

Flora and fauna report 2018-19

There were 65 sightings recorded in the fauna book and online reporting tool between October 2018 and September 2019.

A particularly interesting sighting was a Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua*) in the stretch of Merri Creek between St George's Rd, North Fitzroy and Merri Park, Northcote. The Owl was observed roosting by numerous people in late April and early May 2019. Only two other records of Powerful Owls are known from the Merri catchment – one along Malcolm Creek, Craigieburn in 2012 and another at Yarra Bend Park in 2014. However, the Owls have been present for a number of years further up the Yarra River at Ivanhoe. This Owl may have ventured out from the Ivanhoe population in search of new territory. While roosting spots and food sources (possums) are plentiful in this part of Merri Creek, the deep hollows the Owls need for breeding do not presently exist, so it is unlikely this Owl will hang around in the longer term.



A Powerful Owl perched in a peppercorn tree in North Fitzroy. Photo: Ann McGregor.

Smaller hollow-using species are now being catered for at Merri Park, Northcote through MCMC's pilot nest box program. Twenty nest boxes, designed for microbats and small birds, were installed throughout Merri Park in September 2019, along with 12 habitat logs. The utilisation of these nest boxes by local fauna will be closely followed at a number of monitoring events throughout the coming spring and summer.

A lone Swamp Wallaby (*Wallabia bicolor*) appears to have taken up residence in the Merri Park vicinity. The animal was first spotted in January 2019 on the creek bank opposite CERES, and has been frequently sighted throughout the year, ranging between the Harding St-Kendall St footbridge in Coburg/Preston and Creek Parade in Westgarth. A small group of urban Swamp Wallabies have been a permanent fixture for several decades about 5km upstream in the Fawkner/Reservoir area and occasionally venture as far south as Coburg Lake. Swamp wallabies also persist along the Yarra between Ivanhoe and Kew. Mature understorey

revegetation in the lower Merri may be helping wallabies to radiate out from these known hotspots. MCMC's Ecological Restoration Team have two new projects planned for 2020 to improve connectivity of Swamp Wallaby habitat between these hotspots and encourage more Wallabies into the area.

At Moomba Park in Fawkner, MCMC Ecological Restoration Team members were excited to [hear Growling Grass Frogs \(*Litoria raniformis*\) calling](#) in January 2019, with at least 6 frogs heard calling in different sections of the creek. The City of Darebin bush crew also heard Growling Grass Frog calls a few days later from the Reservoir side, a kilometre further downstream. This endangered species has not been recorded in this part of the Merri for many decades, with the nearest known population approximately 2km north at Galada Tamboore.

It's unlikely that the frogs will remain in the Fawkner area for long, as little adequate habitat remains and the frogs are vulnerable to being washed away after heavy rains. However, the City of Moreland already have plans to construct wetlands in the vicinity of the Fawkner sighting, and may now incorporate Growling Grass Frog habitat into the wetland design. This may allow frogs to remain in the area in the longer term.

Growling Grass Frogs calls were also heard this year by Ecological Restoration Team members along Curly Sedge Creek in Galgi Ngarrk/Craigieburn Grassland Nature Conservation Reserve, and at Galada Tamboore near Barry Rd, Campbellfield – a welcome sign after the ingress of fire water into that section of the creek from a factory fire in late 2018.

Three locally-rare grassland herb species were reintroduced into grasslands in Fawkner, Reservoir and Thomastown, using seed

produced by volunteers through Friends of Merri Creek's *Secret Seven* project. Many of the directly-sown plots have germinated well, with some of the sown Plains Yam Daisies (*Microseris scapigera*) having reached the flowering stage. *In situ* seed production areas for a further 6 species have since been set up by the team at Bababi Djinanang and Moomba Park in Fawkner and are already producing seed.



Directly-sown Plains Yam Daisies in flower. Photo: Jessica Slade.



Striped Legless Lizard sheltering beneath a tile. Photo: Michael Longmore.

Outside the catchment, staff were excited to discover a nationally-threatened Striped Legless Lizard (*Delma impar*) in a rail-side grassland west of Melbourne in September. We are conducting tile surveys for Metro Trains at 8 grassland sites in the north-west of Melbourne over 2019-20 to develop a better picture of the fauna living in those sites and their management needs. Staff have also observed previously unrecorded populations of the threatened daisies Basalt Podolepis (*Podolepis linearifolia*) and Large-fruit Groundsel (*Senecio macrocarpus*) at rail-side grasslands in Sunbury, after the team reintroduced ecological burning practices to these grasslands for the first time in several decades.