

Merri News

MAY 2010

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

Fire leads to expanded grassland

In January 2007, a fire set by vandals completely burnt a three-hectare remnant grassland at Bababi Djinanang (Wurundjeri for "mother's foot") at Jukes Rd, Fawkner. It also burnt the surrounding weedy scrub and revegetation plus over 700 metres of rabbit-proof fence.

While healthy grasslands need fires, this fire was quite harmful and less mobile animals like lizards may never re-colonise this site. During planned ecological burns, two-thirds of the site is left unburnt as a fauna refuge.

However, MCMC and Moreland City Council have turned this disastrous fire into a win for the grassland. A replacement fence now includes formerly unmanaged shrubby thickets and mown parkland, increasing the grassland habitat by over a hectare (25%).

Although this extra area was previously dismissed as being degraded, it is responding well to restoration efforts and is now flourishing, with healthy stands of Spear grass, Kangaroo grass and wildflowers. It now augments grassland habitat by buffering the high quality area where the grasses and wildflowers have managed to rapidly recover after the fire.

Friends of Merri Creek bird surveys are finding that wrens, cuckoos and other small birds are already colonising the shrubs that were planted to replace weeds. There has also been increased activity by vulnerable ground nesting birds such as the Rufous Songlark, Australasian Pipits and Brown Quail.



A ground-nesting female Rufous Songlark, at Bababi Djinanang.

Join in the next Merri bird survey on Sunday 16 May, 8.45am – meet at the end of Jukes Rd Fawkner.

For upcoming community events and the 2008-2009 MCMC Annual Report, see the MCMC website: www.mcmc.org.au



A Licence to Frog

MCMC has recently added a Southern Brown Tree Frog (*Litoria ewingi*) to our staff. It is well taken care of with branches to climb, water to wade in and crickets to eat. The Southern Brown Tree Frog, soon to be joined by other local species, is a medium sized frog and an agile climber. It spends most of the day hidden in a quiet, dark, moist place and is usually the first species to be found in backyard frog gardens.

The males make a high pitched loud mating call 'creeee creee creee creee' all year round. MCMC has obtained a wildlife demonstrator's licence which means that we are able to take frogs out to school and community groups. We have noticed through our *Waterwatch* program that close encounters with local wildlife create a sense of wonder and experience that will be remembered.

If you are interested in seeing live frogs as a part of an education session please contact Jane Bevelander on 9380 8199 or jane@mcmc.org.au.

A student from Pascoe Vale Primary School has an encounter of the frog kind in the hands of MCMC's Jane Bevelander.

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.



Ecological burns

In late March – early April MCMC burnt native grasslands at Ngarri-djarrang (Central Creek) Reservoir (*photo*), at Bababi Djinanang (Jukes Rd) Fawkner, and at three reserves in the new Aurora estate, Nth Epping.

Ecological burns rejuvenate native grasses and wildflowers, and reduce the possibility of wildfire. Burns only proceed under certain weather conditions, so we don't know the exact day of the burn in advance.

Permits are obtained from relevant Councils for all burns and firebreaks are cut to contain the fire.

Merri is muddy again

The Merri Creek once again turned a muddy brown colour after heavy rain over the Labour Day weekend. It previously happened after heavy rains in early January.

The mud appears to be from headwater areas, north of Donnybrook, where parts of the Merri and its tributaries flow through light coloured sedimentary rock (rather than basalt typical of most of the Merri catchment).

Investigations after the first incident show that a number of development sites in the north of the catchment had inadequate erosion control and appear responsible for a sizeable portion of the problem. Some of the sediment may also come from eroded creek banks and gully erosion in the upper catchment.

MCMC assists bushfire relief

MCMC is controlling weeds for the Kinglake Landcare Group as part of our donation to post-bushfire restoration. The works involve a round of Blackberry control, followed later in the year by control of woody weeds, such as Broom and Holly, along the modestly named Number Two Creek (headwaters of Mountain Creek, part of the Goulburn catchment). We will follow this up next year with more woody weed control.

To help revegetate some of the areas affected by the bushfires, contact Tara Sanders at Parks Victoria at tsanders@parks.vic.gov.au or phone 5772 0290.

More funding and more staff

MCMC will implement two riparian and one grassland restoration projects using grant funds in 2010 to 2011.

The two riparian projects are funded by Melbourne Water's Community Grants program:

- To re-establish and strengthen vegetation near Rushall Station, North Fitzroy. This project will involve an indigenous cultural event and planting of traditional food plants in spring 2010.
- To control riparian weeds and replace with local shrubs along the length of Merri Creek in Bababi Marning (Cooper St Grasslands) in Campbellfield.

Friends of Merri Creek has employed MCMC to implement its Australian Government *Caring for Our Country* grant: to extend and strengthen restoration of Critically Endangered Grasslands at Bababi Djinanang (Jukes Rd, Fawkner).

Staff: Will Parker and David Woods have joined our permanent staff; Arthur McManus is a new temporary staff member and Clinton Hallissey a two year trainee.

A belated farewell to Alex Davern, who has taken up full time study after five years at MCMC, most recently as the Parkland Management Team Supervisor.

Compassionate Award to MCMC

On 23 March, MCMC was one of 17 employers to receive a 2010 Compassionate Employer Recognition Award from *The Compassionate Friends Victoria*.

We were honoured for showing extraordinary compassion in the workplace after a staff member lost a child to cancer in 2004.

MCMC was seen as an extremely flexible employer, even allowed colleagues to give their support by donating their sick leave.

Above: MCMC Treasurer, Allie Dawe and Manager Luisa Macmillan accept the Compassionate Employer Recognition Award.



Singing for the Merri

Join in the fun and learn about restoration of the Merri Creek when the Rogues Choir and a range of community musicians raise funds for MCMC.

Friday 18 June, 7pm, Northcote Uniting Church Hall 250 High St Northcote. Check our website for details.

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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