapture.

Volunteers are required for assistance during these surveys. This is an excellent opportunity to see the species in its natural habitat and understand the threats to its continued existence in urban Melbourne. All sites are located along the Hume Highway, and within one hour's drive of most Melbourne suburbs.

If you are interested, please contact Geoff Heard by email on G.Heard@latrobe.edu.au or by mobile on 0409 695 915. Only one or two volunteers are required on each night, but there will be numerous surveys.

The Growling Grass Frog (*Litoria raniformis*) was formerly one of the most common and widespread frog species in Victoria. As many of you will be aware, the species is now considered endangered within Victoria, having undergone often-severe population declines and extinctions over the last 20-25 years.

More information is available at www.frogs.org.au 