

## Ecological Restoration Team flora and fauna report, 2019-20

There were 94 fauna sightings recorded in MCMC's systems between October 2019 and September 2020. This was a substantial increase from previous years, largely due to the introduction of flora and fauna recording capabilities to the customised tablet software which the Ecological Restoration Team (ERT) use to document their on-ground works. The flora and fauna recorders feed sightings directly into MCMC's databases, from which they can be easily exported to DELWP's Victorian Biodiversity Atlas. These additional capabilities greatly increase our ability to document the natural values of the sites on which we work, plan our works sensitively, and share information with others.

Brunswick East/Northcote's lone resident Swamp Wallaby continued to be reported until the end of 2019, then vanished for most of 2020. It is very possible that the high public use of open space during COVID-19 restrictions was too much for this timid species. Swamp Wallabies prefer dense shrubby vegetation where they can browse on leaves and shelter from potential predators and we suspect that pre COVID-19, the dense, dog-free, weedy creekside at Northcote Golf Course provided a great refuge for the inner north's lone wallaby. An article by MCMC's Tony Faithfull and FOMC's Nick Williams in [the November 2020 issue of Merri Growler](#) discusses the plight of urban Swamp Wallabies in greater detail, and an article by Jane Miller in the same issue looks at future opportunities to greatly improve habitat for wallabies and other species at Northcote Golf Course. In the meantime, MCMC's ERT has been implementing two projects to improve quality and connectivity of habitat for Swamp Wallabies in other parts of Northcote and in Fairfield. Encouragingly, just as this report goes to press a single Swamp Wallaby has again been spotted in Brunswick East, suggesting that human and dog activity has now decreased sufficiently for wallabies to again feel comfortable transiting through the area.



*Southern Boobook perched in a Sheoke at Moomba Park.*  
Photo: Ann McGregor.

Other fauna sightings this year include a few 'firsts' in MCMC's thirty years of observations. In June 2020, ERT members were excited to spot a Brush Cuckoo *Cacomantis variolosus* in June 2020, sallying forth from a Drooping Sheoke at Moomba Park in Fawkner. Brush Cuckoos are widespread in forests and woodlands east and west of Melbourne but have not previously been recorded in the Merri catchment. While following up on the Brush Cuckoo sighting, MCMC President Ann McGregor spotted a Southern Boobook *Ninox novaeseelandiae* sheltering in a Sheoke nearby. Boobooks also haven't been observed by MCMC or Friends of Merri Creek previously, though online databases suggest they are infrequent visitors to the catchment, with 3 records in the northern suburbs over the last decade

and a sighting by community members in North Fitzroy earlier in 2020. And just as we publish this Flora and Fauna Report, news has come in from a FOMC member of a Southern Boobook calling in North Coburg!

In July, a Pink Robin *Petroica rodinogaster* was spotted in Thornbury/Coburg, just north of Normanby Avenue. This was apparently another first along the Merri, but upon further investigation a local expert realised he had photographed Pink Robins in that very location as far back as 2012! A closely related species, the Rose Robin *Petroica rosea* was also sighted this year, a few hundred metres further up the creek at Strettle Wetland. MCMC have subsequently applied for a grant from Melbourne Water to extend habitat in the area for Pink and Rose Robins and other small birds.



*Pink Robin in Thornbury. Photo: Tristan Best.*

Two hundred and twenty-one plants of interest were recorded by the ER team using the new field recorder between October 2019 and September 2020. Approximately 600 other significant flora records, collected by MCMC staff over the last decade, were also migrated into the system (and shared to the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas where this had not already been done).



*Common Swamp Wallaby-grass growing very vigorously this season. Photo: Michael Longmore*

Outside the catchment, Ecological Restoration staff were excited to discover the nationally-threatened River Swamp Wallaby-grass *Amphibromus fluitans*, growing abundantly in a rail-side ditch at Beaconsfield in late 2019. The landowners have subsequently committed to fencing off this new population and MCMC began to take care of the patch in 2020. Closer to home, ER staff may also have located another threatened *Amphibromus*, Swollen Swamp Wallaby-grass *Amphibromus pithogastrus*, on gilgai plains at Galgi Ngarrk (Craigieburn Grassland) in December 2019. Unfortunately the key diagnostic features for this species weren't clear at

the time due to seed desiccation. Spring-Summer 2020 appears to have been a much better season for *Amphibromus*, and we are planning to revisit this site imminently to confirm its identity.

Other highlights this year include the discovery of several rare and threatened species, including Matted Flax-lily *Dianella amoena*, Slender Tick-trefoil *Desmodium varians* and Western Golden-tip *Goodia medicaginea*, on a large private property in Wollert which the ERT have been methodically freeing from Artichoke Thistle for several years. Slender Tick-trefoil *Desmodium varians* and another threatened pea Emu-foot *Cullen tenax* have also been uncovered this year along rocky escarpments near the confluence of Merri & Kalkallo Creeks in Craigieburn North.

With its relatively wet autumn, winter and spring, 2020 has been a good year for orchids. The ERT were pleased to discover several hundred unrecorded Sun Orchids *Thelymitra* sp. and Onion Orchids *Microtis* sp. at Galada Tamboore,

both in high quality areas close to known populations, but also in large numbers in distant degraded areas. The team also encountered a variety of unrecorded orchid species in the rail reserve sites we manage outside the catchment, including the Autumn Bird Orchid *Chiloglottis curvicalvia*, Nodding Greenhood *Pterostylis nutans* and Small Mosquito Orchid *Acianthus pusillus* at Langwarrin, and Fringed Midge Orchid *Corunastylis ciliata* at Crib Point. Unfortunately, 2020 has also been a good year for the invasive South African Orchid *Disa bracteata*, with several thousand plants removed by the team this spring from Ngarri-djarrang in Reservoir. Sadly, this weedy orchid appears to now be well-established around Melbourne, having been recorded now at dozens of grassland sites in the northern suburbs.



*A tiny Fringed Midge Orchid at Crib Point. Photo: Michael Longmore*



*Green-staining Coral Mushroom, Brunswick East. Photo: Michael Longmore*

A rare fungus, the Green-staining Coral Mushroom *Phaeoclavulina abietina* was observed by ERT crew members this winter at half a dozen different sites in Brunswick, Northcote, Reservoir and Fawkner. Mycologist Dr Sapphire McMullan-Fisher discusses the significance of this fungus in the recent [Fungi of the Merri webinar](#), co-hosted by MCMC and Friends of Merri Creek.

*Merri Creek Management Committee, December 2020.*