

Merri News

AUGUST 2007

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

First Bilingual Park Guides Course is big success

MCMC played a central role in the development of Victoria's first Bilingual Parks Guides course, a 10-week program accredited by the Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT). The enthusiastic graduates of the course represent eleven different cultural groups and speak more than seven languages. Ranging in age from early 20's to 70's with an almost even gender balance, the graduates are keen to continue learning about Victoria's environment and to conduct their own programs for community groups from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Most of the course participants were from the community sector, with two from natural resource management areas. Linking these two sectors proved a very effective way to conduct community engagement programs about the parks and waterways of Melbourne's northern suburbs.

The success of the project was due to MCMC's partnership with the City of Whittlesea, NMIT, Parks Victoria and the *Go for Your Life* program, the Office of Women at the Department for Victorian Communities, with support also from the Department of Sustainability & Environment.

For more information about the course and the group, contact Dimi Bouzalas at MCMC, phone: 9380 8199.



Course participants on a field trip, guided by Graham Dear, City of Whittlesea Parks Assets and Community Programs Coordinator, (at right) and Roger MacRaid, City Wide Parks Care (left rear).

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

Merri's valley of secrets

While walking or cycling along Merri Creek you may be aware of the indigenous plantings, constructed wetlands and the animal life of the creek corridor. But there is an underlying element to this - the Merri valley contains many millions of years of history and secrets.

Over 400 million years ago the sea covering this area receded. It left behind a

layer of yellowish marine siltstone and sandstone rocks. Around 65 million years ago non-marine sediments left a sandy layer behind. Over time the ancestral valley of the Merri Creek developed, eroding through these sediments.

Then, from 0.8 to 4.6 to million years ago volcanoes such as Hayes Hill (about 5km east of Donnybrook) and Mt Fraser (near Beveridge) erupted, sending lava on an epic journey along the ancestral valleys of the Merri and Darebin Creeks and into the valley of the Yarra River as far as the CBD.



Our modern day Merri Creek was formed over many years, by incising through the lava surface. One of the many sites of geological interest along the Merri valley is the rocky cliff face on the eastern side of Merri Creek visible from the shared path in Clifton Hill (shown at left). City of Yarra primary school students will explore the site as part of MCMC's *Northern Nature Creek Connections* program funded by the Natural Heritage Trust.

The cliff face is a sculptural revelation. Its tall, cracked (or jointed) basalt columns, formed by cooling lava, are clearly visible and the weathering evident in the rocky ripples mid-stream where columns have collapsed and tumbled into the stream. Some of the vertical fractures at the top of the cliff appear to be leaning, forming an amazing radial pattern.

But you don't have to be a primary school student to explore the fascinating secrets of the Merri valley! Next time you're in the area see what you can observe in the rocky escarpment features along the way.

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.

A cheeky visitor finds a refuge

The tuneful whistles and burbling chuckles of a pair of Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters have enlivened the morning chorus along the Merri in Fawkner for several weeks this winter. Although common to inland Australia, this species is a rare visitor to Melbourne.

The Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater has been identified as one that might extend its range southwards, so it may be one of the few species that can readily adapt to climate change.

Along the Merri Creek Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters feed on the fruits of the native Kangaroo Apple (at right) and are fond of native Mistletoe berries. They have also been feasting on the fruit of several large shrubs of African Boxthorn. Boxthorn smothers and out-competes indigenous vegetation, harbours rabbits and even promotes high fox numbers (foxes eat Blackberry and Boxthorn).



Other creek animals that are nourished or sheltered by exotic woody weeds include Swamp Wallabies (love the cover

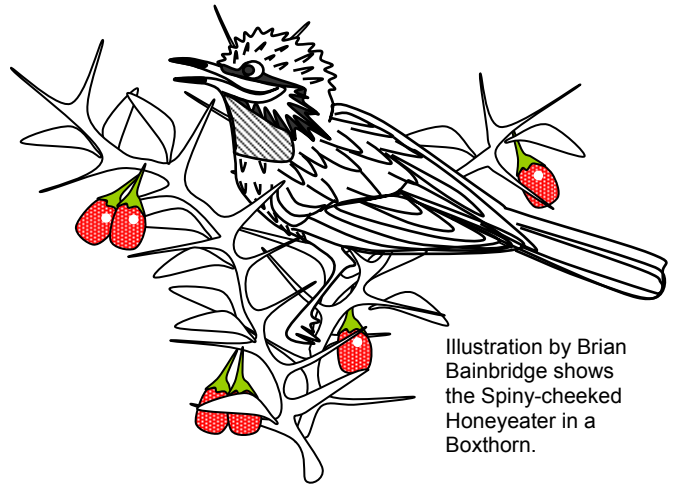


Illustration by Brian Bainbridge shows the Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater in a Boxthorn.

provided by Gorse), Silvereyes (snack on fruits of Blackberry and Boxthorns), and New Holland Honey-eaters (sip Boxthorn nectar).

How do we cater for our Spiny-cheeked visitor and other creek animals while ridding the creek of such weeds? The Friends of Merri Creek's project *Black & Blue*, funded by Melbourne Water's Community Grants Program, will plant suitable indigenous shrub species into escarpments where woody weeds such as Blackberry, Boxthorn and Gorse are being removed.

The project name *Black & Blue* refers to the association of Superb Blue Wren colonies with exotic Blackberry thickets.

The final *Black & Blue* planting is on August 12 near Jukes Rd, Fawkner at 10am, with a free barbecue afterwards.

Restoration on the Merri from the Yarra to the source

Grants and contracts to MCMC and Friends of Merri Creek have funded a busy winter of projects along the Merri waterways. Some of this can be seen from the Merri path, but much of the action is beyond the creek's urban reaches.

New wetlands in Hall Reserve, Clifton Hill: In early July, volunteers and MCMC staff planted over 3000 plants at this new rain garden and wetland, near Walker St, Clifton Hill.

Merri Park wetlands, Northcote has been filtering the Sumner Estate's stormwater since 1999 and, in July, Darebin Council gave the pond which collects the bulk of the sediment a much needed cleanout. Landcare/CitiPower is funding a community planting at the site on September 9.

Edgars Creek, North Coburg: MCMC has supported the Friends of Edgars Creek to gain a grant and conducted the enthusiastic group's first planting in May.

Imaroo St escarpment, Fawkner: Transformation of this site continues and it has expanded to over two hectares with help from Spicers Paper. Works involve freeing remnant shrubs from weeds and planting escarpment shrubs.

Various other sites in Fawkner: Fencing, weed control, boulder placement, school activities, mulching and lots of community planting has made big improvements to sites in Fawkner after a summer of drought and wildfire.

Central Creek Grassland, Reservoir: The unique plants found at this site in moist depressions (called 'gilgais') have received special attention with help from volunteers.

Cooper St Grassland, Campbellfield: Unfortunately, the construction of a drainage line for a nearby development destroyed an established revegetation plot. This will be replanted in future months. Nearby weed removal and planting will develop valuable habitat.

Beveridge to Wallan rail reserve is a significant area for biodiversity of Western Basalt Plains Grassland and Grassy Wetland. Grants and contracts with Dept of Sustainability & Environment and Merriang District Landcare Group have funded MCMC to work in this area, especially on weed control after ecological burns. The landowner, VicTrack, has recently moved to protect the area from illegal vehicle access with a fence and lockable gate.

Swamp in Beveridge Recreational Reserve: MCMC is providing management advice for this spring-fed swamp (a fragment of the larger swamps that were once widespread).

Wallan Community Park: MCMC completed a vegetation management plan for this park on Wallan Creek, a major headwater tributary of the Merri. We've also developed weed identification bookmarks, and ran a series of weeding workshops with the Friends of Wallan Creek.

These projects have been funded variously by Melbourne Water Community Grants, Darebin City Council, Moreland City Council, Yarra City Council, Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority, SP AusNet, Landcare Australia, the federal Natural Heritage Trust, Environment Protection Authority, and Yarra Valley Water.

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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