

Merri News

May 2007

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

A Merri win at VCAT

Merri Creek Management Committee is delighted with a recent decision by VCAT (Victorian Civil & Administrative Tribunal) to reject a development in Northcote.

MCMC and local residents vigorously objected to the proposal for four 2-storey townhouses at 1 Elizabeth Street in Northcote (off St Georges Road, south of Northcote High School). Both groups appealed at VCAT against Darebin Council's decision to grant a planning permit.

The proposed development projected beyond the break of slope on the site and extended well forward into a secluded part of the creek corridor. The VCAT report described the proposal as "...not an acceptable response to the site context" and as "highly intrusive".

The decision has confirmed the importance of the ESO (Environmental Significance Overlay) planning scheme control that seeks to protect and enhance the significant values of the Merri Creek. It's a welcome win for all those who love the creek and have worked tirelessly over the years to protect the area. It also sends a very clear message to developers that the creek valley is off limits.

Community love their lake

During Darebin Council's recent Community and Kite Festival held at Edwardes Lake Park in Reservoir, MCMC staff members were swamped by a continual stream of excited local people captivated with Edwardes Lake. With a level of interest in Edwardes Lake never seen before, over three hundred people participated in bug identification and water chemistry activities. People spoke about swimming and fishing in the lake years ago and their dream of a time when lake improvements might allow those activities again.



Meanwhile, the lake is benefiting from strong local interest as people join in regular Frogwatch, litter collection and planting activities. Edwardes Lake means a great deal to the community and many people clearly treasure the 26 hectare park.

Above: MCMC's Environment Education Officer, Jane Bevelander, prepares for public events such as the annual Darebin Festival by collecting a sample of macroinvertebrates for people to identify.

It's a blast!

Campbellfield Heights Primary School students have launched a new MCMC program, *Volcanoes Rock!* They explored nearby Galada Tamboore which shows volcanic activity dating back five million years.

Students were astounded to learn that hot lava flowed through the area where they now stood and that the basalt rocks around them are the remains of ancient lava flow. They looked north towards the volcanoes of the Merri Catchment such as Mt Ridley, Bald Hill and Mt Fraser.



Walking through the grasslands and into the creek valley they noticed 'air bubbles' in the basalt rocks that formed in the cooling lava. They saw that Merri Creek had slowly 'cut' into the lava and exposed the rocky escarpment which forms the perfect habitat today for insects, small animals and birds of prey.

Later, the students travelled five million years back in time creating a make believe lava flow of their own using model volcanoes. This is when the students thought for sure that *Volcanoes Rock!*

This project is a part of the Natural Heritage Trust funded *Northern Nature – Creek Connections* project. This project supports communities caring for the environment of the Moonee Ponds, Merri and Darebin Creeks and the special ecological communities associated with this eastern-most part of the Victorian Volcanic Plains bioregion.

Above: Students use model volcanoes at Galada Tamboore to replicate lava flows of days gone by.

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).

Dry season, plenty of action

In spite of drought conditions there's a great deal going on out there!

Dry season planting – Sedges for Edges

Bringing back a diverse mix of local stream-side rushes and sedges to replace a dense, weedy tangle is the aim of the Friends of Merri Creek *Sedges for Edges* project funded by an Australian Government Community Water Grant.

Dry season planting is viable along moist creek edges. Appropriate indigenous plant species quickly develop strong roots which then act to secure stream banks against future rain and erosion. Creek edges are often swamped by an aggressive mix of weeds after removal of Willows and Desert Ash. Monocultures of the dreaded Tradescantia (Wandering Creeper), rampant Creeping Buttercup and appropriately named 'Common Mugwort' can take over the flats and rocky platforms where local plants once grew.



The Fitzroy, Preston and Coburg Sedges for Edges planting events were funded by a Friends of Merri Creek Community Water Grant.

Community cares for local areas

The Natural Heritage Trust funded *Northern Nature Creek Connections* project has helped MCMC work with the public to 'spot' the difference between weeds and indigenous plants. On-site advice at Merri Park Wetlands, Northcote and Rushall Reserve, North Fitzroy focussed on community participation in maintaining local natural areas.

Mayflies on the move

A sign of improved in-stream conditions has come in the form of a small, pollution-sensitive waterbug, the Baetid mayfly nymph. In recent years the mayfly has only been recorded in more northerly, less polluted, areas of Merri Creek. It is thought that decreased polluted stormwater runoff (due to low rainfall) has enabled this insect to move into southerly parts of the Merri.

It was collected recently by the community water quality monitoring group *Friends of Merri Creek Streamteam* at St. Georges Road in Northcote and later during the *Sedges for Edges* planting day near Rushall Station in Fitzroy.

You might like to join us

Final planting of *Sedges for Edges* is on 26th August at Aitken Creek, Craigieburn. To help monitor our ever-changing creek life, call Greg Woodward at MCMC on 9380 8199 or check the Friends of Merri Creek website www.vicnet.net.au/~fomc for Streamteam activities.

Splendid amongst the rushes

The Splendid Ochre Butterfly (aka *Symmomus Skipper*) has been sighted in Phillips Reserve, East Brunswick. It is a medium sized, moth-like butterfly with gold and chocolate markings (not to be confused with common garden 'skippers' which are tiny fingernail-sized insects).

Locally, this butterfly's caterpillars feed exclusively on the leaves of Spiny-headed Mat-rush, a hardy tussock that favours creek banks and rocky outcrops. Prior to revegetation works, this plant had been virtually eradicated from a fifteen kilometre stretch of the creek between Yarra Bend Park and Galada Tamboore in Campbellfield.



Fortunately, Spiny-headed Mat-rush is one of the easiest understorey plants to establish and maintain. It has been planted in the thousands through Friends of Merri Creek, MCMC, VicRoads and Melbourne Water projects as well as by local councils and residents over the last twenty years.

When sighted, the Splendid Ochre Butterfly was patrolling a dense patch of Spiny-headed Mat-rush in East Brunswick. This was planted by Melbourne Water three years ago in what was formerly a willow-infested weedscape. The butterfly was spotted darting across Merri Creek towards Northcote's Merri Park. The species has possibly reached East Brunswick in stages, establishing along the many revegetation beds linking it to 'core habitat' at Yarra Bend.

Similar increases in this butterfly's range and numbers have been noted in Sydney. Exciting proof that fauna can re-establish along with the habitat that they rely on!



Easing the risk

Trees have recently been removed or pruned by SP AusNet within the power easements at Kirkdale Street Park in East Brunswick and at Edgars Creek Reserve in East Coburg. MCMC regrets the loss of mature trees within power easements along Merri Creek (that were established by the community over two decades) but accepts that the removals are unavoidable because of safety issues. The works were guided by an SP AusNet Vegetation Management Plan which considers the safe and reliable supply of electricity in relation to landscape management. (Trees above certain heights can lead to dangerous arcing which can directly threaten people and animals in the immediate vicinity, leading to fires and serious cuts in power supply.)

Over 2,500 indigenous shrubs and ground storey species will be planted at Kirkdale Street Park at a community planting day on Sunday 5th August. The new plantings will suit the area as they are low in height and comprise species that have been significantly depleted in the area.

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

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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