

Merri News

NOVEMBER 2007

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

Supporting native fauna in a changing climate

Do you ever wonder what MCMC is doing about climate change? Planting thousands of trees for carbon uptake? Like everyone, we have considered how we might change our work to minimise carbon dioxide levels. MCMC is purchasing wind generated electricity, ensuring energy efficiency is maximised and many staff ride to work (*see the Ride to Work Day photo*). However, our strongest impact on mitigating the effects of climate change may result from doing what we have always done: revegetation and restoration of remnants along Merri waterways.

Improving habitat corridors will strengthen the resilience capacity of the wildlife populations and help flora and fauna to survive in a rapidly changing environment.

In spring, Merri Creek parkland's role as a habitat corridor becomes very apparent. September saw the return of summer breeding species such as Brown and Rufous Songlarks, Cuckoos (Horsefield's, Pallid and Fan-tailed), White-winged trillers, Rufous Whistlers and Olive-backed Orioles. Birds on passage to breeding areas further south such as the Blue-winged parrots were noticed following the open spaces. Also, inland birds seek refuge from drought during spring, including White-browed Woodswallows. We are likely to see more birds seeking areas of relatively moist environments where they can survive until conditions improve.

Photo: Most of the MCMC staff who rode to work on *National Ride to Work Day*, 17 October (four other riders are missing from the photo). 85% of the MCMC staff participated in the ride.

Along the Merri, habitat corridors are usually strengthened by establishing as much of the original vegetation cover as is practical. Habitat corridors can also be strengthened by providing habitat refuge in the urban surrounds. Consider the following to make your garden a welcoming 'stepping stone' for travelling wildlife:

- Migrating and vagrant wildlife are at increased risk from predators as they will be unfamiliar with safe hiding spots. Providing dense shrubberies that can provide refuge from local birds of prey is helpful for the vulnerable visitors.
- Cat containment can also make our suburbs less hostile to moving animals.
- Planting indigenous plants that foster plentiful insect life is very important. Gardens dominated by nectar-bearing Grevilleas, gums and Banksias will encourage an over-abundance of tough resident Honeyeaters that give migrant species a hard time.
- Versatile indigenous species that will foster insect life and look great in the garden include Sweet Bursaria, Tree Violet and Lightwood. These also provide blossom, berries and seed in summer when migrant species are often present.



Talk about litter reduction

During 2007 MCMC has been working with Darebin City Council and a number of other stakeholders to reduce litter in Merri Park, Northcote. Three meetings have been held for people to share their experiences about how they use the park and how they manage to be responsible for litter.

The process has revealed that many park users come from far and wide to participate in seasonal sports competitions, while others are regular visitors, such as students from Northcote High School and nearby residents. By coming together they've become more aware of each other's initiatives in caring for the area.

All stakeholders are preparing to co-sign a Memorandum of Understanding to continue their shared focus and responsibility for Merri Park.

Going Out on a Limb to learn about local areas



We're pleased to announce that The Ian Potter Foundation is supporting a new MCMC program (2007 to 2008) called *Out on a Limb*. Through this program we will work with eight schools to develop local catchment awareness.

Students will be offered a range of activities during visits to their schools and will also be taken by bus to tour local areas of conservation significance.

**For upcoming MCMC Community Events
See MCMC website: www.mcmc.com.au**

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.

Community Engagement: A key grassland conservation action

There was standing room only at MCMC's Urban Grasslands and Community Engagement Seminar in September. The seminar offered an overview of techniques for community interaction and had the goal of involving more of the diverse neighbours of urban native grasslands in their conservation.

MCMC and other local grassland managers are keenly aware that Victorian Volcanic Plains Grasslands are Australia's most threatened ecosystem. However, the public is largely unaware of the biodiversity treasure at their doorstep.

How can we share these grassland treasures with local communities? How can we find the local allies needed to value and protect our precious grasslands? These questions were on the tongues of the 46 keen participants at the seminar which was funded by the Natural Heritage Trust through the *Northern Nature – Creek Connections* project. Given the wide geographic spread of attendees it also proved a lively networking forum.

In the morning, four speakers clearly identified the importance and complexity of community engagement, while the afternoon's workshop session encouraged groups to explore issues and plan actions.

The participants heard that well resourced, ongoing and customised engagement programs are necessary to reach diverse communities. The value of respecting the perspectives of the community was clearly demonstrated.

The seminar was a significant undertaking for MCMC and it used our recently acquired data projector and the services of the innovative 'Zing' system that linked the audience in a lively electronic version of the old 'butcher's-paper' workshop. The positive feedback suggests that expertise in this field is eagerly sought. We hope to see more thoughtful and effective projects to engage the community begin to emerge in coming years.



Photo: Some of the seminar participants inspect the nearby native grassland at Malcolm Creek Craigieburn.



A glimpse of the nightlife

During October nocturnal animals around Merri Creek in Northcote and Edwardes Lake in Reservoir woke to the sound of music and chatter of unusually large numbers of people out at night. People were out and about in response to Darebin City Council's invitation to join in two community *Safety Night Strolls*. These annual strolls extend people's experience of public parks and their natural features. MCMC attended the evenings with information about local animals and free animal badges for walkers.

About 90 people joined in the *Merri Creek Safety Stroll* passing the Merri Park Wetlands Northcote on a very mild spring evening. Later in the week about 120 people attended the *Edwardes Lake Safety Stroll*, many wearing MCMC's badges featuring dragon flies, brush tailed possums, echidnas and little pied cormorants which were observed in the twilight at Edwardes Lake, Reservoir. Locals, including attending police and fire brigades, were amazed about the variety of animals that live in and around Merri Creek.

The strolls provide a chance for the community to connect with local natural areas as well as each other. People talked of their encounters or sightings of local fauna and revealed their connection with these special areas.

Court order funds environmental works

On 27 September 2007, at Broadmeadows Magistrates' Court, Onesteel MBS Pty Ltd pleaded guilty to causing an environmental hazard charge brought by the Environment Protection Authority in relation to the discharge of an estimated 3,000 litres of chromic acid from its premises at Cliffords Road Somerton in late October 2005.

The Court, without convicting Onesteel MBS Pty Ltd, ordered it to pay \$75,000 to MCMC for the *Streets and Streams* project which involves community education on stormwater impact via guided walks, display materials and electronic and printed information packages, as well as stormwater monitoring work and habitat restoration at four sites along Merri Creek: Rushwood Reserve Craigieburn, Moomba Park Fawkner, Merri Park Wetland Northcote, and Hall Reserve Wetland Clifton Hill.

The discharge resulted from an overflow of chromic acid when the power and air supply was turned off for the Melbourne Cup weekend in 2005. The secondary containment bund also failed to contain the overflow and the chromic acid entered the stormwater drains. Luckily, it did not reach Merri Creek but was contained in a Melbourne Water sediment basin on the west side of Hume Highway.

Onesteel MBS Pty Ltd has since made appropriate changes to prevent a recurrence of this incident.

**Report any pollution you see to the
EPA Pollution Watch Hotline
Phone: 9695 2777**

The EPA depends on reports from the public to clean-up pollution, to prevent further problems and to penalise guilty parties.

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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