

# Merri News

FEBRUARY 2009

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



## Come visit your nearby nature

You don't need to travel far to visit an area full of ancient landscapes, indigenous history and local animals. During 2009, MCMC will conduct community eco-tours along Merri Creek at Galada Tamboore, just 15km north of Melbourne's CBD, in Campbellfield / Thomastown. The landscape was formed by volcanic eruptions over millions of years creating impressive basalt escarpments that are valuable habitat to many reptiles and birds of prey such as kites, kestrels, falcons and eagles. The north-facing slopes of the grasslands are warm and full of insects, making it a great hunting ground for insect eating birds. This rich landscape also features ancient River Red Gums, remnant grasslands and 200 million year old sandstone on the creek bed.

The Wurundjeri-willam people created tools near Merri Creek whilst looking out across Galada Tamboore's grasslands. Evidence of their occupation of the land still exists today in the form of tool fragment scatterings and scar trees, from which bowls and sometimes canoes were cut.

Are you in a community group and would like to join an eco-tour to Galada Tamboore? Please contact Jane at MCMC on 9380 8199 or [jane@mcmc.org.au](mailto:jane@mcmc.org.au). The tour can be adapted to all fitness levels. (Funded by alternative sentencing fines.)

Photo above: Students studying English as a Second Language discover the many delights of Galada Tamboore. Many were surprised to find this remote natural area so close to their homes.

## Upper Merri to be urbanised

MCMC is carefully considering the potential implications of the recently announced Growth Investigation Area for the upper Merri. For more details check out the news item on MCMC's website at: [www.mcmc.org.au](http://www.mcmc.org.au)

## Annual Report 2007-08 available now

Download the report off our website at [www.mcmc.org.au](http://www.mcmc.org.au), or phone Ray Radford on 9380 8199 for a hard copy.

## 2009 Funding successes

MCMC was successful in gaining \$81,236 from the Federal Govt *Caring For Our Country* Open Grants Program in a highly competitive field of very worthwhile applications. This funding will enable MCMC's parkland management team to accelerate the restoration of the Merri Habitat Corridor by enhancing six sites of threatened vegetation.

Target sites will include Merri Creek at Rushwood Drive Reserve and Aitken Creek in Craigieburn, Moomba Park in Fawkner, Edgars Creek in Coburg, Merri Park in Northcote and parklands in Clifton Hill upstream of the Merri's confluence with the Yarra.

Local communities will be engaged through weed management workshops at Edgars Creek, planting and an indigenous cultural workshop at Aitken Creek, Safari tours of local parklands at Moomba Park, community planting and school activities in Northcote, and a planting at Clifton Hill.

Galada Tamboore has received \$20,000 to consolidate remnant and restored vegetation from a Melbourne Water Community Grant to Friends of Merri Creek. The ongoing community involvement in management of Galada Tamboore will be celebrated during a spring planting.

Look out for MCMC's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary planting on 31 May.

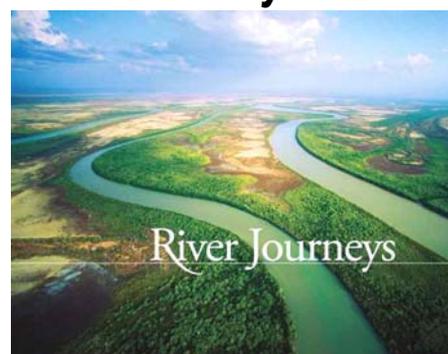
For upcoming community events, see the MCMC website: [www.mcmc.org.au](http://www.mcmc.org.au).

## The Merri in *River Journeys* book

Merri Creek is featured in *River Journeys*, a stunning coffee table book on river restoration journeys worldwide. It features insightful and inspiring interviews with Australian and international people who love their land and rivers and are dedicated to repairing the damage inflicted upon them.

With this book the International Riverfoundation (IRF) recognises the accomplishments of the winners over ten years of the Thies Riverprize – the world's foremost prize in river management. MCMC was awarded the National Thies Riverprize in 2002.

*River Journeys* is available from IRF for \$39.95. Order online at [www.riverfoundation.org.au](http://www.riverfoundation.org.au)





## Shady characters

Most of us revere trees for their shade, beauty and habitat. Trees generate strong opinions and it can be a mistake to denigrate one person's environmental icon by referring to it as a mere 'environmental weed.'

The removal of non-indigenous self-sown trees along waterways sparks vigorous debate. It can seem like lunacy to advocate the removal of a shady Willow or Desert Ash during the height of summer, yet there is overwhelming consensus among land managers on the subject. Removal of exotic trees and their replacement with indigenous Eucalypts and Acacias has occurred steadily over the past 20 years. It is foreseeable that, within 10 years, there won't be a single mature Willow or Desert Ash along the Merri Creek.

Why are these trees being banished from creek parklands?

Until just over a hundred years ago, local creeks were shaded by vast River Red Gums and thickets of Acacia, Woolly Tea-tree and Bottlebrush. Australian trees generally lack the deciduous habit; their hard, resinous leaves are dropped into the water throughout the year. The Eucalypts cast a dappled shade that permits undergrowth and waterplants to thrive.

This is dramatically different from the dense summer shade, autumn leaf fall of soft, fast-rotting leaves and bare winter branches of deciduous Willow and Desert Ash. The root mats of Willows cause further fundamental changes in the creek bed environment. The altered light quality, creekside vegetation, and aquatic organic matter are unsuitable for most animals that have evolved in very different conditions.

The cool shade of a Desert Ash on a summer day is inviting for humans, but it casts hostile shadow for most native wildlife, especially freshwater macro-invertebrates.

Deciduous trees diminish the ecological health of the surrounding area - presenting a clear case for removal. Retaining even small numbers of these trees requires ongoing maintenance to prevent proliferation. This drains resources for other environmental enhancement works. Creekside parklands constitute only a small percentage of urban landscape otherwise dominated by exotic trees and plants. Maximising the indigenous habitat of creeksides gives wildlife the best chance to cope with the pressures placed on them through habitat destruction and increasingly, climate change.

In conjunction with Melbourne Water (the agency with primary responsibility for creekside vegetation management), MCMC has advocated staged removal of exotics for many years. Planting indigenous trees nearby in advance of anticipated removals is a preferred approach to reduce the rawness that inevitably results. Prompt replacement with further indigenous plantings is also encouraged.

Sustained and thorough replacement with indigenous trees opens up a richer creek experience for both wildlife and urban humans.

The above photos show (at left) the cool, but dark area under Willows where little grows apart from a limited range of other exotic plants; and (at right) the dappled light of River Redgums allows a range of semi-aquatic and verge vegetation to thrive.

## New Seeding the Future film

In the six season calendar, this time of year is 'late' or 'high' summer. Temperatures soar and many native grassland species which flowered in spring grow taller and some set seed. The timely collection and proper storage of these seeds is vital to the ongoing restoration of indigenous grasslands.

Judy Allen, of Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Cooperative, has partnered with MCMC to make a film called *Seeding the Future*, which advises on seed identification, collection and storage. MCMC hosted a viewing of the 'rough cut' of the film during December. Seventeen people attended the viewing and provided constructive feedback.

The film, part funded by Melbourne Water, is due to be completed shortly. Watch out for news of its premiere!

## Grassland seed harvest

Each year, one of MCMC's more difficult challenges is organising the collection of Kangaroo Grass seed.

Kangaroo Grass has to be collected at the very peak of it having mature seed on the plants, which is often a window of only a few days - usually around the Christmas to New Year holiday period. However, this year, due to a dry spring, the seed harvest didn't occur until 20th January - a very hot day!

Despite the difficulties, the harvest was a success - thanks to the volunteers and to Parks Victoria which funded it.

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:

**Merri Creek Management Committee 2 Lee St East Brunswick VIC 3057. Phone: 9380 8199 Fax 9380 6989**

**Email: [admin@mcmc.org.au](mailto:admin@mcmc.org.au) Website: [www.mcmc.org.au](http://www.mcmc.org.au)**