

Merri News

NOVEMBER 2010

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

Students clued in to nature

MCMC recently completed another exciting new project, *Catchment Clues Course*, funded by the Myer Foundation.

Over eight sessions, MCMC worked with Lakeside Secondary College and St. Gabriel's Primary in Reservoir, guiding students from each school to create a *Catchment Clues Course* for the other school to complete. The course clues included measurements, compass readings, photographs, plant prints and more.

On their first excursion, Lakeside Secondary students visited Edwardes Lake, Reservoir, and St. Gabriel's visited Galada Tamboore, Campbellfield. There they explored and collected information to create clues about the natural area for the other school to follow. Students from both schools then enjoyed treasure hunts following the other school's clues.

Students said "you can feel the plants, which you can't do if you're learning out of a book" and "you can experience it without the teacher telling you – we had clues to work it out".



Photo: Year 7 Lakeside Secondary students after completing the *Catchment Clues Course* that was designed by St Gabriel's Primary School out at Galada Tamboore. They are displaying a representation of the area that they all helped create.

Member group wins Landcare award

Congratulations to Friends of Merri Creek (FoMC), for winning the Port Phillip and Westernport Landcare Award in the category *Community Group Caring for Public Land*.

According to the judges: "The Friends of Merri Creek have shown great leadership and innovation in regards to protecting and enhancing the environs of Merri Creek."

This Award is particularly special for the urban-based FoMC, as Landcare is associated with rural groups.

Photo: Dr Kate Auty, Victoria's Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, presents the Landcare award to Friends of Merri Creek President, David Redfean.



Platypus seen in Merri Creek

On 16 September, MCMC Administration Officer, Ray Radford, was lucky enough to see a platypus about 30cm long in the Thornbury/Coburg area of Merri Creek. This received front page coverage in the *Moreland Leader* and *Northcote Leader* newspapers as well as an interview on ABC radio 774.

Ray went to look after two community reports from the same site and he was able to watch the platypus for 20 minutes while it hunted, swam, went in and out of its refuge and even had a scratch while on a rock.

Although MCMC has received other reports of platypus sightings, Geoff Williams, from the Australian Platypus Conservancy, said: "As far as we are concerned, this is the first really confirmed record for Merri Creek itself since the Australian Platypus Conservancy conducted trapping surveys (with negative results) in 1995."

Geoff thinks that this platypus could either be an adult male travelling in search of potential mates, or more likely (because of the small size), a young animal from last summer's breeding season looking for vacant territories from farther upstream in the Yarra system. Tributaries, like Merri Creek, would have more appeal than normal due to the recent high water flows.

If you site a platypus or a water rat, please report it to the Australian Platypus Conservancy through the link on their website: www.platypus.asn.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.

Help the Yam Daisy to return

If you lived in Melbourne 200 years ago what would you have for dinner? Instead of potatoes, rice or pasta, you would probably be eating the roots of a dandelion-like plant. Until 1836 the swollen roots of 'Murnong' were a staple food of the Wurundjeri, traditional custodians of this part of Melbourne. They tended and harvested large patches across the volcanic plains. However the thousands of sheep released onto the grassy plains by Melbourne's early graziers devoured the plant's luscious leaves and roots, annihilating populations. Surviving plants dwindled under rabbits and the loss of Aboriginal land management practices that had sustained the daisy population for thousands of years.

There are three kinds of Murnong or 'Yam daisy' as it was called by Europeans. The rarest is the 'Plains Yam Daisy' which occupies swampy patches of the Volcanic Plains. Other kinds are found in alpine and foothill regions. In the Merri Creek valley, only a handful of small populations of Plains Yam Daisy remain. Given the changes of the last 174 years, it is not yet clear how to maintain healthy populations in native grassland reserves. This winter, a project to re-learn how to sustain this species in local remnant grasslands began.

Merri Creek Management Committee invites people to volunteer to help us learn how the local plants are surviving and reproducing. Volunteers can monitor 20 plants reintroduced to Ngarri-djarrang (Central Creek) Grassland Reserve in Reservoir, and a parent



population further north in the Merri Creek valley. The Victorian National Parks Association 'NatureWatch' program is assisting with the project.

Results from this monitoring will help design a larger reintroduction program in 2011 with the aim of having several thriving, secure populations under active management in native grasslands in the region. The information will be available to assist conservation of this vulnerable species elsewhere in Victoria.

If you're interested, ring Brian at MCMC on 9380 8199.

Photo: Steve Mueck (Biosis consultant), Ada Nano (VNPA NatureWatch Coordinator) and Brian Bainbridge (MCMC) get wet establishing monitoring sites of Plains Yam Daisy in September.

Indigenous connections

Two new MCMC projects recognise the Merri's cultural and ecological heritage: *Together by the Merri* (funded by The Ian Potter Foundation) and *Indigenous, Indigenous* (funded by the International



Year of Biodiversity). Both projects help to improve the connections between Aboriginal people and natural areas in the Merri catchment, while also increasing community awareness of cultural heritage.

So far these projects have supported visits to Galada Tamboore in Campbellfield with Karen Lovett and Auntie Maureen Simpson, who are Indigenous arts teachers at the Gunung-Willam-Balluk Indigenous Learning Centre in Broadmeadows, and Bronwyn Razem, a distinguished Gunditjmara artist.

MCMC is also working with the Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council to develop an Aboriginal Food and Fibre garden at the Merri Yarra confluence.

Photo: Bronwyn Razem and her daughter Amanda were captivated by the serenity and the sense of remoteness at Galada Tamboore.

Seeding the Future recognised

Judy Allen's DVD, on seed identification, collection and storage, *Seeding the Future*, produced in collaboration with MCMC, is being applauded as an important teaching tool around Australia.

This year, Judy's work has been duly recognised by becoming a Finalist in the Port Phillip & Westernport Landcare Awards in the category *Individual Caring for Public Land*, and also in the Banksia Foundation's *Land & Biodiversity Category*. Congratulations Judy.

Contact MCMC for copies of the DVD, tel: 9380 8199.

More funding and staff changes

Funding: The Australian Government's 2010-11 Caring for our Country initiative has granted MCMC \$290,940 over three years to improve ecological values at five critically endangered Native Grassland and Grassy Eucalypt Woodland sites in the Merri Corridor from Wollert to Reservoir.



Staff: MCMC is delighted that Amy O'Dell, Jim Brien, and Michael Longmore have accepted ongoing positions with the Parkland Management Team, which now has 13 permanent team members.

For upcoming community events see the MCMC website: www.mcmc.org.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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