

# Friends of Merri Creek



## NEWSLETTER

November 2008

– January 2009

### BIG BUMPER 20<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY ISSUE

## 2008 Annual General Meeting

7.30pm Wednesday 26th November  
CERES Environment Room, Lee Street East Brunswick

### Agenda

- ☞ **Results of the great Merri Birdwatch**  
*Ann McGregor will tell us what we found on the bird surveys along Merri Creek.*
- ☞ **President's Report**—David Redfearn
- ☞ **Election of the 2009 Committee**  
*(Nominations needed—see below)*
- ☞ **Election of six Friends' Representatives to MCMC**
- ☞ **End of year celebrations**  
*Drinks and nibbles provided*

### All members are invited to attend

Please come along, find out about what birds we found on our great Merri Birdwatch, elect our new Committee and help celebrate another successful year with drinks, nibbles and a chat.

### The Committee needs new members

All committee positions become vacant at the AGM and it would be great to have some new blood. A role on the Committee would suit someone who would like to do more in the group but perhaps isn't able to attend activities.

If you are even vaguely interested in a role on the Friends' Committee or in being a representative to the MCMC, or in volunteering for one of the various Sub-Committees, please contact Ray Radford by email: [admin@mcmc.org.au](mailto:admin@mcmc.org.au) or by phone: 0422 989 166. Also contact Ray for a Nomination Form, or downloaded it from our website under *Membership*. The forms must be received before 20th November, although nominations for any vacancy will also be welcome at the AGM. An election will only be held if there are more nominations than vacancies. It is absolutely okay to nominate yourself and leave it open to be seconded by someone else.

### 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 not financial, your membership fee and application form will need to be received before Tuesday 18 November. Unfortunately, memberships cannot be approved at the AGM.*

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## SECRETARY'S REPORT

# Friends Activities 2008

### 2008 Friends Committee

The Committee in our 20th year was: President: David Redfearn, Vice President: Ann McGregor; Secretary: Ray Radford; Treasurer: Colin Abbott; Membership Secretary: Monica Williamson; Committee members: Carrie Deutsch and Wendy Moore. Also on the Committee were these representatives of Sub-Committees: Regeneration Group: Ruth Shiel, Litter Group: Paul Prentice, Streamteam: Irene Baker, Newsletter: Dean Lombard. The Committee met monthly from Feb to June, then bi-monthly until September. Although Jack Svendsen resigned from the Committee this year, he thankfully continued as Office Coordinator.

### Representation on MCMC

Trevor Hausler continued as MCMC President, Ann McGregor as Secretary, Allie Dawe as Treasurer, Paul Prentice, and Ruth Shiel as Committee members. They were joined by Louise Grgat in place of Harold Mackrell, who became a Substitute.

The Friends representatives are still the most consistent members at MCMC meetings, with most also attending some of the quarterly Sub-Committee meetings.

Most of the Substitute Representatives, Harold Mackrell, Pascale Pitot and David Redfearn made various contributions.

### Regeneration Group

Our most active and popular group continues to take on a range of management-type activities, with a total of 47 people involved in these activities: Collecting an impressive 15 bales of Kangaroo Grass seed at Cooper St Grassland on 18/12/2007; three sessions of weeding at Merri Park Wetlands Northcote on 2/2, 10/2 & 25/5; and a Gorse removal at Cooper St Grasslands Epping on 14/9.

Of course, planting was still the most popular activity, with a total of 327 people attending: at Merri Park Wetlands Northcote on 2/3 & 24/8; at Rushall Station North Fitzroy on 16/3, to celebrate 20 years since the underground powerline campaign (with staff from Readings Bookstore); at Rotunda Wetland Clifton Hill on 5/4, 20/4 and for our Bridging Communities Festival on 13/7; at Robinson Reserve Preston on 6/4 & 7/9; at Central Creek Grasslands Reservoir on 3/5 & 19/7; at Aitken Creek Craigieburn on 11/5; at the levee bank at Merri Park Northcote on 1/6; at Hare St Fawkner on 14/6; at Rushwood Drive Craigieburn on 22/6; at Strettle Wetland Thornbury on 29/6 & 12/10 (which Darebin Bush Crew changed from a weeding). Altogether 7963 plants went into the ground, plus

there was also lots of tree-guarding and occasional mulch-spreading.

Once again the MCMC Parkland Management Team supported us at most of the plantings and usually also supplied barbecues later. Thanks also to the Darebin Bush Crew for resourcing our plot at Strettle Wetlands (which is extending) and to Parks Victoria's Grassland Rangers.

*Coordinator: Ruth Shiel.*

### Litter Clean-ups

A total of 34 people cleaned up heaps of litter monthly, except January: at Harding St Coburg on 4/11/07; at Broadhurst Ave Reservoir on 2/12/07; at Moreland Rd East Brunswick on 3/2; at Merri Park Northcote on 2/3; at St Georges Rd Nth Fitzroy on 6/4; near Rushall Railway Station North Fitzroy on 4/5; at Sumner Ave Northcote on 1/6; at Harding St East Coburg on 6/7; at Bell St East Coburg on 3/8; at WH Robinson Reserve Preston on 7/9; and at Walker St East, Northcote on 5/10.

*Coordinator: Paul Prentice.*

### Streamteam

This dedicated group again conducted water quality tests on the first Sunday of every month, upstream of St Georges Rd Bridge Nth Fitzroy, with a total of 63 people attending from Nov. '07 to Oct. '08.

The seasonal variation in macro-invertebrate species is continuing with the creek having more abundant and diverse life in summer, then falling to a low in winter. Since monitoring at the site began, the test results for turbidity have improved and are now consistently low (below 10 NTU). Prior to mid 2006, elevated readings (above 10 NTU) were common, so the results indicate that the water has become generally clearer!

Streamteamers enjoy the interest and frequent participation of passing cyclists and pedestrians – especially the kids who are invariably captivated by the creatures in the creek.

*Coordinator: Irene Baker.*

### Walks Talks and Tours

Eleven people enjoyed the Wildflower Walk at Craigieburn Grasslands with Ben and Dave from MCMC on 28/10/2007. But only six people attended a similar walk at Cooper St Grasslands on 11/11/2007.

However, 40 people packed our hastily arranged Introduction to Bird Identification at CERES on 13/10, even though we only notified those who had already registered for the bird survey on 19/10.

*See the calendar for upcoming events.*

### Campaigns

The Upper Merri Campaign Group, which included others besides FoMC, has not met since March, but we are still tackling a number of issues in this area.

Although we have abandoned our campaign for a shared path on the proposed rail bridge from Westgarth to Clifton Hill, we are trying to get the best result possible for the new paths that need to be created as a result of the bridge construction. Thanks to Paul Prentice for his work on this.

We have had some success with lobbying Darebin and Moreland Councils to create wetlands that treat stormwater. Moreland has allocated \$15,000 for a feasibility study into wetland creation and Darebin has agreed to allocate \$15,000 in the 2009 budget toward a redesign of Strettle Wetland Thornbury.

### Newsletter

Four high quality Newsletters were printed and posted by FoMC in February, May, August and November, with wonderful layouts by Dean Lombard. We are now also sending a substantial number of newsletters by email.

*Layout: Dean Lombard.*

### Other Activities and News

We were very successful in obtaining grants from: Parks Victoria, Landcare Australia/SPI Powernet, Aust. Govt Envirofund, Aust. Govt Water Fund Community Water Grant, and two from Melbourne Water Community Grants.

An information stall was held at the Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival at CERES on 24/11/2007 and at the Sydney Road Street Party on 24/2.

As usual, we had input to a number of policies, plans and strategies including: the State Government's White Paper on Land and Biodiversity, the Northern Sewerage Strategy, and Melbourne Water's Fawkner to North Coburg Improvement project.

All together, over 530 people attended at least 50 Friends' organised events and this doesn't include those who helped out at the many MCMC events or those held by MECCARG or Friends of Edgars Creek.

Thanks to Jack Svendsen, Monica Williamson and Warren Cooper for regularly staffing the office; to Simon D'Alfonso for continuing to look after our website, to Angie Retallack for staying on as New Member Welcomer; and to Ruth Shiel who again updated our only sign near Roseneath St Clifton Hill while also coordinating the busy Regeneration Group.

RAY RADFORD (SECRETARY 2008)

# Grant Successes

## Golden Sun Moth Surveys and Wildlife walks

After a twelve month break, FoMC will again be conducting the popular surveys of Golden Sun Moths, both at Craigieburn Grasslands and also this time at Cooper St Grasslands.

Parks Victoria has granted \$7050.00 to FoMC for the surveys and for "Wild Discoveries" Grassland Interpretation Walks - one at *Bababi marning* (Cooper St Grasslands) along with a bird survey on 9/11, and the other at *Galgi ngarrk* (Craigieburn Grasslands) on 23/11; plus a Themeda Harvest at Cooper St followed by a barbecue, in the second week of January 2009.

The Golden Sun Moth Surveys won't be scheduled, as we'll hold them when the weather is more suitable in order to increase their effectiveness. The timing is likely to be a Saturday or Sunday from 22/11 to 14/12. Likewise, the Themeda Harvest will probably be held in the second week of January, at the best time to harvest the seeds. If you're interested in participating in either of the surveys or the harvest, please register with Megan at MCMC on 9380 8199 or email: [megan@mcmc.org.au](mailto:megan@mcmc.org.au) so that she can let you know about the timing.



## Grassland restoration — change in Gorse removal

Parks Victoria has also granted \$4400.00 for restoration works at Craigieburn and Cooper St grasslands. This will allow us to follow-up Parks Victoria's large scale mechanical Gorse removal with a more detailed treatment through sensitive remnant vegetation plus a later round of professional spraying by MCMC. The funding will also enable an assessment of previous Golden Sun Moth plantings at Craigieburn and control of priority weeds.

Because of the mechanical "muncher," it may well be that the Gorse removal that we did on Sunday 14 September was the last one that we'll do in that manner. Already we have



cancelled the Woody Weed Removal that was scheduled for 26 October at Cooper St grasslands.

Brian Bainbridge, from MCMC, Paul Prentice and Ray Radford visited Cooper St Grasslands on 1/10 to see what was being done and, while we had some concerns about broken rocks, soil disturbance and compaction, the contractors seem to be reasonably aware of the environment and are trying their best to limit the damage. Of course, it's Parks Victoria's decision, not ours, but it does seem that the machine will do more good than bad.

## More replacement vegetation

Landcare Australia/SP AusNet has granted \$2,200 for Merri Creek Transmission Line Easement Vegetation Management. This continues the revegetation works within the 220kv transmission line easement between Brunswick and Reservoir, and will supplement similar funding to MCMC.

## MORELAND FUNDS WETLAND STUDY

Moreland City Council has allocated \$15,000 in the current budget for a feasibility study into establishing wetlands at a number of sites suggested by FoMC: on Edgars Creek at Newlands Rd Coburg, at Jukes Rd or Moomba Park in Fawkner, and the area around the Harding St main drain in Coburg.

This is good news as we have been lobbying Moreland Council about establishing wetlands since 2004, when the Council unilaterally replaced a proposed wetland at Pentridge Village with an underground tank.

There is also a further \$100,000 allocated to litter trap installation and storm water management, including works at Jones Park East Brunswick and installation of a large litter trap at Coburg Lake Reserve, just off Murray Road. This will also complement works that Melbourne Water will be undertaking further upstream in the Lake at the Merlynston Creek drain entry point.

# Letter from Israel

Margaret Gottstein, a founding member who now lives in Israel, sent this letter after receiving the August newsletter:

After reading the (*August*) newsletter I am filled with admiration for the strength of environmental support and interest that it shows. Long may it continue and increase.

Living in Israel, such things are something to dream about.

I am involved here with a Bird Observatory. Israel is on the North - South route of millions of migrating birds twice a year, up and down the Great African Rift. They fly North in the summer, as the deserts of Africa become too hot, and fly South in the winter when Siberia and Europe become too cold. The Jerusalem Bird Observatory (JBO) has had a bird banding programme in place for the past 12 years. Each year the number of birds banded increases, as the birds learn that there is food, water and shelter in the surrounding grounds. Sometimes they catch the same bird each year on the same

day! The JBO has built a large pond, with reeds and rushes and a small waterfall, in front of a large bird hide – it's an absolute pleasure. All you need is a pair of binoculars and the time.

Your Merri *Birdwatch* day triggered this letter. If I was in Melbourne, I would surely join you.

Anyone interested in seeing the masses of birds in Israel, contact me, and I can help you find your way to the best sites. Bird watchers would be more than satisfied here in the migrating seasons. Spring is the best – March to May. Thousands of storks and cranes concentrate together in one area, plus birds of prey and millions of little birds. And on and on.

*My best wishes to all of you.*

MARGARET GOTTSTEIN

To contact Margaret, email: [margott@netvision.net.il](mailto:margott@netvision.net.il)

## Merri Creek photos

Member Elke Kerr is an amateur photographer who has put images from the Merri and Edgars creeks on a website: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/smelkstarsuniverse/sets/72157606289102216/> and she has allowed us to provide a link on our website.

Elke writes on her website: "Merri Creek is a place where I spend a lot of time. I love it. A creek that cuts through the suburbs, providing a beautiful escape from the city, right in the middle of it. It has been used and abused, a lot of Melbourne's bluestone has come from the Merri Creek, and often it is full of rubbish. But the locals are doing their best to bring it back to life. It's beautiful. I walk my dog down there and just escape to the sound of water and birds. It's the secret heart of the city. At the moment it's winter and the wattles are blooming everywhere. Little tiny ones, big fat fluffy ones, longer ones all



glowing in the sunshine. Today I saw a hawk down there, and the other day, a pair of Tawny Frogmouths."

Photos by Elke Kerr of wattle and the golden tops of the Russian Orthodox Church on the banks of Merri Creek at Albion St East Brunswick, copied off her website (with permission).



### HELP PLAN OUR PLANTING ACTIVITIES FOR 2009

*Planning Meeting for Regeneration  
Group Activities 2009*

*Thursday 4 December, 6.00pm*

*MCMC office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick.*

*All FoMC members are welcome to help plan our  
planting and weeding activities for 2009.*

# Life Member wins Landcare Award

FoMC congratulates Life Member, Brian Bainbridge, on winning the 2008 Port Phillip & Western Port Landcare 'Caring for Community Groups' Award.

The Award citation stated that Brian:

- ☞ has developed a wide range of publications, management plans, environmental educational (e.g. brochures, booklets) and interpretive materials (such as signs) and has conducted many "walks and talks" and workshops. These publications and engagement activities have increased the capacity, environmental awareness and appreciation of many Friends of and community groups and individuals;
- ☞ possesses a superb knowledge of local flora, fauna, restoration ecology, impressive artistic skills and a commitment to share his understanding and knowledge of the local environment with the community;
- ☞ has rediscovered Golden Sun Moth at Craigieburn Grasslands, encouraging the Friends of Merri Creek to conduct further surveys that led to finding it at other grassland sites;
- ☞ has played a key role in providing expert knowledge to many Friends' and community groups which has helped empower these groups' members to apply the skills

learnt to deliver on-ground outcomes;

- ☞ in 2004, ran successful weed workshops on aquatic weeds and conducted other customised weed workshops with two other Friends' groups in 2006-2008;
- ☞ undertakes innovative engagement opportunities on the natural environment with local groups from diverse cultural backgrounds.



Brian is the second FoMC member to win this award, following on from Ray Radford at the previous Landcare awards in 2006.

## Update on the new Merri Creek Parklands

Claire Evans, Team Leader New Urban Park Planning at Parks Victoria (PV), supplied the following update of the proposed new park north of the Western Ring Road or *Marran baba*.

The planning for the Merri Creek Parklands is still progressing. PV has set up a Steering Committee which comprises representatives from PV, the Cities of Hume and Whittlesea and Melbourne Water. The Steering Committee has been established to provide strategic input into the Merri Creek Parklands Project and bring together the key management agencies to develop a shared vision for the future protection, use and management of the parklands and waterway.

PV is currently putting together a Strategic Directions Statement which draws largely from the Draft Management Plan and is a high level strategic document which will be endorsed by the Steering Committee members. The information will be used to feed into the master planning process for the Merri Creek Parklands and eventually the finalisation of the Management Plan.

The next stage of the planning process will be master planning, initially around Galada Tamboore and ultimately the parklands as a whole. PV has been working closely with Melbourne Water which considers Galada Tamboore a significant biodiversity site.

PV will also be carrying out a Cultural Heritage Management Plan to inform the Master Plan for Galada Tamboore, as well as consolidating the existing environmental

values assessments to ensure that protection of the environmental and cultural values of the Merri Creek corridor are fully considered in the planning process.

PV will be releasing a Community Bulletin in the near future in order to keep people better informed on the planning process for the Merri Creek Parklands; copies will be sent to FoMC as well as the broader community.

### HELP MONITOR NEW/OLD SITE

Brendan Casey would like some help to do some water quality monitoring at Galada Tamboore, near Barry Rd Campbellfield. This is the site where our monitoring team was established and where it remained for a number of years. Brendan used to do regular tests there and it would be good to be able to compare new test results with previous results at the site, as well as with the results of the Streamteam site at North Fitzroy. If you're interested, contact Brendan at: [bjmcasey2002@yahoo.com.au](mailto:bjmcasey2002@yahoo.com.au) or phone 9443 0148.

# Happy 20th Birthday to FoMC

Members and guests enjoyed drinks and some wonderful food at our 20th Anniversary celebrations on Friday 26 September, looking over the Merri Creek at the Sports Pavilion in Capp Reserve Preston. Lots of people were impressed with the food, which was provided by the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (email: [catering@asrc.org.au](mailto:catering@asrc.org.au)).

Thanks to the Darebin Women's Sports Club for allowing us to use their pavilion, which isn't usually available to the public. The room was still decorated with streamers and balloons as their football team, the Falcons, had just won its third premiership. Thanks also to the two women from the Sports Club, both named Sally, who really helped make the evening a success.



All the Committee members were there and we enjoyed catching up with a number of people whom we hadn't seen for a while.

There were also a few interesting short talks, each introduced by our President, David Redfearn.

**Allan Thomson** was one of the first people to establish native plants in the northern suburbs and was very active in helping to save Coburg Lake in the seventies. In those days, native plants were regarded as 'radical' and hardly anyone had heard of indigenous vegetation and he could only dream of attracting Red Wattlebirds to his garden.

He then related the great tale of how, in 1972, a person known only as "the vandal"

it. The valve has never been opened again and the identity of "the vandal" remains a mystery.

**Bruce and Ann McGregor**, both long term activists, recalled the early vision that the group had and some of our most notable achievements. They were pleased that we have continued to work towards that vision with much lobbying of politicians, submissions and feedback on any number of policies and strategies.

FoMC President, David Redfearn, introducing the short talks



**Brian Bainbridge** explained

how he found Golden Sun Moths at Craigieburn grasslands and also with the invaluable help of Wendy Moore, at Cooper St Grasslands and several other sites. This led to others discovering the moth at locations far and wide outside the Merri catchment, and it was also responsible for moving a proposed development at Cooper St.

**Ruth Shiel** described the work of the Regeneration Group and noted some of the active members at the celebration as well as mentioning some who could not attend.

She thanked the MCMC



FoMC Vice President, Ann McGregor

managed to open a valve, that Coburg Council claimed couldn't be opened, to drain Coburg Lake. Then, when the Council said it couldn't be closed, the mysterious "vandal" snuck back and did



Streamteam Coordinator, Irene Baker



Current Membership Secretary, Monica Williamson (right) chats with Julie Mason, who had the role previously



staff for organising plantings and providing the much-enjoyed barbecues later.

**Paul Prentice** told of his career as a collector of rubbish and recyclables and how his small team goes tidying up on the first Sunday of each month, except for Clean Up Australia Day, which he boycotts because it is sponsored by McDonald's (this was greeted with much applause).



Litter Group Coordinator, Paul Prentice

**Irene Baker** filled us in on the Streamteam water quality monitoring, also on the first Sunday of the month, and thanked the various WaterWatch officers at MCMC who had assisted the group.

**Linda Parlane** reminisced about our high profile campaign against the F2 Freeway where, although we lost eventually, it was not before VicRoads put forward 13 changes of alignment; and mentioned the importance of the discovery, by Brendan Casey, of Growling Grass Frogs in and near the Merri Creek. Altogether it was a grand milestone in our wonderful ongoing story.

However, the celebrations haven't ended yet, as there are bird surveys, one of which has since been held on 19 October, but another

one is due on 9 November, and there's a bus trip to the upper Merri on 16 November (which is now fully booked).



Life Member, Linda Parlane

*Thanks to Allie Dawe for taking the photos at the party, only a few of which appear here.*



FoMC Secretary, Ray Radford, with Jack Svendsen, who coordinates staffing of the FoMC office



Brian Bainbridge chats with Des and Ruth Shiel

## STOP PRESS October Birdwatch results

It is too early to report in depth on the Birdwatch results. Here are some summary statistics: Number of participants = at least 73. Total bird species seen = 69. Estimated total number of individual birds seen across the seven sites = 2170. Most common bird across the seven sites = Red Wattlebird (200+). 'Best' site for bird numbers = Blyth St – Moreland Rd East Brunswick (630+). 'Best' sites for bird species = Kirkdale St Park – Merri Park (37), Blyth St – Moreland Rd (36), Edwardes Lake (35).

# It's all happening on the Merri

Works are now under way on two of the major projects that we publicised in the newsletter in May 2007, while the third major project will be happening soon. FoMC has participated in consultations on all three projects, the benefits of which will flow way beyond Merri Creek. However, people using the shared path or the parklands in the project areas do face some temporary inconvenience.

## Clifton Hill Rail Project

Construction of the new rail viaduct over the Merri between Clifton Hill and Westgarth is well under way, and path users need to take an alternative route in this area. This long overdue duplication will reduce delays on both the Hurstbridge and the Epping lines.

FoMC has abandoned its campaign for the viaduct to take a shared pedestrian and bicycle path, but we are still lobbying for improvements to the pathways around the viaducts.

For more information see: [www.cliftonhillrailproject.com.au](http://www.cliftonhillrailproject.com.au)



Piling to construct the foundations of the new rail bridge north of the Merri Creek. ([www.cliftonhillrailproject.com.au](http://www.cliftonhillrailproject.com.au))

## Northern sewerage works

Construction for the Northern Sewerage Project stages 1 & 2 is progressing and these works will continue until 2012. Shafts are being constructed on the Merri at De Chene Reserve (Bell St), Carr St, Newlands Rd (north of the drive-in) and Jukes Rd Fawkner (L.E. Cotchin Reserve, east of the creek parklands). When the shafts are completed, sewer tunnels will be constructed between them, deep underground.

If you have any concerns about this project, phone the toll free Northern Sewerage Project hotline on 1800 097 565 (24 hour). All calls will be responded to within an hour and logged.

For more information see: [www.nsp.net.au](http://www.nsp.net.au)

## Merri Creek Improvement Project — North Coburg

Melbourne Water will soon start on major creek improvement works from Queens Pde Fawkner to Carr St North Coburg. These will begin at the footbridge between Bakers Rd and McMahons Rd North Coburg, after Melbourne Water replaces a pipeline in the area. The project includes the staged removal of most willow trees and woody weeds, followed by plantings, including extensive aquatic vegetation; the creation of some wetlands; major work on the Merlynston Creek confluence; and erosion control.

FoMC's representatives on this project are Pascale Pitot and Nicole Lowe. If you would like more information, contact Pascale on 9484 5752.

## Bush Telegraph

Victorians can report behaviour that could damage our environment using an easy to remember number: 13 2874 or 13 BUSH on your keypad.

Callers can remain anonymous if they wish.

Everybody witnesses incidents from time to time, such as driving in inappropriate areas or removing plants from National Parks, that, although not criminal, they would like to report to someone, but not necessarily the police. This BUSH TELEGRAPH service allows Victorians to register their concern, which is then noted and forwarded on to the appropriate authority. The service is provided by Parks Victoria through its seven-day-a-week Information Centre.

## VALE BILL MASSEY

We are sorry to hear about the death of one of our long-time members, Bill Massey, on 14 July. Despite being almost blind and finding it hard to walk, Bill still somehow managed to come along to occasional activities. He especially liked doing litter clean-ups and earlier, before his eyesight deteriorated too much, he would do them on his own by the creek. He wanted to keep up with the news of our group, so relatives and friends would read our newsletter to him. A few of our long-standing active members would remember him well. We extend our sympathies to his family.

# Friends' Life Members — Pascale Pitot

The eighteenth and the last in a series of short histories of the current Friends' Life Members — but the first from a non-English speaking background.

I have good early memories of gardening and of spending many summer holidays as a child in Agen, in the south west of France, roaming with some other kids in the countryside 'minding' the cows, setting pots for yabbies (*ecrevisses*) in the creek, building cubby houses in the woods and collecting blackberries for making jam.

I studied Agriculture and Food Technology in Brittany, then worked on applied research projects for a major Dairy Co-op in Normandy. I was shocked when, after seeing a heron (an uncommon sight), my landlady urged me not to talk about it in case the anglers would kill it — because herons eat fish!

In the late 80s I came travelling to Tasmania and the East coast of the mainland, going from one national park to another, absolutely bewitched by the Australian environment. I did a stint of a few months as a 'cook' in a camping resort at the top of Cape York, bluffing "*of course I can cook, I am French,*" after which I quickly bought a good recipe book. It must have worked, because they told me that I was the best cook they ever had!

I loved the nature up there with one tide one day then five the following, turtle tracks on the beach, billabongs, birds, bats and goannas. However, one night, feral pigs were fighting and we had to climb a tree and wait.

During a second visit to Australia shortly afterwards, I was offered a three months job to work on dairy desserts — French style. While waiting months for my visa application to be processed, I joined up with *Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers* (now *Conservation Volunteers*) and planted hundreds of trees on farms and at places like Organ Pipes and Tower Hill National Parks.

After becoming a resident in the early 90s, I grew trees for *Tree Project* in my backyard for several years and got involved with the Rainforest Action Group. It was an extraordinary experience with an incredible smattering of amazing and diverse people, many still involved one way or the other with the environment (one of them being Katrina Roberg at MCMC).

My earliest memory of the Merri Creek is a planting in the late 80s with *Tree Project* on the Yarra Bend side near the freeway. At that time, trees were planted about one metre apart with lots of wattle! Whilst it is done differently now, these thick wattle copses might have brought back Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos to the

Merri. I also attended a walk led by Gary Foley at Cooper St Grasslands, during a campaign before they were protected.

In 1993 I moved to Thornbury when pregnant with my first child and later when he was a toddler, I went with him and my new baby on the original bus tour to the upper Merri. Then, when both kids were walking, I started to go to the litter clean-ups on the Merri. The kids loved the clambering, the "treasure" hunt and the stop at a playground afterwards.

When my third child was born, I lived for a short while in Lakes Entrance where I started to learn about indigenous plants and to enjoy the meditative aspect of weeding. On returning to Thornbury, I took on weeding at Merri Park Wetland, attended more plantings and also started to volunteer at VINC.

The time I spend on the creek is greatly enhanced by the combination of FoMC and MCMC. It is brilliant because it is so nice to know that there is professionalism and continuity to back up whatever activity you get involved in as a Friend of Merri Creek. As a migrant, it is a great privilege and deep experience to slowly feel you are developing roots, to feel nurtured by your new environment and somehow that you belong.

When my second job in Australia — teaching Food Technology at TAFE — collapsed, I very happily took on teaching some plant subjects in a Conservation and Land Management diploma.

Over the last two years, I have represented FoMC on the Merri Creek & Environs Strategy Implementation Sub-Committee, which is reviewing that Strategy, and this has given me new perspectives on the complexities handled so skilfully by MCMC. I also represent FoMC on Melbourne Water's Merri Creek Improvement Project in North Coburg.

I also go to some field trips and fauna surveys with the Field

Naturalist Club of Victoria and I will soon be building a house not far from the MECCARG site in North Coburg, which is daunting but very exciting.

I am dreaming of a fully revegetated and healthy creek with strong communities of kind people that value the creek enough to put energy back into it and of seeing many silly practices (like throw-away containers and burning brown coal, amongst others) relegated to the Museum of Unsustainability.

PASCALE PITOT



# It's a galaxy out there!

Although Melbourne's suburbs are continuing to swell (and oil reserves to shrink as more folk drive further), there is an arc of townships 40 or 50 kilometres out that retain their country identity, which have not yet been swallowed up.

Naturally they exhibit a great diversity of size, character and accessibility, offering various kinds of recreation and touristic appeal, historical and environmental features; and for each there is a waterway or two, ranging from big to very modest.

We can start with Little River, evocative of a famous rock band, poised nervously between Werribee and northern Geelong; with a railway station, and handy to Avalon Airport, it's the jumping-off point for the You Yangs Regional Park and the Mount Rothwell sanctuary further north.

Quite a contrast is booming Melton, situated on the Ballarat line beside the Werribee River, with a golf course, an industrial area, and abundant educational facilities; and to the west, bordering the Djerrivarrh Creek, the magnificent Long Forest conservation reserve.

Sunbury, on the Bendigo route, may even get electric trains; well that's fair enough, it's closer in than Belgrave or Berwick or Kananook. Its meandering Jacksons Creek combines with Deep Creek further on, quite close to the Organ Pipes, to form the Maribyrnong; the Kismet and Blind Creeks are followed by excellent shared-use pathways. The former institution "Caloola" is now a university campus; in 1882 the first Ashes Test was played at Rupertswood College; Emu Bottom, built in 1836, is Victoria's oldest homestead.

Then Wallan, beside our own Merri Creek, boasts the legendary Pretty Sally Hill; an Avenue of Honour, narrowly saved from the obsessive road-widening mob; the active Friends of Wallan Creek, the Righetti Airfield with a flying school, and a station on the Wodonga line, adjoined by Rattlers Hotel. On the road going north to Kilmore is the Bylands Tramway Museum; the Plenty River rises in the east in the Great Dividing Range, on the slopes of Mount Disappointment, which is actually quite easy to reach.

Kinglake's got a real village feel, tucked away in the hills with no buses; you can get there without a car in the world, like the excited, sightseeing cyclists seeking a scenic, strenuous stretch - ! The Diamond Creek rises nearby, as do Creeks Nos. 1 and 2; and with walking trails, pony club, gallery, museum, monthly market, and places to dine and recline, there's no shortage of things to do.

A bus links Lilydale with Healesville and its Aussie wildlife park; and beside it the 130 hectares of the bushland reserve "Coranderrk". The Maroondah Reservoir lies to the east, formed by damming the big Watts River; the latter flows past the north side of town on its way to joining the Yarra. A

tourist train operates on Sundays for enthusiasts of history and railways.

Finally with rails of gauge 2 feet 6 inches (Victoria's norm is five-foot-three – that's 0.75, or 1.6 metres), it's Gembrook, the terminus of Puffing Billy. No longer restricted to Lakeside, it now uses all of its track, following the Wattle and Cockatoo Creeks, as it did a century back. And we're chuffed at such a source of satisfaction, that the Garratt G42-00-00 is back in action!



Puffing Billy crossing the Belgrave trestle bridge  
(from [www.puffingbilly.com.au](http://www.puffingbilly.com.au))

What stimulation for all the senses, including the usual tasty tucker, the whole experience is: the creaking, bumping, jolting, rattling, the smells, the smoke, the whistles; the antiquated carriages, the quaint outdated steam-engines which pant and snort and are known as Iron Horses – said to be the only living machines that human beings have created.

There's Belgrave and the iconic trestle bridge, Clematis with the laconic Coodabeens' "Cliff"; the rail museum at Menzies Creek, swimming and boating at the Emerald Lake; Cockatoo, risen like a phoenix from the ashes of the '83 bushfires; and Gembrook, with plenty to keep the visitor happy – a pottery, a nursery and tea-rooms, The Ranges Hotel and a winery, and a number of welcoming guest-houses. So many beautiful spots around Melbourne and so many ways to enjoy life.

PAUL PRENTICE (COMMITTEE MEMBER)

# A huge aim for a small group

FoMC wholeheartedly supports a new group of only seven people which has the huge aim of establishing a UNESCO Biosphere for the Victorian Volcanic Plain, which extends west of Melbourne almost to the South Australian border.

This massive task would require the cooperation of 32 local governments and five catchment Management Authorities.

The group, which includes the FoMC Secretary, Ray Radford, is appropriately named the Victorian Volcanic Plain Biosphere Association Incorporated (VVPB). The VVPB believes that threatened and endangered species and ecosystems of the Victorian Volcanic Plain may be better secured for the future if a UNESCO Biosphere is created.

## What is a UNESCO Biosphere?

A UNESCO Biosphere is an internationally recognised land sustainability initiative which:

- ☞ Includes protected areas of characteristic ecosystems and surrounding lands that are managed for conservation and sustainable use;
- ☞ Has people as an integral component, who manage the land for objectives ranging from complete protection to intensive yet sustainable production;
- ☞ Provides a regional centre for monitoring, research, education and training on natural and managed ecosystems;
- ☞ Is a place where government decision makers, scientists, managers and local people cooperate in developing a model programme for managing land and water to meet human needs while conserving natural processes and biological resources;
- ☞ Is a symbol of voluntary cooperation to conserve and use resources for the well being of people everywhere.

## How will a biosphere link in with existing groups?

A biosphere will not replace or override existing groups or institutional arrangements. Landholders, landcare groups, Friends groups and other organisations will continue to work to manage land sustainably and to protect threatened species and ecosystems.



*Galgi ngarrk* (Craigieburn Grasslands) is a great example of Victorian Volcanic Plain grassland. The grasslands provide habitat for a number of endangered fauna and this photo shows one of our famous Golden Sun Moth surveys going on in the background. There's another survey this year — see the events calendar for details.

A biosphere will create a higher profile for ecosystems and land, better information networks, help to access more resources and allow more learning to occur around issues relating to the sustainable use of the land and the conservation of nature.

## What do we need to do to become a biosphere?

A biosphere is created by its community so we need to gather support right across the community to ensure we have all of the resources to deliver on our commitments and the endorsements from land managers to ensure the potential of the biosphere will be fulfilled. After that, we'll need to prepare a detailed application to UNESCO.

Currently the VVPB committee is gathering interest and support from people and groups on the plains to guide a biosphere application. If you are interested in supporting this aim, please email Ray at: [admin@mcmc.org.au](mailto:admin@mcmc.org.au) or phone 0422 989 166.

*Adapted from a Victorian Volcanic Plain Biosphere Association leaflet*

## WURUNDJERI NAMES FOR MERRI GRASSLANDS

FoMC now has the pronunciations for the innovative Wurundjeri names, provided by Doreen Garvey-Wandin, for the grasslands along Merri Creek. So from now on, we will try to use these names and to lobby for them to be taken up by Darebin and Moreland Councils and Parks Victoria. Below are the old names, Wurundjeri names, pronunciations and meanings:

- Cooper St Grasslands is now *Bababi marning*, said as "Barb-a-bee mah-ning" (or mother's hand)
- Craigieburn Grasslands is now *Galgi ngarrk*, said as "Gal-gi nyark" (or back bone)
- Jukes Road Grasslands is now *Bababi djinanang*, said as "Barb-a-bee jinna-nang" (or mother's foot)
- Central Creek Grasslands is now *Ngarri-djarrang*, said as "Nyarree-jar-rang" (or thigh)
- New park north of the Ring Road is *Marran baba*, said as "Marran barb-a" (or body of mother)

## Saturday 1 MECCARG\* Weeding, Watering and Picnic

Just south of Murray Rd bridge, Coburg, 1pm-3pm. Melway map 18 A11. Wear sturdy footwear and gloves and bring food and drink to share.

## Sunday 2 Litter Clean-Up

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

## Sunday 2 Streamteam Water Quality Testing

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

## Sunday 9 Bird Survey & Wild Discoveries Wildflower Walk

*Bababi marning* (Cooper St Grasslands), near Istrian-Australian Social Club, 8.45am-10.30am. Melway map 180 K10. Light refreshments will be provided. Funded by Parks Victoria. Please register and say if you want to join a car pool, with Ray Radford, email [admin@mcmc.org.au](mailto:admin@mcmc.org.au) or phone 0422 989 166.

## Sunday 9 Other Bird Surveys

Bird surveys are also at Galada Tamboore and Craigieburn Grasslands, 8.45am-10.30am. Please register, nominate your site and say if you want to join a car pool, with Ray Radford, email [admin@mcmc.org.au](mailto:admin@mcmc.org.au) or phone 0422 989 166.

## Sunday 9 Friends of Wallan Creek Event

Meet at the Scout Hall carpark on the corner of Windham and Watson St opposite the new Police Station. 10am-1pm.

## Sunday 16 Tour to the Upper Merri (Now fully booked.)

## Sunday 16 Friends of Edgars Creek Planting Site Maintenance

Meet at Notice Board near Ronald St Nth Coburg, 1-3pm. Melway Map 18 A9. Phone Stephen 9350 4212.

## Sunday 23 Wild Discoveries Wildflower Walk (No.2)

*Galgi ngark* (Craigieburn Grasslands), 10am-12 noon. Light refreshments will be provided. Funded by Parks Victoria. Please register and say if you want to join a car pool with Megan at MCMC, email [megan@mcmc.org.au](mailto:megan@mcmc.org.au) or phone 9380 8199.

## Wednesday 26 Friends of Merri Creek AGM

CERES Environment Room, Lee St East Brunswick, 7.30pm. Have your say in running the Friends group, elect the new Committee, hear about the group's activities and party afterwards. Drinks and light refreshments supplied.

## Saturday 29 Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival

CERES Environment Park, Lee St East Brunswick, 3-9pm. Don't miss this fantastic community event. *If you can help staff the MCMC/FoMC stall at the festival, please ring Ray on 0422 989 166.*

## Sat. 22-Sun 30 Golden Sun Moth Surveys

*Galgi ngark* and *Bababi marning* (Craigieburn and Cooper St grasslands), whenever the weather is most suitable, probably a Saturday or Sunday from 22/11 to 14/12. Funded by Parks Victoria. Please register with Megan at MCMC on 9380 8199 or email: [megan@mcmc.org.au](mailto:megan@mcmc.org.au) so that she can let you know about the timing.

# DECEMBER

## Thursday 4 Planning Meeting for FoMC Regeneration Group Activities 2009

MCMC office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick, 6.00pm. All FoMC members are welcome to help plan our planting and weeding activities for 2009.

## Saturday 6 MECCARG\* Weeding and Watering

Just south of Murray Rd bridge, Coburg, 1pm-3pm. Melway map 18 A11. Wear sturdy footwear and gloves.

## Sat. 6-Sun 14 Golden Sun Moth Surveys

*Galgi ngark* and *Bababi marning* (Craigieburn and Cooper St grasslands), whenever the weather is most suitable, probably a Saturday or Sunday from 22/11 to 14/12. Funded by Parks Victoria. Please register with Megan at MCMC on 9380 8199 or email: [megan@mcmc.org.au](mailto:megan@mcmc.org.au) so that she can let you know about the timing.

## Sunday 7 Litter Clean-Up

Edgars Creek, below Edwardes Lake, Reservoir, 10am-12 noon. Melway map 18 D5. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

## Sunday 7 Streamteam Water Quality Testing

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

## Sunday 14 Friends of Wallan Creek Event

Meet at the Scout Hall carpark on the corner of Windham and Watson St opposite the new Police Station. 10am-1pm.

# JANUARY 2009

## Sunday 4 Streamteam Water Quality Testing

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

## Friday 9 Deadline for articles for next newsletter

Please send to [admin@mcmc.org.au](mailto:admin@mcmc.org.au).

## 2<sup>nd</sup> week Kangaroo Grass Seed Harvest & BBQ

*Bababi marning* (Cooper St grasslands), probably during the second week in January, at the best time to harvest the seeds. Funded by Parks Victoria. Please register with Megan at MCMC on 9380 8199 or email: [megan@mcmc.org.au](mailto:megan@mcmc.org.au) so that she can let you know about the timing.

# FEBRUARY 2009

## Sunday 1 Litter Clean-Up

Bell St East Coburg, 10am-12 noon. Melway map 18 A12. 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 map 30 C10. Phone 9354 9885.

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