

Merri News

AUGUST 2008

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

Federal protection for volcanic plains grasslands in Victoria

The Merri catchment contains some of the most important and extensive areas of remnant volcanic plains grassland in the whole of the Port Phillip region.

After a nine year wait the "Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain" community has been recognised under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act. It is now listed as a

critically endangered ecological community. The EPBC listing will provide good quality remnant grassland with some measure of federal legislative protection from degradation and destruction. Development of a broad-scale bioregional plan is also recommended.



The Threatened Species Scientific Committee reported that "the most serious current threats [to the grassland] are due to: development pressures from the expansion of greater Melbourne; continued intensification of agriculture through practices such as rock crushing machinery and raised-bed cropping; and lack of knowledge or awareness about how to manage grassland remnants for biodiversity and conservation."

The Committee noted that over a 15 year period to the year 2000, the area of volcanic plains grasslands around western and northern Melbourne declined by 44% as a result of destruction for urban development (1670 ha) and degradation by weed invasion and poor management (1469 ha).

As part of a current project funded by the Melbourne Water Community Grants program, *Teeing off a five year strategy*, MCMC will plant rare grassland species within Central Creek Grassland Reserve and engage the community through planting and educational activities. This project will also contribute to the development of the next five year management plan for this reserve of critically endangered grassland in the heart of Reservoir.

Further information:

A fact sheet and links to the EPBC Act listing for the volcanic plains grasslands can be found on the *Victoria Naturally* website www.victorianaturally.org.au in the section *Nature under Threat - Habitat loss*.

Photo above left shows Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plains with Billy Buttons in flower on the Merri Creek at Cooper St Grassland Reserve.

Merri Creek & Environs Strategy draft available soon for public comment

The draft *Merri Creek & Environs Strategy* will be available for public comment in September. If you are interested in commenting on this Strategy, which guides MCMC and Council actions and works, please email us at admin@mcmc.org.au or phone 9380 8199 and we will let you know the latest. You will also be able to provide your input at public information sessions.

Out on a Limb and loving it

No need to dream of some far away natural haven if you can experience some wonderful nearby nature. Northcote Primary School students responded with wonder to nearby Merri Park Wetland that is ordinarily beyond the school's ability to visit.

The students did interpretive sketches of the indigenous flora and fauna. This visit and other MCMC visits to schools were funded by The Ian Potter Foundation and enable children, who aren't close to waterways, to experience one.

Northcote Primary School students at Merri Park wetland.



Northern Nature – Creek Connections 2006-08, funded by the Natural Heritage Trust, has supported significant on-ground works in endangered ecological communities on the Merri, Darebin & Moonee Ponds Creeks as well as many new initiatives: Fawkner Safaris, educational workshops on weeds and community engagement plus a revamp of the MCMC website.

Cultural heritage connects communities

Thirty nine local residents, Friends groups, and corporate employees came together on a cold Sunday in July to strengthen a habitat corridor between two wetlands in Clifton Hill.

The *Bridging Communities* festival in Clifton Hill celebrated the community restoration efforts on the Merri

Creek. Local residents and members of Spensely St Primary School, Friends of Merri Creek and Friends of Quarries Park have a long history of participation in the Merri Creek's restoration in Clifton Hill. For some however, this was their first Merri Creek event. Some residents from Northcote's Holmes St flats that overlook the Merri Parklands were special guests.

Bronwyn Razem, senior Aboriginal weaver from the Gunditjmara people, conducted a traditional weaving workshop at the festival to demonstrate cultural heritage and Victorian Koorie connection to indigenous plants. Jack Charles, Holmes St resident and Yorta Yorta elder, played guitar and sang for festival goers. The Connies shared environmental swap cards detailing local flora and fauna. Local frog calls from the *Waterwatch* trailer reminded us that frogs will benefit from the corridor being enhanced.

Friends of Merri Creek received \$20,000 from Melbourne Water's Community Grant Program for the *Bridging Communities* project. MCMC and the Cities of Yarra and Darebin worked with the Friends of Merri Creek to host the festival..

Photo above shows people weaving together after planting and before the barbecue at the festival in Clifton Hill on Sunday 13 July.



Waterwatch in Africa

MCMC's *Waterwatch* Coordinator, Greg Woodward, was travelling through the Biwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park in Uganda in search of mountain gorillas when he came across a pristine creek. He couldn't resist hunting for water bugs and found a number of mayflies, caddisflies and even a dragonfly nymph. The accompanying park ranger and guides were amazed at what was living in the stream and found it hard to believe that one of the bugs was a dragonfly nymph. Greg told them of the problems that creeks face in Australia and that we use the bugs as a way to measure water quality.

The ranger told him that the streams around the park were also facing pressures, particularly from surrounding farms. The parks authority has been trying to teach the community about the importance of protecting the mountain gorillas and their habitat. The ranger and guides were keen to impart their new found knowledge to the farmers and villagers to show them the importance of protecting their local streams.

Greg also spoke with several park rangers about what lives in their local waterways while on a game walk in Kruger National Park in South Africa. Once again he faced the same problem of disbelief about the dragonfly living in water for a period. The rangers enthusiastically asked Greg for more information about what lives in the park's waterways.

During his trip through southern and eastern Africa and Egypt, Greg estimates that he gave at least one hundred kids *Waterwatch* stickers, keyrings and temporary tattoos, as well as quick lessons on water quality monitoring.



MCMC *Waterwatch* Coordinator, Greg Woodward (at left) giving *Waterwatch* stickers to rangers at Kruger National Park, South Africa.

For upcoming community events and the 2006-2007 MCMC Annual Report, see the MCMC website: www.mcmc.org.au.

Merri-Merri twinning

Merri Creek has a namesake in Western Victoria, the Merri River, (pronounced "mare-eye") which flows through Warrnambool. Four members of the *MAD 4 the Merri* (Making A Difference for the Merri) group visited MCMC in June to consider possible models for their own group.

Perhaps surprisingly, Merri River faces many of the same challenges that Merri Creek does – urban growth, impact of industry, and loss of much of the riparian vegetation. Merri River also has some special features that Merri Creek will never have. At its mouth lies the Merri Marine Sanctuary and Merri Island!

Also in the estuary mouth, Middle Island supports a threatened fairy penguin colony which is protected from fox predation by 'Marema' Italian guardian sheep-dogs. The nearby Merri River estuarine wetlands are a haven for the rare Orange Bellied Parrot which migrates each year from Tasmania.

MCMC has decided to pursue a 'twinning' arrangement with the *MAD 4 the Merri* group. Initially this will involve information exchange, with MCMC helping with the organisational development of the *MAD 4 the Merri* group. It is hoped that the 'twinning' will be auspiced by the International River Foundation, the organisation which awards the annual *RiverPrize*, won by MCMC in 2002.

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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