

Merri News

MAY 2013

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

Fire along the Merri

This summer, Merri Creek catchment experienced its most significant bushfires ever.

In January, two major fires occurred along Old Sydney Road in Wallan, burning a large amount of remnant bushland. The second fire caused a lot of damage due to many trees knocked over and extensive bulldozing for fire control. Although there was the potential for erosion from bare hills with heavy rain, most of the area now has quite a good grass cover, which should help limit any erosion.

Then, in February, the Donnybrook/ Wollert/Epping grassfire burnt more than 2000 hectares and caused traffic chaos as residents and workers in outer suburbs including Aurora tried to evacuate. The fire burnt along both sides of the Hume Freeway before being halted at



Cooper Street Epping. The Merri Creek itself was spared, but the fire highlights the particular vulnerability of newly developing suburbs on Melbourne's outskirts and the need for good fire management planning.

Photo by Claudia James, of Wallan Environment Group, shows Old Sydney Road in Wallan, looking south, after the fires in January 2013.

Focus on Edgars Creek

Edgars Creek is an important tributary of Merri Creek. Unfortunately its middle section is one of Melbourne's most polluted waterways. Melbourne University's Centre for Aquatic Pollution Identification and Management found contaminants such as arsenic, cadmium, copper, lead, mercury, and zinc in stormwater drains from Thomastown industrial areas leading to the creek.

Now the middle reach in Thomastown will receive much needed attention through three new projects.

Firstly, *Waterway Friendly Workplaces Stage 2* has been funded by the City of Whittlesea for MCMC to visit more workplaces in industrial precincts to encourage good workplace practices that minimise stormwater pollution.

A grant from the Department of Sustainability and Environment's *Communities for Nature* will add to MCMC's ability to focus on industrial stormwater pollution, with funding for spill kits and bunding, and support for the community to monitor creek health.

Lastly, a grant from the Port Phillip & Westernport Catchment Management Authority is funding *Edgars*

Creek - Creek Connections. This revegetation and stormwater pollution awareness project beside Edgars Creek in Thomastown will involve a large number of local school students caring for their creek.

Latest MCMC staff changes

Farewell to Michael Day, the second Parkland Management Team member to resign this year to take up full time study. We'll miss his enthusiasm and willingness to plunge into action. Also, welcome to our new temporary team member, Jason Hannan.

Marran Baba Management Plan out

After over six years, Parks Victoria has announced that their plan for the management of the Merri Creek Parklands north of the Western Ring Rd will be posted on their website: <http://parkweb.vic.gov.au/> in May.

For upcoming community events and the 2011-12 MCMC Annual Report see our website: www.mcmc.org.au



Play a part in your local ecosystem

On a mellow autumn afternoon the Merri Park Wetland in Northcote is all dappled light. Emerald marshes are set amid grassy woodland buzzing with insects and birdsong. Who could guess at the intense human effort that has transformed this place over the last 30 years?

Originating as a note on a plan in the early 1980s, the wetland was wrestled into existence in 1999 amid grant wrangling, stakeholder enthusiasm, machinery and mud. The plan inspired Friends of Merri Creek with the promise of a biological hotspot on their doorstep. Hundreds attended the plantings of the wetland in 2000 and 2001. In the first ten years 18,107 plants were planted.

The freshly turned mud became a battleground as weeds and the new plantings struggled for supremacy. Community members came to the rescue at epic handweeding events through the 2000s, supporting the regular maintenance of the dedicated MCMC crew.

The wetland has now entered a stage where indigenous plants definitely have the upper hand. Through natural regeneration, local flora and fauna is regaining ground it lost decades ago.

One of the Merri's great restoration stories is emerging in Northcote; but the wetland still needs the care of its human neighbours. It is vulnerable, surrounded by a lush sea of potential invaders (a.k.a. our gardens!). The pretty Cruel vine, tough Paspalum, and innocent-sounding Strawberry Clover creep through the undergrowth, gathering strength to stage a takeover. Extracting these wily weeds from surrounding indigenous plants requires patience and dedication.

A Site information note detailing the history of this site is available at www.mcmc.org and the MCMC office.

You can help take this restoration effort to still greater heights, by participating in the event below.

Photo: Friends of Merri Creek playing a positive role in the ecology of their local wetland.

Merri Park Wetland Handweeding Sunday 14th July, 10am-12noon

Near cnr of Sumner Ave & Winifred St Northcote, Melway 30 C8. Funded by Darebin City Council. Light refreshments provided. Ph: Ben at MCMC 9380 8199.

Wurundjeri have a growing role in fire management on the Merri

It starts with a match. A tiny flame blossoms amid the dry grasses along the Merri Creek in early autumn. Lighting the flame is an elderly man. Witnessing the event are a dozen younger men and women, mostly strangers to the elder. They are ready with equipment to direct the growing flames and keep the fire from running away. An hour later, a hectare of blackened grass is smoking quietly, waiting for rains to rejuvenate the grassland's wildflowers and ecological processes.

The group rejoices in a job well done and reflects on the significance of the event: an Elder of the Wurundjeri has again lit the fires that were central to his ancestors' culture, ecology and economy for thousands of years. A few years later, and the man's relatives are now the ones holding the hoses, the drip-torches and weather meter that are part of current burning practice for Native Grassland near the Merri Creek. The little flame of interest sparked in 2011 has taken among the Wurundjeri community. This burning season, Wurundjeri Elders and trainees from the Wurundjeri Narrap team, and even members of the next generation, took part in the ecological burns along the Merri Creek alongside MCMC and Darebin bush crews.



Mentoring and partnership has taken on new urgency as Wurundjeri build the skills to again conduct their own burns. Sites in Sunbury and Mount William were returned to Wurundjeri ownership and management in 2012. A growing exchange in knowledge between Wurundjeri and MCMC has been building through cultural days and relationships fostered through joint activities. A deeper appreciation for the land, its people and the work to repair it is growing among both groups.

Photo: Ash Firebrace and Dave Wandin of the Wurundjeri Narrap Team at a burn at Ngarrri-djarrang (Central Creek Grasslands).

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