

Merri News

NOVEMBER 2013

Newsletter of Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) 2 Lee St East Brunswick VIC 3057

Wildflowers or weeds? Can you dig it?

Grassland wildflowers boost the diversity of invertebrates and in turn, the whole web of life.

MCMC projects are attempting to re-establish wildflowers that depend on soil disturbance in their early stages.

Small-scale soil disturbance was once common in the native grasslands along Merri Creek through the activities of Wurundjeri Traditional Owners who dug for edible roots and through the feeding activities of small mammals such as bandicoots and bettongs. However, nowadays digging also promotes unwanted weeds. How can soil disturbance be reintroduced without causing further harm to the grasslands?

Disturbing it! Collaboration between Traditional Owners, MCMC and university researchers explored the potential of soil disturbance to provide the conditions many wildflower species need to establish.

The project applied research findings to a controlled location at Ngarri-djarrang Grassland in Reservoir. The beautiful native daisy, Lemon Beauty Heads *Calocephalus citreus*, was our 'guinea-pig'.

Attempts to establish seedlings in 'churned' soil in autumn 2013 are showing good results. Seedlings have established and plots protected from kangaroo browsing have slightly better results. Our plots are beginning to show greater overall floral diversity.

It has been a thrill for researchers at local universities to see their work applied in the field and for MCMC and for Wurundjeri to share this learning experience.

Digging it! A second project with Wurundjeri Traditional Owners was to re-develop and update the knowledge needed to dig and regenerate foodplants in grassland for both ecological and cultural renewal purposes. This time the 'guinea-pig' plant was Chocolate Lily, *Arthropodium strictum*.

Digging foodplants in natural grassland locations is a powerful experience for re-connecting to country and culture. Wurundjeri Elder, Aunty Alice Kolasa, described her experience: *I was excited because I was doing what my ancestors did and I could imagine my ancestors digging up plants in this same way. It was particularly exciting to see the bulbs emerge from the soil. I didn't expect the roots to be so heavy.*

Both projects were funded by the Australian Government's *Caring for our Country* program. The Digging Project was also funded by a Victorian Government *Communities for Nature* Grant.

Read more about both projects on MCMC's website.



Chocolate Lily, *Arthropodium strictum*.

Latest MCMC staff changes

Aaron Eulenstein, who has been with MCMC for more than six years, is leaving to work with a remote Indigenous community in Western Australia. Amy O'Dell who's been with us for almost four years is heading off on a big overseas trip, and Kyvelie Tsolakis will rejoin the Department of Environment and Primary Industries summer fire crew after spending the winter months with us. We'll miss their enthusiasm, knowledge and commitment. Ben Hodgens now has an ongoing position with the Parkland Team and we welcome back Trevor Hausler, who is job-sharing the Waterwatch Coordinator position with Jane Bevelander, who has now returned from parental leave.

MCMC now has a *real* nature strip

In August MCMC staff dug up the front nature strip and planted indigenous grasses and small shrubs, topped with mulch.



For upcoming community events
see our website: www.mcmc.org.au



Female Golden Sun Moth.

Merri Citizen Science

For over 30 years, Friends of Merri Creek volunteers have contributed enormously to our understanding of the Merri's biodiversity, including conducting surveys of birds and Golden Sun Moths, recording fauna sightings and monitoring the water quality. This information helps planning and better management.

This summer, volunteer 'citizen scientists' can help count Golden Sun Moths, measure Plains Yam Daisy, identify wildflowers and develop observation skills in the field with MCMC staff.

Between November and January, we would like your help to conduct:

- Golden Sun Moth surveys
- Golden Sun Moth Habitat surveys
- Plains Yam Daisy monitoring

Timing of these events is weather dependent and we need a register of volunteers who can be called upon at short notice. Surveys might be during the week or the weekend. Participation on any particular day is entirely up to you! A moderate level of fitness (and patience) is required for most of these activities.

If you're interested, email admin@mcmc.org.au or phone 9380 8199 and ask to have your details added to our Merri Citizen Scientist Register.

Growth fears

MCMC is greatly disappointed by the final Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (BCS) for Melbourne's massive growth corridors, especially as it affects the Merri catchment. Growing Grass Frog corridors along many parts of the creek are significantly narrower than ecologists recommend and ancient River Red Gums have been left unprotected. The Federal Minister approved the inadequate BCS, submitted by the Victorian Government, days before the federal election.

Private land on Merri Creek

Believe it or not, private land titles that go to the edge of Merri Creek still exist in Melbourne's inner suburbs.

Forty years ago there were many private land parcels to the edge of the creek. One of the earliest actions of MCMC's predecessor, the Merri Creek Coordinating Committee, was to work on achieving a corridor of public land along the creek. This provided access for the shared trail, appreciation of the creek surrounds, and coordinated revegetation and weed control.

The lack of continuous public land still creates problems along Merri Creek, especially as private land frontage often harbours high levels of environmental weeds. This is an issue that MCMC plans to focus strongly on in the coming year.



School's in on Edgars Creek

Thomastown Secondary College students have made a huge improvement to Edgars Creek near Main Street Thomastown. In late August they planted 900 trees and shrubs into a series of plots near the creek and also took time to learn about waterbugs and other features of the creek habitat. Local MP, Bronwyn Halfpenny, teachers, MCMC staff and others joined in the action.

Then, two weeks later, students created an indigenous garden in their school grounds, not far from Edgars Creek, and got more than 400 plants into the ground.

These activities were part of the *Edgars Creek: Creek Connections* project, funded by Port Phillip & Westernport CMA.

Above photo: Local MP, Bronwyn Halfpenny, with Thomastown Secondary students, Marina Stojanovska and Aaron Cooper.

The Merri Creek Environment Fund

The Merri Creek Environment Fund is seeking donations for revegetation and conservation works in the Merri Creek catchment. *Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible.* For credit card payment see our website. Make cheques out to Merri Creek Environment Fund and send to MCMC, 2 Lee Street, East Brunswick, 3057. Drop in a cash donation or contact us to arrange a direct deposit.

Download *Merri News* from our website or obtain a printed copy from:

Merri Creek Management Committee 2 Lee St East Brunswick VIC 3057. Phone: 9380 8199.

Email: admin@mcmc.org.au Website: www.mcmc.org.au