

Friends of Merri Creek

NEWSLETTER
February – April
2009



The Merri Valley Nature on Melbourne's northern doorstep

In December 2008, the State Government announced investigations for a significant expansion of the Urban Growth Boundary. One investigation area covers most of the Merri Creek catchment from north of Craigieburn to Wallan.

In response, the Friends of Merri Creek present their vision of parklands, habitat links and rural and urban landscapes that sustain natural ecosystems and provide spaces for recreation:
A Melbourne of 5 million people without sacrificing the plants and animals that have made the Merri home for millennia.

The Friends of Merri Creek seek protection for creeks, wetlands, significant native vegetation, volcanic cones, Aboriginal and historic heritage. We envisage a network of

habitat links through urban and rural areas, to connect larger conservation reserves within and beyond the Merri catchment. Green wedges would be retained between growth corridors, and rural communities and landscapes sustained, both for their own sake and as breathing spaces for the metropolis, complementing the habitat in conservation areas. These measures will help to maintain Melbourne's liveability for people, and maintain the diversity of life on our northern doorstep.

The Merri conservation network

Our conservation network proposal would protect many values including:

- ☞ some of the largest and most diverse remnants of the natural vegetation of the endangered Victorian Volcanic Plain (of which less than 1% remains);
- ☞ many places important to the Wurundjeri people;
- ☞ endangered plant and animal species;
- ☞ volcanic cones and other important geological sites;
- ☞ Ancient River Red Gums;
- ☞ scenic rocky gorges and broad landscape vistas.

See our website www.vicnet.net.au/~fomc under "News" for more details including constructive suggestions as to which sites should be given the highest priority for protection, and what is needed to implement the proposal.

FoMC sent politicians in the Merri catchment a Christmas card asking them to share our vision.



Photo by Brian Bainbridge used on FoMC's Christmas card to politicians: the upper Merri Creek in Merriang

2 First Merri Birdwatch 3 Clifton Hill bird survey/2009 Merri Birdwatch surveys

4 2009 Committee / Regeneration group 5 Sun-moth surveys 6 The Magical Merri Bus Tour

7 Birds on bus tour 8 President's report 10 A long way to go

11 Merri Creek Parklands update/Going green 12 Events calendar

Plenty of birds in the bush

the first Merri Birdwatch

The Red Wattlebirds were particularly noisy and numerous along the Merri for the first Merri Birdwatch. In fact, they were the most commonly-seen bird, and recorded at all ten survey sites.

There were plenty of other birds to be seen too, from the tiny Brown Thornbill to the elegant, snow-white Eastern Great Egret; from the familiar House Sparrows and Rock Doves to the uncommon Little Grassbird and Rufous Songlark; colourful Rainbow Lorikeets and Superb Fairy-Wrens; cryptic Tawny Frogmouths (nesting) and the shy Buff-banded Rail. There were ducks and cormorants, honeyeaters and pardalotes, cuckoos and kingfishers. However the raptors (birds of prey) were elusive, with Nankeen Kestrels being the only ones recorded.

Over 100 people, including 14 volunteer leaders, participated in the Birdwatch on 19 October and 9 November. Many of them also came to an introductory identification



Satin Flycatcher, seen at Bababi marning (Cooper St grasslands) (Photo: Brian Bainbridge)

session in early October, when Stuart Dashper provided an informative commentary on digital images of many of the birds we expected to see.

The weather was good on the survey mornings, and the birds were active in the midst of the spring breeding season. Eighty-three species were recorded, which is quite an impressive result. It is a testament to the success of revegetation efforts along the Merri that sites in East Brunswick and Northcote, weedy wastelands of limited habitat value 30 years ago, now have as many species as the natural areas on the northern fringe of Melbourne. A bonus for birders at the northerly sites were the other wildlife sightings, including Swamp Wallaby, Eastern Grey Kangaroo and Blue-tongue Lizard.

It is quite challenging to estimate the number of each species while identifying every bird that flies past, showing them to beginner birders, and walking steadily for an hour and a half. All the groups rose to the challenge, and produced a valuable set of records while introducing many people to the joys of birding.

The Birdwatch summary:

- ☞ 10 sites were surveyed;
- ☞ 83 bird species, 13 introduced;
- ☞ Total estimated birds: 2,760;
- ☞ Most common bird: Red Wattlebird (247);
- ☞ Birds seen at all sites: Pacific Black Duck, Spotted (Turtle) Dove, Red Wattlebird, Australian Magpie, Little Raven, Welcome Swallow.

'Best' sites for number of species:

- ☞ Craigieburn Grasslands (37);
- ☞ Kirkdale St to Merri Park (37);
- ☞ Blyth St to Moreland Rd (36);
- ☞ Edwardes Lake (35);
- ☞ Galada Tamboore (34).

By all accounts, participants enjoyed the surveys, learnt a lot about the birds they can see along the Merri and in their backyard, and want to do more birding. We intend to repeat the surveys up to four times each year, to monitor changes in bird populations.

Many thanks to all the leaders, not only for their contribution to the first Birdwatch but also for being willing to continue next year. Dates and sites will be listed in the events calendar.

Ann McGregor (Birdwatch convenor)



Myfanwy Jones, Marlon and Llewellyn at Kirkdale Street Park (Photo: Bruce McGregor)

Clifton Hill bird survey

Fourteen birders gathered at the Rotunda at Hall Reserve, Clifton Hill, as part of the bird survey along the Merri Creek on 18 October 2008. We divided into two groups, and equipped with binoculars, bird guides and sturdy shoes, set off to cover both sides of the Creek.

The west side of the Creek, especially between Ramsden and Roseneath Streets, provides good regenerated habitat for Superb Blue-Wrens, Spotted Pardalotes, Grey Fantails, Yellow Thornbills, White-Browed Scrubwrens and other small birds.

However, these small birds have to compete with the recent influx into the area of Noisy Miners which are now the dominant species. The Red Wattlebirds are also making life difficult for the smaller birds.

Away from the Creek on the parklands were large flocks of the Red-rumped Parrots, which were sharing the grasses with feral pigeons. And in a spindly eucalypt next to a well used children's playground on The Esplanade, a Tawny Frogmouth sat well disguised.

The second group set out to traverse the east side of the Creek, but as we moved upstream the group had a slight mishap: we managed to lose one of our members who was trying to identify "a black and white bird." Since the member



Rainbow Lorikeet, seen on the Clifton Hill survey (Photo: Nora Peters)

was the Litter Group Coordinator, Paul Prentice, we assumed he had been seduced by the rubbish in the Creek. All ended well when we met up again at the Rotunda, but the "black and white bird" remained a mystery.

The east side of the Creek is well treed in places, but even in well vegetated areas we saw no small birds. The Noisies and the Wattlebirds still dominated.

On the parklands on the east side, the Rainbow Lorikeets were dominant: we observed one poking its head out from its nesting hollow. We finished at a recent

wetland created by the City of Yarra. This area should provide good future habitat for the smaller birds, but at the moment it is still dominated by Lorikeets and Wattlebirds, although Eastern Rosellas were also feeding here.

In all, 27 species were identified. Birds which have been seen in the area, such as the Red-browed Finch and the Eastern Spinebill, were not apparent. Noisy Miners and the introduced Common Myna create problems for the native species in this area. We felt that it was important to note that the most productive areas are those that have been revegetated.

This was a very enjoyable morning and we are looking forward to our next survey in 2009.

Ruth Shiel (One of the leaders of the Clifton Hill survey)

Tawny Frogmouth, seen on the Clifton Hill survey (Photo: Nora Peters)



2009 MERRI BIRDWATCH SURVEYS

After the success of the first Merri Creek Birdwatch last year, we will be holding four bird surveys at ten sites along Merri Creek this year. All surveys will be from 8.45-10.30am as below. BYO Binoculars if possible. The contact for all Birdwatch events is Ann McGregor 0429 386 102.

The following eight sites will have surveys on 15 February, 24 May, 9 August, 8 November:

JUKES ROAD, FAWKNER — Meet on Merri Path at end of Jukes Road, Fawkner (Melway 18 A2).

EGAN RESERVE-HARDING ST-STRETTLE RESERVE-NORMANBY RD — Meet at bluestone steps at end of The Grove, East Coburg (Melway 30 A3).

EDWARDES LAKE — Meet at the playground adjacent to Griffiths St, Reservoir (Melway 18 E5).

COBURG LAKE RESERVE — Meet near the car park, Lake Grove Coburg (17 H10).

CERES TO MORELAND ROAD — Meet at the seats on the path at rear of CERES, East Brunswick (Melway 30 B7).

MERRI PARK, PHILLIPS RESERVE — Meet at the end of Victoria St, East Brunswick, at BBQ shelter (Melway 30 B8).

HALL RESERVE- YARRA BEND PARK — Meet at the Rotunda, Hall Reserve, Clifton Hill (Melway 2D D1).

GALGI NGAARK (Craigieburn Grasslands)* — Meet at the O'Herns Road gate off Hume Highway (Melway 180 E6).

Surveys at GALADA TAMBOORE* will be on 1 March, 24 May, 30 August, 8 November. Meet at the end of Hatty Court, Campbellfield (Melway 7 K6).

Surveys at BABABI MARNING (Cooper Street Grasslands)* will be on 1 March, 28 June, 30 August, 22 November.

Meet near the Istrian Club, Cooper St, Epping (Melway 387 K10).

* For sites with an asterisk, car pool outside the MCMC office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick leaving at 8.15am.

NO DOGS PLEASE

We do not want a dog on Birdwatch surveys, because their presence reduces the number and variety of birds to be seen. Many birds see dogs as potential predators, so they hide or fly away. Recent research in Sydney found that dogs walked on-lead in woodlands led to 41% fewer birds and 35% fewer species being seen. Similar results in areas where dogs are allowed indicate that birds do not become habituated to the presence of dogs.

The 2009 Friends' Committee

Eighteen members attended the FoMC Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 26 November 2008, including Christine Campbell, MP for Pascoe Vale, and the following members were elected to the 2009 Committee:

Office Bearers:

President:	David Redfearn
Vice President:	Ann McGregor
Secretary:	Ray Radford
Treasurer:	Colin Abbott
Membership Secretary:	Monica Williamson
Committee Member:	Simon O'Connor
Committee Member:	Christabel McCarthy

The Committee welcomes Christabel McCarthy and Simon O'Connor who both joined FoMC only recently—Christabel (who actually nominated after the AGM) joined in April 2008 and Simon is even newer, only applying a week before the AGM. When we said we wanted “new blood,” we didn't imagine it would be quite this fresh! They replace Wendy Moore and Carrie Deutsch, both of whom did not re-nominate, although Carrie later agreed to be a Substitute Representative to MCMC.

Sub-Committee Coordinators:

Planting Group:	Ruth Shiel
Litter Group:	Paul Prentice
Streamteam:	Irene Baker
Newsletter (layout):	Dean Lombard

These Coordinators have remained the same since 2005.

Representatives to MCMC

As last year, FoMC will again be represented on the Merri Creek Management Committee by Trevor Hausler, Ann McGregor, Allie Dawe, Paul Prentice, Ruth Shiel, and Louise Grgat.

Substitute Reps to MCMC

David Redfearn, Harold Mackrell, Pascale Pitot, Colin Abbott, Simon O'Connor and Carrie Deutsch agreed to be Substitute Representatives to MCMC. David, Harold and Pascale remain as Substitute Representatives from 2008, while Colin, Simon and Carrie are new to this position.

Thanks again to all the ‘old hands’ who re-nominated and to Simon and Christabel for putting their hands up so soon after joining. We also appreciate Angie Retallack for continuing to welcome the new members and another special thanks to Colin Abbott for once again agreeing to continue as Treasurer, despite the pressures of running his own business.

Ray Radford (Secretary)

REGENERATION GROUP ALREADY AT WORK



Kangaroo grass seed harvest

After a meeting on 4th December 2008, when the FoMC Regeneration Group planned all its activities for this year, the group has already held one activity: a Kangaroo Grass harvest at Bababi marning (Cooper St Grasslands) on Tuesday 20 January, with MCMC. This event was originally scheduled for 6/1, but surprisingly the seed wasn't ready to harvest. This year the group will be doing some vital mopping-up of woody weeds after their widespread removal by a mechanical “muncher” late last year. We are actually now seeing the beginning of the end of woody weeds in the grasslands. So come along to one of our woody weed removals and enjoy the satisfaction of restoring a Gorse-infested area back into native grassland. Please check the calendar for details.

Merri Creek journey in print

Congratulations to FoMC Life Members, Bruce and Ann McGregor, whose story of connection to the Merri Creek features in a beautiful colour book *River Journeys*. The book is published by the International River Foundation to celebrate ten years of the Thiess Riverprize, for excellence in waterway management. It features articles from many of the National and International prize winners over the ten years and Bruce and Ann contributed on behalf of MCMC, which won the National Riverprize in 2002.

Many thanks to MCMC for generously providing a book to each of the FoMC Life Members and some other active members as well.

Sun finally shines on Sun-moth surveys

The two Golden Sun-moth surveys conducted by Friends of Merri Creek and Merri Creek Management Committee with funding by Parks Victoria have been successfully completed for 2008.

The biggest logistical challenge is to get volunteers and the moths in the same grassland at the same time. This year we used an 'on-call' system to arrange for volunteers using email and SMS. One advantage is that it has avoided the wasted effort of holding a survey on unsuitable days. Due to unusually cool, cloudy weekends, and changeable weather, we came close to missing out on running the surveys at all!

We did however have much lower participation rates than in earlier years, presumably due to people being unable to commit to coming at short notice. This was a shame as the surveys were certainly interesting.

The surveys have been a truly collaborative effort, with Parks Victoria staff providing valuable in-kind support in planning stages and establishing permanent monitoring points at Bababi marning (Cooper St Grassland). The Victorian National Parks Association *NatureWatch* Program have been running surveys in western suburbs grasslands and assisted with promotion and survey design. Communication with professional ecological consultants has also helped greatly.

What we learnt

The survey at Bababi marning (Cooper St Grassland) revealed strong variation in the moth's distribution across the reserve, from being virtually absent in the northern half to common in the southern half. One dazed volunteer made an estimate of having seen 80 moths in a one minute period! Over one thousand moths were counted by the four teams.

The survey at Galgi ngarrk (Craigieburn Grassland) revealed very high numbers of moths (2235), especially in areas where grazing had resulted in a short 'lawn' of grasses.



Our quarry- the elusive Golden Sun Moth female (Photo: Brian Bainbridge)

Moths were also absent from the area of a sheep camp where soil structure had broken down and all grasses had been eaten. The surveyors had the privilege of finding a group of female moths laying eggs and mating and the pupal cases that the moths had emerged from, still poking out of the ground.

Two different survey techniques were successfully applied. The Craigieburn survey is the third for this site in four years while the Cooper St survey is using a new technique designed to help with some critical vegetation decisions. MCMC staff have subsequently surveyed vegetation characteristics and in future years will try to correlate trends in moth numbers with changes in vegetation.

We are also trying to improve our communication process next year by asking for feedback from the volunteers, whether or not they made it to a survey.

Brian Bainbridge (Coordinator, 2008 Golden Sun Moth Surveys)



All Lined up. Well-trained volunteers methodically counting moths at Galgi Ngarrk (Photo: Brian Bainbridge)

The Magical Merri Creek Bus Tour

The big 48-seater bus that took FoMC members on a tour of the upper Merri on 16 November 2008 would have been filled to capacity if it wasn't for a couple of people who weren't able to attend at the last minute (despite paying for the trip).



Some of the group at Kate Looker's farm (Photo: Brian Bainbridge)

The first stop was at Malcolm Creek, Craigieburn, where Ann Jessop, of the Friends of Malcolm Creek, showed us around their site which includes remnant grasslands and magnificent Red Gums in a new estate. Ann gave everyone a beautiful colour booklet called "*Malcolm Creek Grasslands: Understanding Your Native Grasslands*" and we were lucky enough to see some of the wildflowers shown in the booklet, such as Chocolate Lilies and Blue Devils.



Malcolm Creek (Photo: Chris Jennings)

The second stop was Richard and Margaret Lloyd's farm on Merri Creek at Donnybrook Rd where many people were interested in some historic bits of machinery that Richard had collected. Richard could undoubtedly have talked for a lot



The Lloyds' farm (Photo: Chris Jennings)

longer about these interesting items if it wasn't for the time restraint. He and Margaret took us around the part of Merri Creek that flowed through their property and we admired the area where Growling Grass Frogs habitually reside. Unfortunately, they weren't calling at that time.

We stopped for lunch at Kate Looker's farm "Merri Park" in Merriang Rd Woodstock where we tucked into spinach and cheese pides washed down with fruit juice, tea or coffee. Once we could prise people away from eating and chatting, we enjoyed a lovely walk along a rocky creek bank where we saw Little Pied Cormorants nesting and admired a number of picturesque views.



Kate Looker's farm (Photo: Chris Jennings)

The next stop wouldn't have been a stop at all if we hadn't been pulled over by the police! They probably thought it was a little strange that a large tour bus was driving along a dirt road that only went to the Wallan Sewage Treatment Plant, so they pulled us over to find out what was going on. Having done so, they then had the driver do a breath test. He said that it was the first time he had ever been pulled over by the police and the first time he had been breath-tested while driving a bus – and he hadn't even done anything wrong. On this brief but exciting excursion down the dirt road, into what was once Hernes swamp, we did manage to glimpse a few wildflowers, but there was also an awful lot of Gorse.

Wallan Creek (Photo: Chris Jennings)



Our final stop was at the Wallan Scout Hall, where we enjoyed some refreshments and listened to John Robinson and Claudia James, of the Friends of Wallan Creek, talk about their project and some of the important battles the group has had to fight. Here we also received another freebie - a little collection of bookmarks about weeds and similar indigenous plants. Afterwards, they took us on a short walk around their planting site on Wallan Creek.

Everyone seemed to enjoy the tour, which was the first opportunity for most people to visit those places, especially the farm properties. Thanks to all those involved for making this a real success.

Ray Radford, Secretary

Birds on the bus tour

Keen participants in last year's bird survey, Ila Marks, Eric Miller and Heidi Miller, kept a lookout for birds while on the bus tour. Here is Ila's report.

When I saw the two long-billed Corellas flying over Malcolm Creek I knew that combining bird watching with the Friends of Merri Creek Bus Tour was an excellent idea. Others joined in and it wasn't long before I was able to add more birds to the list. Thanks to the person who heard the Striated Pardalote and the others who saw the Red-rumped



White-plumed Honeyeater (Photo: Eric Miller)

Parrots. At Malcolm Creek we added a Purple Swamphen and a White-faced Heron to the list.

Further north we visited Richard and Margaret Lloyd's farm on the Merri Creek in Donnybrook. While we were wandering around their plantings we briefly saw a female Golden Whistler. There were magpie larks and starlings in the paddock, and by the house New Holland Honeyeaters were chasing each other in the flowering gums.

The highlight of the day was at Kate Looker's farm 'Merri Park,' where we saw young gawky looking Little Pied Cormorants sitting in their nests overhanging a part of the Merri Creek that had been dammed. We stood well away to take our photos; it was an opportunity too good to miss. Later, an Australasian Pipit popped up in the paddock and we lined up along the fence to have a good look.



Little Pied Cormorant chick in a nest at Kate looker's farm (Photo: Eric Miller)

Although we were running late when we arrived at the turn off to the Wallan Sewage Treatment Plant, we all voted to stick to the itinerary and drive along the road to look at the remnants of Hernes Swamp. Here the precious daisy, Swamp Everlasting, was pointed out to us. Bird watching here was difficult, as we were not allowed out of the bus and the day was now very overcast; however we did see a Pacific Black Duck.

The Wallan Scout Hall was our last stop. Following afternoon tea, we walked around the Wallan Creek Reserve with members of the Friends of Wallan Creek to be shown the revegetation work they have been doing. While we were being told how difficult it was to convince some local people about the importance of leaving the dead trees standing, we spied an Australian Magpie sitting on an untidy nest in clump of dead black wattles. The Magpie seemed to be telling us it thought it was a good thing the trees had been left.

In all we saw 28 birds on the bus tour and had a fantastic day. We learnt so much about the Merri Creek and the work of the many wonderful people to improve and protect this important waterway. In addition the lunch was delicious and the company great. Thanks to those who organised the day, it was lots of fun.

Ila Marks

President's Report

As given at the AGM on 26/11/2008

Another year has passed but this one was a bit more special than usual, as we marked the 20th anniversary of the foundation of Friends of Merri Creek; and what a twenty years it has been, from those early exciting days when we were involved not just in forming another community group but in working with the councils to help set up the Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC), an institution of which we are an important part and which continues to be robust and active. They have been years of substantial achievement and, at times, setbacks but FoMC has become one of the most respected waterways groups in Victoria if not Australia for its endeavours and successes.

The upsides have been the creation and endurance of the MCMC; the commitment by the State Government to the Merri Creek Parklands; Galada Tamboore; campaigning for a good outcome for the Central Creek Parklands; galvanising the community over the F2 Freeway; the discoveries of the Growling Grass Frog and the Golden Sun Moth along the Creek Catchment; input into the *Merri Creek and Environs Strategy*; the Streamteam; attracting substantial funding for our community plantings; - to name but just a few. There have been downsides, such as losing the freeway campaign (although we did achieve substantial modifications to the route) and the dark days of council amalgamations, when we had to hold the MCMC together - a responsibility we never sought but which I believe we acquitted ourselves with well.

To celebrate our twenty years we held a number of events. We had a birthday celebration at the Capp Reserve on 26 September, where a number of people who played a huge role in our history, such as Allan Thomson and Bruce and Ann McGregor, reminisced about the FoMC from those early days to now. We also held a highly successful bus trip to the Upper Merri on 16 November, where we looked at Malcolm Creek, the Donnybrook and Merriang areas as well as the Wallan Creek, something which added to our knowledge of the creek and which was well supported by members.

Our ever hard working secretary, Ray Radford, has covered most of our activities quite comprehensively in his Secretary's Report (*see newsletter Nov. 2008*) so, as usual, I will seek to focus a range of other issues. But first the well deserved thank yous.

I would like to thank all members for their commitment during the year, those who held office and those who organised and carried out the many tasks that befall an organisation such as ours. Our efforts are all voluntary, a true labour of love, and the time given to ensure the success of the FoMC mission, no

matter how great or small, is immensely appreciated. Although I am ever reluctant to single out any particular individuals, I must give special thanks to Ray as FoMC Secretary - his efforts make the job of the committee so much easier - and also to Jack Svendsen and his dedicated team for holding the fort at our office at the Brunswick Town Hall throughout the year dealing with the flow of correspondence and emails. Special thanks also to the representatives on the MCMC and to Paul Prentice for his work on improving the Merri Creek trail and for always being on hand to assist at our many events. Finally many thanks to my dedicated fellow committee members for coming out to our monthly meetings through rain hail or shine

(although the former is still all too rare).

Now to some of the issues that we faced throughout 2008.

Merri Regional Park

Planning continues for the park, the plan for which was eventually released by the State Government in March 2006. We stand by our view that the plan is good as far as it goes but it still falls short regarding the area to the north of Craigieburn Road East where there are places of high sensitivity value which are still vulnerable to development pressures. As a result, we would like to extend the park to the

north of Craigieburn Road. We are also pleased that the park is not going to have a recreational focus.

Northern sewerage works

Two major sewerage projects have commenced that will affect Merri Creek over the next several years. Both projects will help protect Merri Creek from storm sewage overflows and ensure that the sewerage system can cope with growth in the northern suburbs. Both FoMC and MCMC are represented on Community Reference Groups for these projects.



FoMC President David Redfearn

Growing Grass Frog Trust Fund

As reported last year, the Growing Grass Frog Trust Fund has continued to fund Geoff Heard's valuable research project into the habitat requirements of the Growing Grass Frog (*L. raniformis*). We have now reached the final year of the three year research project which will yield valuable information about the Growler.



Growing Grass frog metamorph (Photo: Geoff Heard)

Geoff's PhD project has been designed to examine key aspects of the conservation biology of *L. raniformis* in urbanising landscapes around Melbourne. He is particularly interested in the species' habitat requirements, and is conducting research on habitat patch occupancy patterns, the determinants of habitat quality (ie. how habitat variability affects key demographic parameters) and factors influencing habitat occupancy turnover (extinction and colonisation dynamics). He hopes that this information will ultimately allow him to make predictions about the effect of urbanisation on the regional viability of this endangered species.

Geoff has received support from the Growing Grass Frog Trust fund and other bodies to apply for an Australian Research Council Linkage application to continue this research through the University of Melbourne.

Merri Creek Wetlands

We are advised that the City of Moreland has allocated some funding in its budget for the exploration of wetlands along the creek in Moreland. FoMC has been pressuring the council for some years regarding this and we look forward to progress on it in the coming year, but we must continue the campaign to ensure a good outcome.

Membership

We continued to get a steady stream of new members throughout the year and we always pick up new people at the various events where we set up stalls. This is most gratifying and we hope that these new people will become actively involved and be part of our future.

Merri Bird Watch

Another exciting new event for FoMC members and the community was the two bird surveys organised along various parts of the creek in conjunction with Birds Australia. This was most ably organised by Ann McGregor and will help increase

our knowledge of bird population patterns along the creek and lay the foundations for future bird surveys to monitor trends.

Brian Bainbridge and the Port Phillip and Western Port "Caring for Community Groups" Award

Congratulations to Brian, one of our life members, for winning this award, a recognition of his superb work for the creek through publications, management plans and environmental education along with his rediscovery of the Golden Sun Moth at Craigieburn Grasslands among a host of other activities. Brian is a most unassuming person who never ceases to amaze us with his profound knowledge of our local environment and we are all so proud for him on achieving this most deserved recognition.

Challenges for 2009

This list is by no means exhaustive but I would see some of our key priorities for 2009 as:

- ☞ Continuing to campaign to ensure that the Merri Regional Park delivers real protection to the **whole** of the upper Merri corridor;
- ☞ Working with other groups, the community and government to ensure appropriate development along the whole of the Merri but particularly in the upper Merri and to secure the protection of sites of significance;
- ☞ Taking up the matter of the wetlands along the Merri in Moreland and seeking community partners to ensure that this happens;
- ☞ A continued commitment to the good governance and the operations of the MCMC;
- ☞ Exploring opportunities to further educate and engage our community in the values of the creek and its environs;
- ☞ Promotion and implementation of the recommendations of the research into the protection and improvement of the Growing Grass Frog habitat; and
- ☞ Membership, the next generation and succession planning.

Finally I would like to give my thanks to all of you for your fantastic support and hard work during 2008 and I hope that we all emerge refreshed and ready for the challenges of 2009.

David Redfearn (President)

MORE GRANT SUCCESSES

FoMC has been successful with two grants from Melbourne Water Community Grants Program.

\$20,000 will help consolidate remnant and restored areas adjacent to three sites with a history of restoration at Galada Tamboore Campbellfield.

Our sub-group, the Merri & Edgars Creeks Confluence Area Restoration Group, won \$9,780 to continue their recreation of Riparian Escarpment Shrubland EVC at their great-looking site just south of Murray Rd Coburg.

A long way to go

It's still hard to get used to the idea that we've been saved, at least temporarily, from the Eddington road tunnel. No monstrous exit ramps or ventilation towers across Fitzroy and Carlton, no extra stress for the Flemington high-risers, no annihilation of the J.J. Holland Park or the Manningham St wetlands. We can breathe again!

But now the Yarra's green wedge faces a similar threat: a link from the Ring Road to the Eastern Freeway via Bulleen or Donvale, costed at \$6 billion. How can one believe in Mr Brumby's "kilometres and kilometres of tunnel" (rather than an ugly above-ground scar) or expect it to be financially viable? And yet he's trying to rush through the Frankston Bypass in order to help the struggling Eastlink – only getting two-thirds of the patronage it needs – and make the connection to Greensborough seem natural and logical.

The Government's fixation with cars and roads makes it reluctant to spend much on public transport, hence its thumbs-down to the orbital bus routes, the express track to Westall, and light rail to Doncaster or Rowville. However I'm pleased that the useless subterranean line has been halted under the Domain.

The latter was Sir Rod's way of discrediting public transport and favouring the Highway to Hell, but now we could be spared both money-pits. Southern Cross Station may get two more tracks, that's great, just extend them to the platform-rich Flinders Street and you have all the Footscray to Caulfield capacity you need. Then there'd be enough cash for the Westall rails – no way should they cost a billion, with only one level-crossing that has to be eliminated, at Grange Rd.

It's one of the nastiest ways of loading the dice against such projects, using inflated estimates as an excuse for scrapping them. Six hundred and fifty million for a second track from Keon Park to Epping and 4 km. on to South Morang, more than a third of the \$1.8 billion for the entire 77 km. Southern Suburbs Railway in Perth? The Auditor-General should be looking into it, meanwhile we definitely won't be counting our sleepers until they're laid.



The original farmhouse/art gallery at Heide Museum of Modern Art, beside the Yarra in Bulleen, could be under threat from a motorway link (Photo: http://www.heide.com.au/Heide_1.php)

The bureaucrats are desperately searching for *any* other conceivable way of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Car-pooling? Nobody likes it. Cycling and walking? Only good for shorter distances unless combined with – dare I mention it, public transport. More economical cars and driving habits? Lovely, I can just picture the smarmy TV advertising campaign. Shorter trips to work? Maybe in 20 years.

But we have to be honest ourselves about emissions: our trains and trams' electricity comes mostly from dirty brown coal. The immediate solution, temporary of course, is gas-fired power; long-term, wind, solar and geothermal energy. And we must maximise usage of our mass transit by making it reliable, convenient and safe.

There's no shortage of brilliant ideas designed to keep people in their cars even as the world approaches a time of oil shortages: the ingenious plan to convert the West Gate Bridge to ten narrowed lanes, which will somehow cut accidents by 20 per cent; \$5 million to investigate congestion-busting schemes in Hoddle St, including a \$1.5 billion tunnel from Alexandra Parade to the 'G, with off-ramps at Victoria Parade no doubt.

A strategic master-stroke indeed, but it would need extensions to St Georges Rd and the Tullamarine in the north, and Citylink and St Kilda Junction in the south, in order to work properly. Fifteen billion, we can easily afford it with a \$100 per day donation in Hoddle St and Punt Rd: 40,000 cars, \$4 million a day, almost \$1.5 billion a year, it would only take ten years. Talk about revenue raising...

One is cautiously optimistic that the Feds will use their financial clout to promote sustainable transport, however their timidity on climate and water is not encouraging, and they still allow the congestion-boosting rort of "novated car leases" (the more you drive, the more tax you save). By contrast, what multiple benefits bike lockers at stations provide, and the latest proposal for a floating Northbank reconnection of the Capital City Trail is exciting. But only \$105 million for cycling over 12 years, that is a very bad case of the measles.

Let's finish by giving Ms Kosky some acclamation: the Docklands tram penetration, progress on Coolaroo station, Westgarth viaduct duplication, Sunbury electrification; country trains augmentation, possible Epping operation, Nunawading grade separation and accompanying rail triplication!

Paul Prentice

Going green

With its rare combination of a pleasant climate and generally flat terrain, a lovely sheltered coastline and plenty of rivers and creeks and parks, not to mention the excellent trains, our Melbourne's a top spot for cyclists.

They've got bike traffic-lights and lanes, refuge islands, bike rails, helmet laws, to give them status and safety – though some of them aren't so considerate.

And a network of off-road paths follows rail, tram, motor and waterways, shores of sea and lake, wetland and billabong; at its centre the Capital City Trail still suffers some steps and steep gradients, and needs a Northbank track through the CBD to keep cyclists away from the crowds.

Elsewhere they really are "shared footways", with bikes, trikes, wheeled boots, skateboards and scooters, and manual and electric-powered wheelchairs; with walkers and runners and various dogs, kids in prams, pushers, child-seats or trailers.

It's hard to overstate their value, tackling overweight and unfit, depression, isolation and boredom: encouraging people to get out there amid nature and parks and gardens, and enjoy the sight of boats and trains, outdoor art and fine architecture.

Folk can go off to school or college, work or shops, social functions or sport, in ways that are friendly to the planet, inexpensive and healthy and fun. The paths are made all the more useful and safe by over- and underpasses; runners appreciate the cleaner air and fewer traffic delays.

The Gardiners Creek Bridge connects Kooyong to Burnley, and several routes meet at East Malvern; there's the track by the Ring Road from the Kororoit to the Plenty, those by train lines to Fawkner and Ringwood to Belgrave; the Port Melbourne tram linking Yarra and Bay Trails, and lagoons, rocks and beaches on the way to Altona.

The Maribyrnong has the old Footscray waterfront, a cruise boat and grand panoramas; the Merri's got the lofty suspension bridge, and the Coburg Lake, and CERES; the Darebin, Bundoora's diversity and Alphington's wonderful Parklands. The Yarra boasts numerous billabongs, Dights Falls and art-rich Herring Island, and a couple of elegant boathouses.

The Edgars Creek path needs completion from Mahoneys Rd through to Kingsway, but southward to Glasgow there's simply no need, with quiet streets running parallel. From the Edwardes Lake to the Merri, the bicycles must go on-road, via Henty St, Bonview, Elizabeth; no formal path must ever disfigure this magical stretch of the creek.

Paul Prentice

FoMC IN NEW LANDCARE BOOK
FoMC is honoured to be represented in the recently released book, *MAKING A DIFFERENCE: A CELEBRATION OF LANDCARE*, published by the Commonwealth Government Dept of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. The book features inspiring stories from a number of groups involved in Landcare activities along with beautiful photos of volunteers and the environmental treasures they are working to protect. It covers a wide range of problems that are being tackled in many places across Australia and even overseas.

Update No. 2 on the new Merri Creek Parklands

Rebecca Scott, Team Leader Urban Parks at Parks Victoria, supplied this update of the proposed new park north of the Western Ring Road, or Marran baba.

The Steering Committee established to provide strategic input into the planning and development of the Merri Creek Parklands has met three times since forming in September. It comprises representatives from Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, and the Cities of Hume and Whittlesea, and has endorsed the following actions.

Consultation Strategy: This outlines the key messages, stakeholders and methods of consultation for the project.

Strategic Directions Statement: A high level strategic document which will feed into the master planning process and eventually the finalisation of the Management Plan.

Cultural Heritage Management

Plan Project Brief: This project brief was sent to consultants in November and submissions closed on 24 December. The successful consultant will be engaged in January.

Master Plan for Galada Tamboore section of Merri Creek Parklands

Project Brief: This project brief was advertised in January and submissions close on 18 February. The study area for the Master Plan includes land managed by Hume City Council, City of Whittlesea, Melbourne Water and Parks Victoria.

Community Bulletin: Copies of the bulletin will be posted on agency websites as well as being mailed to key stakeholders including FoMC.



Merri Creek at Galada Tamboore (stream waterhole) in Campbellfield/Thomastown, an important part of the new Merri Creek Parklands.

Sunday 1 Litter Clean-Up

Bell St East Coburg, 10am-12 noon. Melway map 18 A12. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 1 Streamteam Water Quality Testing

Upstream of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller St, Nth Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway map 30 C10. Phone 9354 9885.

Saturday 7 MECCARG* weeding and site preparation

Just south of Murray Rd bridge, Coburg, 1pm-3pm. Melway map 18 A11. Wear sturdy footwear and gloves. Bring a bucket/bag and digging tool for weeding.

Sunday 8 Hand weeding

Friends' site near Strettle wetland Thornbury, 10am-12 noon. Melway map 30 B3. Help keep our little site looking great. Light refreshments afterwards. Phone Nicole 9354 5045.

Sunday 15 First Bird Survey at most sites for 2009

8.45-10.30am at eight sites along the creek. See page 3 for details. Phone Ann 0429 386 102.

Thursday 19 Friends of Edgars Creek Weed workshop: Managing and extending remnant grasslands

Meet at Notice Board adjacent to Ronald St, Nth Coburg 7-9pm. Melway Map 18 A9. Focuses on nearby areas of remnant Danthonia, with MCMC. Phone Stephen 042 563 4212.

Sunday 22 Woody Weed Removal

Bababi marning (Cooper St grasslands), near Istrian Club, 10am-1pm. Melway map 180 K10. Light refreshments will be provided. Funded by Parks Victoria. Phone Nicole 9354 5045.

MARCH

Sunday 1 First Bird survey at Galada Tamboore & Bababi marning (Cooper St Grasslands)

8.45-10.30am. See page 3 for details. Phone Ann 0429 386 102.

Sunday 1 Moreland Council, Sydney Rd Street Party

Sydney Rd Brunswick, 12 noon-7pm. Melway map 29 G8. Look for the Friends' stall near the Brunswick Town Hall. If you can help staff the stall, please ring Ray Radford 0422 989 166.

Sunday 1 Darebin Council Community & Kite festival

Edwardes Lake Park Reservoir, 10am-5pm. Melway map 18 D5.

Sunday 1 Streamteam Water Quality Testing

Upstream of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller St, Nth Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway map 30 C10. Phone 9354 9885.

Saturday 7 MECCARG* Weeding and site preparation

Just south of Murray Rd bridge, Coburg, 1pm-3pm. Melway map 18 A11. Wear sturdy footwear and gloves. Bring a digging tool for planting and a bucket for watering.

Sunday 8 Litter Clean-Up

Aitken Creek at Hexham Ct Craigieburn. 10am-12 noon. Melway map 387B11. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Friday 13 FoMC newsletter deadline

Please send articles to admin@mcmc.org.au.

Sunday 15 Friends of Edgars Creek Weed workshop: Aquatic weeds around waterfall and meander

Meet at Notice Board adjacent to Ronald St, Nth Coburg 1-3pm. Melway Map 18 A9. With MCMC. Phone Stephen 042 563 4212.

Saturday 21 Woody Weed Removal

Galgi ngarrk (Craigieburn Grasslands), 10am-12 noon. Meet at the end of O'Herns Rd Somerton (Melway map 180 F6) at 10am or car pool outside the MCMC office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick before 9.15am. Light refreshments will be provided. Funded by Parks Victoria. Please register with Megan at MCMC on 9380 8199 or email: megan@mcmc.org.au. Note this is a Saturday.

Thursday 26 Friends of Edgars Creek Walk and talk with wine: The Natural history of Edgars Creek

Meet at Notice Board adjacent to Ronald St, Nth Coburg 7-8.30pm. Melway Map 18 A9. With MCMC. Phone Stephen 042 563 4212.

APRIL

Saturday 4 MECCARG* Planting

Just south of Murray Rd bridge, Coburg, 1pm-3pm. Melway map 18 A11. Wear sturdy footwear and gloves. Bring a bucket/bag and digging tool for weeding.

Sunday 5 Litter Clean-Up

Arthurton Rd Northcote, 10am-12 noon. Melway map 30 B7. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 5 Streamteam Water Quality Testing

Upstream of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller St, Nth Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway map 30 C10. Phone 9354 9885.

Sunday 19 FoMC Woody Weed Removal

Galgi ngarrk (Craigieburn Grasslands), 10am-12 noon. Meet at the end of O'Herns Rd Somerton (Melway map 180 F6) at 10am or car pool outside the MCMC office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick before 9.15am. Light refreshments will be provided. Funded by Parks Victoria. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 19 Friends of Edgars Creek Planting: Riparian habitat restoration

Meet at Notice Board adjacent to Ronald St, Nth Coburg 1-3pm. Melway map 18 A9. Phone Stephen 042 563 4212.

MAY

Saturday 2 MECCARG* Weeding and site preparation

Just south of Murray Rd bridge, Coburg, 1pm-3pm. Melway map 18 A11. Wear sturdy footwear and gloves. Bring a digging tool for planting and a bucket for watering.

Sunday 3 Woody Weed Removal

Bababi marning (Cooper St grasslands), near Istrian Club, 10am-1pm. Melway map 180 K10. Car pool outside the MCMC office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick before 8.45am. Light refreshments will be provided. Funded by Parks Victoria. Please register with Megan at MCMC on 9380 8199 or email: megan@mcmc.org.au.

Sunday 3 Litter Clean-Up

Murray Rd Coburg, 10am-12 noon. Melway map 18 A11. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 3 Streamteam Water Quality Testing

Upstream of St Georges Rd bridge, enter from Miller St, Nth Fitzroy, 2-3.30pm. Melway map 30 C10. Phone 9354 9885.

Sunday 17 Woody Weed Removal

Along the Beveridge to Wallan rail line, 10am-1pm. Meet at the Wallan Railway Station. Melway map 646 G11. Car pool outside the MCMC office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick before 8.45am. Light refreshments will be provided. Funded by an Australian Govt 'Caring for our Country' grant. Please register with Megan at MCMC on 9380 8199 or email: megan@mcmc.org.au.

* MECCARG = Merri & Edgars Creek Confluence Area Restoration Group.