

Merri News

MAY 2011

The quarterly newsletter of Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) - caring for the Merri Creek

Wurundjeri keep the fires burning on the grasslands

Wurundjeri Elders joined Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) staff in an ecological burn of Bababi Djinanang Native Grassland at Jukes Rd Fawkner on 17 March. We were honoured to have Uncle Frank (Apples) Wandin start the burn and Uncle Ringo Terrick to assist.

The Wurundjeri are the Traditional Owners of the Merri and burning of Native Grassland is a traditional cultural practice.

MCMC has conducted burns on Native Grasslands for 20 years to help to sustain their biodiversity, but this is the first time we've been joined by Traditional Owners.

The burn was preceded by an acknowledgement of Country by Wurundjeri Elder Uncle Ringo, who said: *"It's a renewal of sorts for me. It was a great honour to have (Uncle Apples) to light the fire representing all our people out there and all who've passed on, feeling the spirit of Country and the old people and feeling their approval of us being back on Country."*

This significant landmark was reflected in the responses of those involved in the burn, when they were asked *"What was most important to you here today?"*



Answers naturally included the regular eco-burn priorities like conserving biodiversity, team work and keeping safe. But MCMC staff were quick to add other comments like: *"It's definitely of importance having Wurundjeri Elders here, it brings a good vibe. It's great knowing that we're doing the same thing as what the ancestors of the Elders did here today. It's important they're here to experience this with us."*

MCMC has been mindful of Indigenous cultural heritage for many years and is now very much enjoying a new era of partnership with the Wurundjeri.

Photo shows Wurundjeri Elder, Uncle Apples, starting the eco-burn.



Thornbury Primary School students joined in a series of workshops and excursions to learn more about indigenous flora and fauna and Indigenous cultural heritage.

Appreciating Indigenous culture

2010 was the International Year of Biodiversity and MCMC received a grant from the Council of Australian Museum Directors for a special project to mark the occasion, *Indigenous, Indigenous: Plants, places and cultural heritage*. The project took 182 people on visits to natural areas of the Merri Creek catchment and most also attended special workshops at Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre at Melbourne Museum. There they enjoyed handling grasses, painting and playing games based on Indigenous biodiversity, while learning about how Indigenous people care for and value nature.

For upcoming community events and the 2009-10 Annual Report, see the MCMC website: www.mcmc.org.au

Rain brings interesting results for *Waterwatch* monitors

Large rain events can have a serious impact on the health of our waterways. If they happen too frequently, the high runoff and stream flow cause great disruption and stress to stream ecosystems.

The most obvious visible change has been the very muddy appearance of Merri Creek. Erosion in rural areas and from new housing developments has brought vast amounts of sediment into the creek. MCMC and *Waterwatch* community monitors have measured this muddiness (turbidity) at levels so extreme that the State guidelines consider could cause ecosystem damage.

In January 2011, measurements also showed levels of phosphorus in lower Merri Creek, up to 10 times higher than the levels recorded in October 2010. Much of the phosphorus is bound to sediment from eroded soil.

This sediment clogs the gills of fish and aquatic invertebrates (waterbugs) and it also stops sunlight penetrating the water, so aquatic plants are unable to photosynthesise.

The other very visible impact to the creek is the amount of rubbish washed into it from litter on streets, carparks, sporting venues etc. Stormwater runoff which brings



litter to the creek also washes in other pollutants, such as oils and grease, heavy metals and nitrogen, from roads and roofs.

On the positive side, previously dry wetlands have filled up, providing great habitat for waterbugs and frogs.

MCMC field observations have noted more tadpoles and frogs calling and increased numbers and species of damsel and dragonflies.

Photo shows Merri Creek flooding over the shared path under the bridge at Blyth St Brunswick after heavy rain on 12th April this year.



Planting back from the edge

The Merri Shared Trail Review (2007) identified several potential conflicts between re-vegetation and the needs of path users. Since then, MCMC has tried to reduce hazards caused by vegetation too close to pathways.

This year, several hundred metres of shared trail will be planted with a mix of durable, low-growing indigenous grasses, wildflowers and ground-covers. This will provide robust and diverse native vegetation while maintaining path clearances and viewlines. You can help establish these plants at Clara St and Parkview Ave near CERES in Brunswick, Broadhurst Ave in Reservoir, and Galada Tamboore in Campbellfield.

Major community plantings will also be held at Edwardes Lake in Reservoir, Bababi Marring (Cooper St) grassland in Campbellfield and the parkland south of Rushall Station in North Fitzroy. Volunteers can also deepen their knowledge with two further Weeding Workshops at Merri Park Wetland in Northcote.

Get your gloves on and help us plant over 20,000 indigenous plants at the community planting events scheduled in the Merri corridor on most weekends from May to August (*See the calendar at www.mcmc.org.au*)

New staff: MCMC's Parkland Management Team welcomes Emily Jordan as an ongoing team member.

Newsflash: Merri win at VCAT

The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal recently rejected a proposal for three three-storey townhouses next to Merri Creek in Northcote. VCAT accepted key arguments submitted by MCMC and recognised the need to protect the visual character of the creek.

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.* Please make cheques out to Merri Creek Environment Fund and send to MCMC, 2 Lee Street, East Brunswick, 3057, or drop in a cash donation (sorry, no credit card facilities) or contact us to arrange a direct deposit.

Merri Creek Management Committee produces these quarterly newsletters for the wider community in the Merri Creek catchment. You can download this in colour from our website (see below) or contact Ray Radford for a hardcopy at:

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