

Merri Park Wetland

Northcote

SITE INFORMATION NOTE 1

Wetland Partners

Merri Creek Management Committee

Development, on-ground management and funding submissions

Darebin City Council

Site maintenance funding and statutory committee of management

Friends of Merri Creek and local community

Volunteer works, advocacy and funding submissions

Melbourne Water

Technical advice

Parks Victoria grants to MCMC in 2000 and 2001

Initial establishment funding

Envirofund and Landcare Australia/Citipower (every year from 2004 to 2008)

Funding for extension and site development

Greencorp participants, volunteers from Tree Project and Conservation Volunteers Australia, students from Northcote High School, Princes Hill Secondary, Merri Primary, Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE and many more...

On-ground tasks

A wetland in the heart of its community

Nearly two decades of community advocacy and planning preceded the initial development of Merri Park Wetland in Northcote in 1999.

Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) has directed the project with Darebin City Council and Melbourne Water as key partners. The Committee has worked with community and its

partners to strengthen the wetland's water treatment and habitat values in subsequent years, creating a 'hotspot' for wildlife along the Merri.

This site information note outlines the environmental history, cultural and ecological values of this site.

Commitment to a better environment

Today's thriving wetland is a result of local people's desire to reverse the long-term decline of their local environment.

Lobbying from community groups and the Merri Creek Coordinating Committee during the 1970s and 80s overcame a proposal for a high concrete flood protection barrier next to Merri Creek. Instead, landscaped earthen levee banks and creek-side parklands were established and planted in

partnership with the community in the late 80s. Community input influenced the design of the wetland. Since 2000 over 16,000 plants have been planted. Participation by community in hand-weeding, mulching and monitoring of the site contributes to the wetland's sustainability. Being close to schools, houses and public transport makes it an accessible venue for formal and informal environmental learning.

Merri Creek Management Committee

Merri Creek Management Committee Incorporated (MCMC) is an environmental coordination and management agency formed in 1989 to achieve a shared vision for the waterway corridors of the Merri Creek Catchment. Its members include all the municipalities in the catchment: the Darebin, Hume, Moreland, Whittlesea and Yarra City Councils plus Mitchell Shire Council, the Friends of Merri Creek and the Friends of Wallan Creek. Representatives of these member groups form a Committee of Management which develops policy and guides the activities of MCMC's approximately 20 staff. The primary purpose of MCMC is to ensure the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, and the ecologically sensitive restoration, development and maintenance of the Merri Creek and tributaries, their corridors and associated ecological communities.

MERRI CREEK



MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

May 2000

Greencorps participants



Storm water enters at **A** from surrounding streets, passes through the four ponds to **B** and then by pipe to Merri Creek.



ECOLOGICAL VEGETATION CLASSES

are widely used in Victoria to categorise different kinds of vegetation

Benchmarks describing EVC's can be found at the Conservation and Environment page of the Department of Sustainability and Environment's website

<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/dse/index.htm>

An ecological history

From a haven to desolation and back... in 170 years.

The ancestors of today's Wurundjeri, the local traditional owners, would have known this site as a bend of the Merri Creek lined by Red Gums and dense shrubland.

Grazing by livestock and the cessation of traditional Wurundjeri practices, such as burning, soon followed the first land sales in 1840. Agriculture converted the area to largely exotic vegetation and sensitive native fauna became locally extinct. From the 1920s the surrounding farmland was converted to housing. In 1927 and 1937 the Merri Creek was

straightened and the former creek bed was used as a tip site and later covered over. In the following decades a large maintenance depot occupied the site, leaving no room for flora and fauna.

In response to a major flood in 1974, an earthen levee bank system was built across Merri Park in the 1980s. Part of this area was made into a retarding basin which echoes the form of the original creek bend and was designed to fill only during major flooding events.

HOW TO GET THERE

Access from Sumner Ave or Winifred St, Northcote
Melway Ref - Map 30 C8

Tram 112 stops on
St Georges Rd, Northcote (stop 27) close to Merri Park

Modelled on nature

Plantings attempt to recover local landscape character and habitat values by mimicking natural areas.

The Merri Park wetland contains approximately 1.4 hectares of biodiverse revegetation. It is a part of an 11 hectare patch of indigenous revegetation adjacent to Merri Creek between St Georges Road and Arthurton Road. This is within the 13 kilometre urban reach of the Merri Creek wildlife corridor between the Western Ring Road and its confluence with the Yarra River.

EVC 125 — Plains Grassy Wetland

open wetland that is often dry during summer months. Small Spike Rush and true rushes are common species. Nardoo and Water Milfoils have become dominant in the wetter parts of this wetland.

EVC 68 — Creepline Grassy Woodland

naturally occurring in low lying areas, dominated by River Red Gum with an understorey of grasses including Common Tussock Grass.

EVC 851 — Stream Bank Shrubland

dense shrubby vegetation. Typical species include River Redgum, River Bottlebrush, Silver Wattle and Blackwood.

EVC 895 — Escarpment Shrubland

dense shrubby vegetation, on drier slopes and cliff faces. Lightwood and Hop Bush are typical.

Froglets and Finches

Habitat diversity has fostered a corresponding variety of fauna.

White-browed Scrub-wren and Superb Blue Wrens nest in the dense shrubberies. Crested Pigeons and Red-browed Finches (photo below) visit regularly to feed on the fruits of native saltbushes and seeding grasses.

Common Froglet, Spotted Marsh and Pobblebonk Frogs (photo right) have colonised the pools. These frogs and

small reptiles are hunted by Tiger Snakes and Sacred Kingfishers.

In 2002 a Western Gerygone, a regionally significant migratory bird was seen feeding here among the tree canopy. Common Bronze-wing Pigeon is a locally uncommon bird that has been observed, feeding on fallen Acacia seed. Nankeen Night Herons use the dense, quiet thickets for their daytime roosts.



A fence helps to make the wetland a 'dog-free' zone where wildlife can feed and breed undisturbed

Plantings of indigenous trees and shrubs started in 1987 and soon attracted wildlife. The basin bottom remained as slashed, exotic grasses with minimal habitat value.

When the wetland was developed in 2000 a new, regular water regime was established using storm water from surrounding streets, allowing treatment of some pollutants. The basin's bottom was remodeled into four shallow ponds allowing the establishment of semi-aquatic vegetation.

Indigenous grasses were planted between these ponds and the older treed plantings. These actions greatly increased the habitat for wildlife including aquatic invertebrates, reptiles, frogs and seed eating birds. Older tree and shrub plantings have accumulated bark, leaf litter, fallen branches and logs. The wetland fence has reduced

disturbance to shyer fauna.

Ecosystem establishment was accelerated by introducing organisms from an established wetland. Expansion of the understorey plantings since 2000 has continued to increase wildlife habitat.



December 1990 Work begins at the proposed wetland site — note plastic weed-mat and powerlines



May 1995 Powerlines now underground



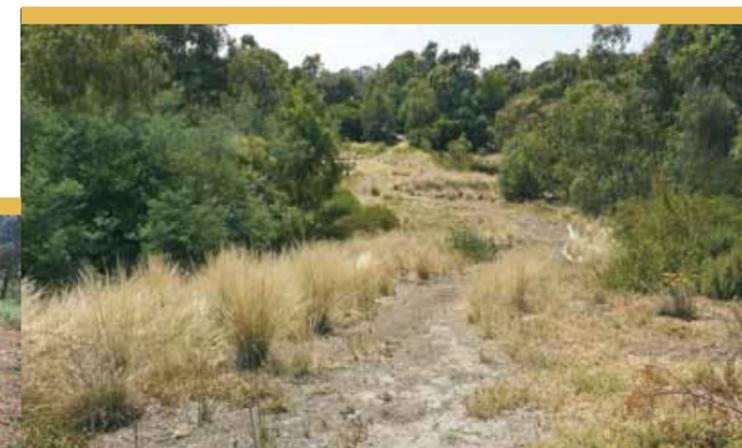
April 2000 Reshaping the basin bottom



July 2001 Degradable weed mat in use



May 2004 Native grass planting well established



January 2009 Resilient vegetation reflects the adaptive management approach



Common Froglet

MERRI PARK WETLAND

Wetlands in the Merri Creek Valley

'Less than 4% of original wetland area remains in the Merri Creek Catchment and it is mostly in very poor condition'

Wetlands are highly depleted in the Merri Creek valley

A wetland is a site where the wetness of the land is sufficiently frequent and sustained to influence the composition of the associated vegetation. Wetlands vary widely and some may not hold water for years at a time. Merri wetlands included swamps, ephemeral drainage lines, creeksides and flats.

Wetlands are productive ecosystems providing habitat for native animals and plants, including rare and threatened species. They assimilate and recycle nutrients and trap sediments. They act as flood control basins, aiding the hydrological stability of the catchment. Wetlands are sites of cultural, scientific, recreational, landscape and educational interest.

Approximately 5.5% (2,145 ha) of the Merri Creek catchment was once occupied by wetlands. The two largest swamps, Old Inverlochy and Herne's Swamp near Wallan together occupied over 1,700 hectares.

Only 83 hectares (less than 4% of original wetland area) remain, mostly in very poor condition. Farm dams, watercourses, artificial ponds, lakes and wetlands now occupy about 318 hectares of the catchment but biodiversity and wetland function of such areas is often low.

Where to from here?

What opportunities are there to build on this project?

Devising reliable and economical techniques to sustain indigenous vegetation and fauna in urban settings is a prime challenge for MCMC. While the Merri Park wetland is essentially 'planted out' and self-sustaining processes such as natural regeneration are occurring, changes to both routine maintenance and more dramatic ecological interventions will be needed to cope with evolving circumstances such as climate variability.

Plantings to join the wetland with surrounding revegetation will improve ecological values.

MCMC's community engagement programs aim to foster lasting custodianship roles with activities that involve schools, volunteers and local residents in wetland upkeep.



Opportunities to be involved in this site and information about MCMC's other work can be found at www.mcmc.org.au



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