

MERRI GROWLER

The Friends of Merri Creek Newsletter

November 2014 – January 2015

FRIENDS OF MERRI CREEK IS THE PROUD WINNER OF THE 2011 VICTORIAN URBAN LANDSCAPE AWARD

BIG COLOUR 25th BIRTHDAY ISSUE

2014 Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 11 November, 7pm for 7.30pm

Room 3, Van Raay Centre at CERES, Roberts St East Brunswick

Enter through the mosaic gate in Roberts St, follow the path to the left and go downstairs.

(Note venue has changed from previous newsletter.)

*Honorary Life Members, Ann and Bruce McGregor, will present **25 Years of FoMC**, with interesting stories of the old days illustrated with great 'before' and 'after' photos.*

AGENDA

1. **President's Report - David Redfearn**
2. **Election of the 2015 Committee**
(Nominations invited – see below)
3. **Election of six Friends' Representatives to MCMC**
4. **End of year celebrations**

Drinks and nibbles provided.

All members are invited to attend the AGM

Help celebrate another successful year by joining us for refreshments at 7pm before the AGM at 7.30pm. Hear Honorary Life Members, Ann and Bruce McGregor, talk about the old days illustrated with great 'before' and 'after' photos, have your say in running the Friends group and party afterwards.

How about joining the FoMC Committee?

All committee positions become vacant at the AGM and it's always good to have some new people. A role on the Committee would suit someone who would like to do more in the group but perhaps isn't able to attend activities. Currently the Committee holds 5 meetings a year of about 2 hours, in even months before the AGM.

If you're interested in becoming a Committee member in the future, you can see what we do by attending meetings and receiving Agendas. Or you could become a Substitute Representative to Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) in preparation to becoming a full Representative.

If you are even slightly interested in any of the above roles, please contact Ray Radford by email: merricreek@bigpond.com or by phone: 0422 989 166. Also contact Ray for a Nomination Form, or download it from our website under *Membership*. The forms must be received before 7th November, although nominations for any vacancy will also be welcome at the AGM. It is absolutely okay to nominate yourself and leave it open to be seconded. An election will only be held if there are more nominations than vacancies.

Check Your Membership

Please note that only financial members as at Tuesday 4th November can vote at the AGM or nominate for positions. Unfortunately, we are unable to approve memberships at the AGM.

Some of the happy planters at the Playground Planting, Merri Park Northcote on 19 July 2014.



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Secretary's Report: Friends Activities 2014

2014 Friends Committee

President: David Redfearn

Vice-President: Ann McGregor

Secretary: Ray Radford

Treasurer: Nicole Lowe

Membership Sec: Monica Williamson

Committee members: Nick Williams, Yasmin Kelsall.

Also on the Committee were these representatives of Sub-Committees:

Regeneration Group: Nicole Lowe

Litter Group: Paul Prentice

Streamteam: Irene Baker

Newsletter: Dean Lombard.

The Committee met bi-monthly until 30 September, which is the limit of this report.

Friends Representation on MCMC

We continued to be represented on the Merri Creek Management Committee by Ann McGregor, as President, Allie Dawe, as Treasurer, Nicole Lowe as Vice President, and Committee members Pascale Pitot and Nick Williams. This year's new representative was Ann Sanson who replaced Louise Wright. The Friends representatives remain the most consistent members at MCMC meetings, with some also attending Sub-Committee meetings.

Most of the Substitute Representatives, David Redfearn, Yasmin Kelsall, Louise Wright, Suzi Shaw, Rebecca Mayo and Ian Patrick made a contribution.

Regeneration Group Activities

The number of maintenance activities continues to rise and this year it jumped to 138 people, who attended these events:

Handweeding at the Friends' site near Strettle Wetland on 13/10/13 & 13/4, and at the *Sumner Loving* events in Merri Park Northcote on 3/5, 24/5, 16/8, and 13/9. We usually saw a big mob of kangaroos on our Woody Weed Removals at Bababi Marning on 10/11/13, 24/11/13, 23/2, 30/3, 10/8 (with flat tyre), and a very windy 28/9. Plus we returned to the past with a Weedmat Removal in Merri Park Northcote on 22/3.

214 people attended these planting events: at Moreland's World Environment Day near the Edgars Creek confluence, with other local groups on 1/6; at the new Northcote Gorge site on 15/6; at Kalkallo South on 22/6; at Merri Park Wetland Northcote on 28/6; at Ngarri-djarrang on 13/7; at Merri Park playground on 19/7, at Strettle Wetland Thornbury on 3/8; and a huge turn up (of 86) at the *Habitat Heroes* Launch on 24/8 at Jukes Rd Fawkner.

We planted a total of 4653 plants, which is about 470 less than in 2013. However, these events often involved tree-guarding, some litter clean-ups and handweeding.

Thanks again to the MCMC Parkland Management Team for supporting most of the plantings and also supplying barbecues later. Thanks also to the Darebin Bush Crew for resourcing our expanding site near Strettle Wetland, Thornbury.

Coordinator: Nicole Lowe.

Litter Clean-ups

This year 27 people cleaned up lots of litter monthly, except January: at Edwardes St Reservoir on 6/10/13; at Clara St East Brunswick on 3/11/13; at Merlynston Creek North Coburg on 1/12/13; at Bell St Coburg on 2/2/14; at Aitken Creek Craigieburn on 9/3; at Ngarri-djarrang, Reservoir on 6/4; at Zoe Circuit Northcote on 4/5; at Moreland's World Environment Day, Murray Rd Coburg on 1/6; near Rushall Station Nth Fitzroy on 6/7; at Strettle Wetland Thornbury on 3/8; and at Keady St North Coburg on 7/9.

Coordinator: Paul Prentice.

Merri Birdwatch

Around 176 people attended our quarterly bird surveys at ten sites along the Merri and at Edwardes Lake. Thanks again to our volunteer survey leaders. The value of both the data collected and the habitat created by revegetation was highlighted in a detailed analysis by La Trobe University student Sue Bryceson (see May newsletter). She concluded: *"For community groups to record 30 species at a site in 90 minutes is surprisingly high given the surrounding urban matrix, and is comparable to numbers attained in healthy natural areas."*

Coordinator: Ann McGregor.

Streamteam

The regular Streamteam monitors performed monthly Waterwatch tests on the Merri Creek at St Georges Road and at the Edgars Creek Waterfall. From Oct 2013 to Sept 2014, a total of 47 people attended at the Merri Creek site and 36 at the Edgars Creek site. The regular monitors were frequently joined by enthusiastic passers-by of all ages and we welcomed occasional secondary and tertiary students with particular interest in the environment. The variations in the water quality and macroinvertebrate abundance that we see are linked to seasonal temperature and water level changes.

This year, FoMC awarded Irene an Honorary Life Membership for her tremendous commitment over ten years, which now also includes Edgars Creek.

Coordinator: Irene Baker

Walks Talks and Tours

8 people seemed to be a magic number, as the same amount of people joined in the Wild Discovery Walk at Bababi Marning on 20/10/13; the talk on Common (Indian) Mynas on 10/11/13; and the Tour of Westgate Park on 25/5. Then the Habitat Gardening Presentation on 23/6 had twice that number, and the *Sumner Loving* launch on 15/3 had 40 people, making 80 in total.

Newsletter

Dean Lombard continues to do great layouts and produce high-quality Merri Growler newsletters. This year, 8-page newsletters were printed and posted in February, May and August, plus this special 12-page issue in November. After ten years of his excellent work, FoMC awarded Dean an Honorary Life Membership.

Layout: Dean Lombard.



Campaigns

This year we worked on: continuing to press for the best environmental outcome from the Urban Growth Boundary expansion; contributing to the campaign to stop or at least improve the Brunswick Terminal Station; lobbying to make private land public at Beavers Rd Northcote, and to retain public land at the former Lakeside College site in Radford Rd Reservoir. We had a success with Darebin Council agreeing to fund the finalisation of its Natural Heritage Plan.

Other Activities and News

We received grants from: Communities for Nature (plus a third year of their two four-year grants), Melbourne Water River Health Incentive Program (for us & FoEC), Port Phillip & Westernport CMA, Darebin City Council, Parks Victoria, and Moreland City Council (for MECCARG).

We participated in these surveys: of Golden Sun Moths on 3/12/13, 9/1, 13/1 & 23/1, attended by a total of 19 people; and of Yam Daisies on 8/12/13 with 9 people attending. Once again we only held one stall - at the Sydney Rd Street Party on 2/3.

Des and Ruth Shiel continued recording oral histories of Merri Creek prior to 1970 and edited excerpts of their interviews have appeared in the newsletter.

Overall, around 710 people attended 60 public events involving FoMC, and this doesn't include any of our sub-groups like MECCARG or Friends of Edgars Creek.

Particular thanks again to Monica Williamson for checking the office and looking after the memberships; to our web master, Simon D'Alfonso; to Ruth Shiel for updating our only sign near Roseneath St Clifton Hill; to Julie Mason for welcoming new members; and to Suzi Shaw for managing our Facebook page.

Ray Radford (Secretary 2014)

Merri trail land for sale: Darebin City Council has decided not to purchase the parkland behind the former Lakeside College in Radford Rd Reservoir, which includes 250m of the Merri Trail. The Education Dept offered to sell the land to the Council for \$925,000 or to grant an easement over the trail. Council accepted the offer of an easement to cover the trail and 1m either side, which will ensure that the trail remains open, but they decided to lobby the Environment Minister, Ryan Smith, to declare the entire area behind the school Crown Land.

FoMC agrees and we will continue to press for this area to be made Crown Land managed by the Council. We want to avoid the issue becoming focused on the Merri Trail, as industrial land owners regularly fail to maintain the land along the creek (like at Beavers Rd Northcote) and the site still has some remnant vegetation.

Gnawing away at Beavers Rd Northcote: Unfortunately we didn't gain much at the Panel Hearing into rezoning land at Beavers Rd Northcote. We made the case that the escarpment alongside Merri Creek, from Beavers Rd to Arthurton Rd Northcote, should be public land managed by Darebin Council, as the private owners have allowed the area to become an ugly weedscape. However, it was important to show Council and the private owners that we are serious about this issue and our next step is to arrange a meeting with them.

Celebrating FoMC's 25th birthday: There hasn't been any response to our request (in the August newsletter) for celebrating our 25th year, so we are marking the occasion with a few special events. Firstly there's this bumper 12-page full colour issue of the Merri Growler; then there's three wonderful events organised by Paul Prentice: a Twin Lakes Walk on 9/11, an Historic Merri Creek Cycle on 30/11 and a Triple Treat Tour on 7/12 (see calendar). Plus of course our AGM on 11/11, where Ann and Bruce McGregor will talk about the early days.

New equipment trailer: FoMC now has a new trailer that has been specially modified to transport equipment to our community events. The trailer was partly financed by a grant of \$2500 from the Volunteer Grants program of the Australian Government, Dept of Families, Housing, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs, plus an additional \$1250 from our own funds. The trailer is stored at MCMC, towed by the MCMC trucks and covered by the MCMC insurance policy, so it will act as an MCMC vehicle.

Brunswick Terminal Station: Our President, David Redfearn, appeared at a VCAT Hearing, along with MCMC Manager, Luisa Macmillan, to give witness statements regarding the impact on Merri Creek of the proposed 80m long and 4m high retaining wall. The Hearing was held because of an objection by the Merri Creek Residents Group to the Moreland Council issuing a permit. Unfortunately, the objection was unsuccessful, but the campaign is continuing. We are also represented on a consultative group convened by Moreland Council, where we hope to lessen the impact of the retaining wall on Merri Creek.

Moreland soon to have new wetland: Moreland City Council is now in the final stages of a design for a wetland to be created near the confluence of the Merri and Edgars Creek. FoMC and Friends of Edgars Creek have participated in a Working Group to comment on the design before it is released for public consultation.

FoMC has been lobbying for the creation of a wetland in Moreland since initiating the idea in July 2004, as currently there is no wetland along Merri Creek in the municipality. We suggested a number of possible sites including this one and, although another site was first selected, it wasn't viable. The confluence site has always been our favourite as it is in the heartland of our own membership and that of our two very active sub-groups, the Friends of Edgars Creek and the Merri and Edgars Creek Confluence Area Restoration Group. It is also a natural wet area and it would help celebrate the retention of this land in public ownership, when it was the gifted by VicRoads to Moreland Council.

Of course it would also help improve stormwater going into Edgars and Merri Creeks and contribute towards biodiversity, as well as improving the amenity of the area for people of all ages and abilities to enjoy, not to mention our wild friends!



Wild life on the Merri – episode 2

Continuing the accounts of fauna found in and around the creek by participants in the Merri Creek Oral History Project, the focus moves to snakes and frogs.

Snakes were common, again along the length of the Creek. They included Brown, Copperhead, Black and Tiger snakes. Mostly they were avoided, but Giorgio De Nola, who grew up in Reservoir near the Creek, had friends who “were avid snake catchers. ...Sometimes they would take me down looking for snakes, because they knew exactly where snakes lived, and they showed me their haunts. We would go down there looking, but not a lot of times, snakes and me weren’t very good friends.” People generally would kill them if the chance came. Brendan Casey, on the other hand, had an impulse to chase them!

Frogs were once prolific along the Creek. Brendan Casey spent much time down around the Creek in Fawkner in his youth, and describes watching the frogs. “The main frogs as far as we were concerned were the Growling Grass Frogs which were literally everywhere along the Creek. They are large colourful noisy animals. They like basking in the sun so they are always out, and as you would approach them they would jump from the bank or a rock into the Creek. Then you could see them in the Creek, and when they exposed their rear limbs they had this incredible iridescent purple colour. So we would watch them swimming through the water, trying to escape from us, those flashes of purple you would see through the water, it was just amazing. And they would sort of sit themselves on a rock, we could just see those things sitting there waiting for us to go away. Absolutely incredible.”

The frogs were numerous in other places as well. “In fact, the main place we used to find them was at what I would describe as a permanent spring at the end of Jukes Road, across from McBryde Street on the southern side of Jukes Road. Where that spring was is now half covered by the paling fences of the properties that are there now. So we would go down there, half a dozen of us. There was a permanent spring there and it was actually perched above the surrounding area.

And what it was, was exposed basalt, that had sort of cups or depressions in there that would hold water. Probably at its deepest point it was about a foot deep. There were lots of rushes around there, and this exposed basalt rock. There were sheets of tin, and you would lift up one of these sheets of tin and you would see twenty, thirty, forty enormous Growling Grass Frogs sitting under this sheet.

As far as finding somewhere where it was easy to see large numbers of spectacular frogs, that was the place we used to go. That was one of the first places we went to, so that’s definitely around 1969/71, where this permanent spring would feed these depressions in the rocks. They were always charged with water, crystal-clear water, all year round. It was an incredible place actually. ...We now know from research that the Growling Grass Frog requires in-stream and off-stream habitats.”

There was once a rich habitat for frogs in marshland near Gowrie Station. Brendan found that “Some of the old Red Gums are still there, but the marshland was where the factories are now sitting. It was a fairly large marshland that had clear flowing drainage lines going through the middle of it. All around it was full of sedges and rushes, it was always moist underfoot and it was absolutely chock-a-block with frogs. That was where we used to find what I call the Walking Toadlets, now very very rare. Bibron’s Toadlets was another one...they were tiny little frogs, about the size of your fingernail, and they don’t hop, they walk. As well as seven or eight other species, including lots of Growling Grass Frogs, Pobblebonks, Spotted Marsh Frogs, Eastern Froglets, Ewing’s Tree Frogs.”

Brown Snake seen at the planting at Galada Tamboore on 16 June 2013. Photo: Ray Radford (This is the first snake that Ray has seen along the Merri.)





Growling Grass Frog. Photo: J. Wombey (from MCMC files).

Bill Berry, who lived in Lewis Street Thornbury as a boy, collected frog spawn from pools of water at Mayer Park, while Giorgio De Nola went “frogging” near Mahoneys Road. John Jordan relates how “you could sit out on a summer’s night, you’d sit there and you couldn’t hear yourself talk for the croaking of the frogs. And you’d go down and stand on the bridge, and have a look at the pool that was up north, there used to be algae that used to grow in patches all around the water, and they’d be covered in frogs, big bullfrogs sitting there, wah, wah, wah, they were going all the time.”

Then development took hold going north and things changed. The frogs that John and others had seen and heard all just disappeared. Joe Garita found that “because the Creek got so polluted in the end, from 1963 all the frogs were coming out, they came into the garden, I said what’s wrong with them, there is something wrong with them I said.

They didn’t like the water for some reason or other. Then they went back, after a few months they disappeared. Haven’t seen a frog since. ... (Before) they were frogging away night and day just about.”

Brendan Casey believes, besides pollution and the Chytrid Fungus disease, loss of habitat is another main cause of the decimation of frogs. “Prior to the Chytrid Fungus, it was nothing more complex than the destruction of the habitat. But the destruction of habitat does not account for the frogs in the Creek, because that riparian habitat still exists. But it would probably be the water quality in the Creek. That was the problem. So habitat deterioration then stresses the population, leaves them prone to getting infections like the Chytrid Fungus which is now rampant along the Creek. But my own research suggests the Creek may be polluted to a point that hinders the growth of the Fungus. So there is a fine balance going on there. That’s why I believe there are still some Growling Grass Frogs along the Creek, because it is not so polluted they can’t survive, but it is toxic enough so that the Chytrid Fungus cannot get a proper foothold.”

Once-adjacent habitats, providing homes to myriads of frogs, were destroyed. The spring at Jukes Road has been covered in dirt by the Council and the Gowrie marshland was drained and is now covered in factories. These are only two examples. Some frogs can still find refuge in places like abandoned quarries and small wetlands. Recent studies into frogs and their requirements give hope that more can be done to protect them and their habitats.

Des & Ruth Shiel

Our Facebook page wants more friends

If you haven’t already done so, check out our wonderful Facebook page, we’re sure you’ll ‘like’ it.

Just point your web browser toward

www.facebook.com/FriendsofMerriCreek

and click on ‘Like’ to get automatic updates to group activities and news.

Dick’s Witticisms

Some more witty one-liners from FoMC Life Member, Dick Harcourt:

I intend to live forever – so far so good.

I am not young enough to know everything.

Boys will be boys and so will a lot of middle-aged men.

Youth would be an ideal state if it came a little later in life.

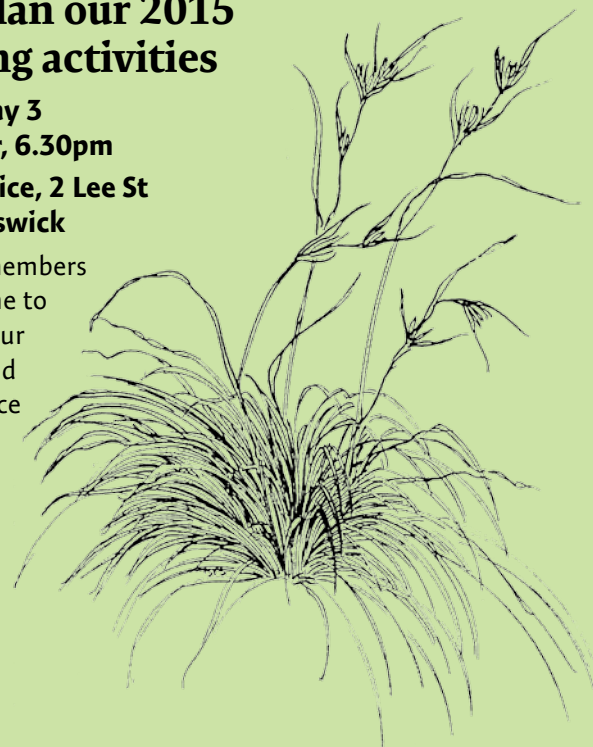
Help plan our 2015 planting activities

Wednesday 3

December, 6.30pm

**MCMC office, 2 Lee St
East Brunswick**

All FoMC members are welcome to help plan our planting and maintenance activities for 2015.



Merri Geometrids

Geometrids, also called loopers or inch worms, are a large diverse group of moths. The names refer to the distinctive locomotion of their caterpillars which have their legs grouped at the front and back of their bodies.

To walk/loop, they reach forward, grab the surface with their front legs, then doing a part hand-stand, move their back legs up to their front legs forming a loop, reach forward and repeat.



Geometrid moths often sit flat on a surface with their wings spread out. Their soft edges, colours and patterns give excellent camouflage.



Geometrids occur worldwide. Australia has around 1300 recorded species, with nearly 680 known in Victoria. I have photographed 70 species in my Coburg garden. Some include: *Scopula rubraria* – Reddish Wave – a common little moth you may see flying by day in grass, even lawns. It is quite variable, from pale straw through to dark brown. WS (wingspan) 2cm.



Crypsiphona ocularia – Red-lined Geometrid – is found over most of Australia. Often seen by day resting on a fence or wall, it may look quite plain. But underneath! WS 5cm.



The bark moth – *Scioglyptis lyciaria* – is a stunner on both sides.



Gastrinodes argoplaca's underside (above) is scary!

The green larvae of the Satin Moth – *Thalaina selenaea* – feed on wattles including Golden wattle – *Acacia pycnantha*. Moths may be plain or have various orange marks. WS 4.5cm.



The Common Gum Emerald – (*Prasinocyma semicrocea*) – is stunning green. WS 3.5cm.



The larvae of the Hakea Wine Moth – *Oenochroma vinaria* – are often seen feeding by day. If disturbed they curl into a defensive pose. The moth is large and may be pink to fawn. It has a bright pink body and is also known as the pink-bellied moth. WS 5.5cm.





Chrysolarentia heliacaria (above) is day flying and can be found in our Merri Ck grasslands. WS 3cm.



Some male and female moths can look quite different – called sexual dimorphism. An extreme example of this is *Zermizinga sinuata*

The male (above) is speckled grey, with brown and black wavy lines. The female (below) is flightless and very strange! I raised her from a caterpillar on indigenous Bluebells.



Discovery

Sometimes on nature documentaries you will hear “You are just as likely to discover a new species in your urban garden as anywhere else” Surely that can’t be true!?

Some years ago I brought home from MCMC (weeds from the crew’s work) a bunch of metre-long stems of Fuller’s Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*). This weed of local waterways reminds me of my home – Geelong, which like Brunswick and Coburg, played an important role in the wool processing industry in Australia. Fuller’s Teasel was brought to Australia as the dried seed heads were used in wool fabric finishing or brushing machines in woollen mills.

I put the stems (also used in dried arrangements) in a big urn and left them. Maybe a year or so later I discovered dainty little (WS 1.5cm) brown geometrids flying about, sitting and mating in the same room as the Teasel, but then, not outside. (I was nightly attracting moths to a lit veranda window to photograph and ID.)



I was in communication with Peter Marriott from the Entomological Society of Vic who is working on a series of books – *Moths of Victoria*. Peter was teaching me how to identify local moths. We could not find the little moth in his extensive photo collection, in the Museum of Victoria or the Australian National Insect Collection (ANIC) in Canberra. I collected specimens for them.

Then I discovered the caterpillars were feeding on the dried Teasel seed heads. As they seemed to be living and breeding inside maybe it was a non-native?

Some internet research found a very similar European species (*Idaea inquinata*) that is found in houses and barns eating dried plant material. Maybe my little moth is a recently introduced species or maybe it is a new Australian species!



When *Moths of Victoria Part 3* (covering that group) came out in 2011 an undescribed moth *Idaea sp(1)* was included.



Initially found in my porch on a plant from Merri Creek, they still live in my garden although the teasel is long gone. Native or introduced, we are not sure? BUT ...

KEEP A LOOK OUT IN YOUR GARDEN. You never know what you may find!

Wendy Moore
FoMC Life member

Birds along the Merri in early spring

Our bird surveyors enjoyed fine, sunny weather on 31 August, although the wind made birds less active and visible than normal at Galgi Ngarrk and Bababi Djinanang.

By late August, cuckoos had returned to the outer-urban Merri for spring and the nesting season. Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo was seen at Galgi Ngarrk, Galada Tamboore (3) and Bababi Marning. The birders at Bababi Marning had good views of a pair of Fantailed Cuckoos, and a Pallid Cuckoo was being chased by honeyeaters, which seem to be aware of the cuckoos' exploitative breeding habits. Australian cuckoos are brood parasites like their European relatives, laying an egg in the nest of another species. The chick generally evicts the eggs or young of the host species, and is fed by the foster parents.

A Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater was seen by the Creek between Merri and Kirkdale Street Parks (East Brunswick/Northcote). It is seen regularly in Fawkner, but this was the first time that any of the observers had seen one so far downstream.

An interview and sound recording were made for Radio 3CR's *Lost in Science* program during the East Brunswick Blyth St-Moreland Rd survey (broadcast on 11 September).

There was no sign or sound of Bell Miners in their usual haunt, between Albion St and CERES in East Brunswick. Have they been chased out by Noisy Miners and/or Red Wattlebirds, or did they run out of food? (They feed on sugary exudate from psyllid bugs or 'lerps' on Eucalypts.) The more recent colony just south of Blyth Street seems to be larger, with 13 birds being recorded. The Clifton Hill surveyors noted that Noisy Miners are very aggressive and have many nests in the area. They have not sighted any New Holland Honeyeaters in the area this winter, despite good flowering of *Grevillea rosmarinifolia* and *Correa*.

The nine surveys on 31 August and one on 7 September recorded a total of 75 species. This is comparable with the total of 77 species for September 2013.

The most numerous species for this round of surveys were Eurasian Coot, even though it was only recorded at Edwardes Lake (130) and Coburg Lake (52); Rainbow Lorikeet; and Red Wattlebird. Pacific Black Duck, Red Wattlebird, Magpie and Little Raven were recorded at all 10 sites.

The most species-diverse sites were Edwardes Lake and Blyth St-Moreland Rd East Brunswick with 33 species each, closely followed by Kirkdale St- Merri Park Northcote and Galgi Ngarrk (31). Thirty species were recorded at Bababi Marning. Sites with the highest number of birds were Edwardes Lake (331), followed by Coburg Lake (243) and Blyth St-Moreland Rd (240).

The large numbers of kangaroos (60 recorded at Galada Tamboore, 100+ at Bababi Marning, and 152 at Galgi Ngarrk) may be inhibiting growth and regeneration of native vegetation. A single feral goat was seen at Galada; also a cat in Yellow Box Gully at Galada, well away from houses.

Ann McGregor BirdWatch Coordinator



The Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater could be confused with a Red or Little Wattlebird, but has a buff-coloured throat and dark-tipped pink bill.
Photo: Kevin (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Kevin>), Wikipedia.

Fourth Merri Birdwatch survey for 2014

Bird surveys will be held from 8.45–10.30am at ten sites along Merri Creek as listed below. Beginners welcome, BYO binoculars if possible, but no dogs please, as they reduce the number and variety of birds to be seen. The contact for all Birdwatch events is Ann McGregor 0429 386 102.

Free leaflets on Merri Birds (normally \$2) are available for all participants

Surveys at the following nine sites are on 9 November 2014 and 15 February 2015

- Bababi Djinanang (Jukes Rd Grasslands),**
- Fawkner:** Meet on the Merri Path at the end of Jukes Road, Fawkner (Melway 18 A2).
- Egan Reserve – Harding Street – Strettle Reserve – Normanby Avenue:** Meet at the bluestone steps at the end of The Grove, East Coburg (Melway 30 A3).
- Coburg Lake Reserve:** Meet near the car park, Lake Grove, Coburg (Melway 17 H10).
- Edwardes Lake:** Meet at the playground adjacent to Griffiths Street, Reservoir (Melway 18 E5).
- CERES – Moreland Road:** Meet at the seats on the Merri Path at rear of CERES, East Brunswick (Melway 30 B7).
- Merri Park and Phillips Reserve:** Meet at the end of Victoria Street, East Brunswick, at the 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 O'Herns Road gate off Hume Highway, Somerton (Melway 180 E6).
- Galada Tamboore:** Meet at the end of Hatty Court, Campbellfield (Melway 7 K6).

Surveys at Bababi Marning (Cooper St Grasslands) are on 16 November 2014 and 22 February 2015

Meet near the Istrian Club, Cooper Street, Campbellfield (Melway 180 K10).

Walking with weeds

Like many people living in Melbourne's inner north, I find that the Merri Creek threads through my daily life as a space to relax, as a passage to and from the city and increasingly, as a place I help to restore.

This entwining of daily activities and the creek eventually wove its way into my art practice. The repetitive and meditative activities of walking, planting, weeding and collecting rubbish coalesced with my art-making, screenprinting and sewing, and focused my attention.

My time at the creek expanded to include the gathering of plant material (usually weeds) to dye and print fabric. In turn I sewed the fabric into wearable artefacts for restoration volunteers. I was interested in what might happen if we wore garments that were inherently of the creek. Could 'wearing the creek' heighten the relations and sense of purpose between workers and sites of planting and weeding?

The restoration activities began to take me further north, to places like Kalkallo Common and Cooper St Grassland (Wurundjeri name, Bababi Marning). The stories of people who had worked at the creek for a long time sparked my interest in its history. Dipping in and out of little sections of creek, I began to dream about the tracts unknown. Where did it begin, and where did it flow before meeting with the Yarra River in Abbotsford? I noticed this was a common way of 'knowing' the creek – to each of us the Merri meant 'our' section, expressed and experienced in relation to where we lived and how we moved about our own neighbourhoods.

About this time I came across Freya Mathews's book, *Journey to the Source of the Merri*. In 1999, when community opposition to the path of the proposed Hume Freeway was coming to a head, Freya and two other women walked from the creek's confluence with the Yarra all the way to its source near Heathcote Junction. Upon reading Freya's account of their pilgrimage contextualised within her research of the Merri's history, I realised that I too had to walk the creek's length.

My walk, over seven days in March/April 2013, became an artistic re-enactment of sorts. It was not about treading new ground, rather I wanted to experience the whole creek, not vicariously and fleetingly from train or car window, but as an iteration of all those who had walked this way before. Not just Freya and friends, Hume and Hovell or Ned Kelly, but also the countless generations of people who walked and lived in this place before colonisation.

Around the world humans engage in ritual as a means of illustrating their particular relationship to their environment. 'Welcome to Country' ceremonies in Victoria represent Indigenous peoples' continued connection to place. They are also a reminder that free passage across land was not the norm in Australia until teams of surveyors and explorers, ignoring traditional laws and customs, began to walk and map the country that they deemed *terra nullius*.

Unlike my forebears, it was important to me to be granted landholder consent to traverse their land. In a process much like piecing together a jigsaw I contacted property owners and managers up and down the creek. For the most part people were interested and obliging – but as the walk showed us more starkly, formal boundaries along the creek are marked not only on historic and contemporary maps, but also on the land itself. Storm water run-off and invasive weeds defy bureaucracy, yet boundaries between one property and the next were often clearly defined by changes in plant distribution. We could be walking through almost impenetrable blackberries or gorse, only to come upon a fence line beyond which the weeds abruptly disappeared and a softer landscape of mostly indigenous species emerged.

Meanwhile, I made other preparations for the walk. Using fabric dyed with weeds gathered from the creek's banks, I sewed seven sets of gaiters and tie-on pockets to be worn each day; anachronistic yet functional garments that would collect mud and seeds, creek water and sweat. Wearing them also served to return the weeds to the creek in a symbolic sense, acknowledging the creek's chequered history and acting as a connecting thread, between past and present.

Once I began the journey from the source to the Yarra, walking with my friend Lesley and the artists who joined us for a day at a time drew my attention to the contrasting experiences of walking for seven days as opposed to walking for one. Afterwards each participant gave their individual experiences of separate tracts of creek, shaping and enhancing my own memories.

Continued overleaf



Rebecca collecting plants for dyeing on the fifth day of her Merri walk. She is wearing her hand-made and dyed outside pockets and leggings.

More good things than bad

How fitting it is that we've had Sumner Loving near the place where forty years ago, floods prompted calls for the concreting of the creek; which led to strenuous efforts to save and restore it.

There've been plenty of great outcomes down the track, plus some rotten ones: even the Craigieburn Bypass would have been worse but for a determined campaign to shift it away from the creek. The East Brunswick electricity terminal's development, and the remnant grasslands' obliteration (it's Melbourne's inescapable destiny to grow, we're told), are the most distressing; some Growling Grass Frog habitat has been overshadowed by a massive new bridge; we look like retaining Hernes Swamp, Wallan, but it is in a very degraded condition.

However just in this section we see the Merri wetland, the Winifred St park and the charming Zoe Circuit, which occupy the site of a former works depot; the levee and the billabong; the arched footbridge commemorating the pioneering Merri Creek Coordinating Committee; the smart new playground, another impressive example of progress; on the opposite bank the Kirkdale St park, once a quarry and then a tip, and the enhancement of the shared footway with some fine decking.

Downstream where people power drove electric power into the ground, persuading the decent John Cain to bury the cables, there's the park beside the St Georges Rd bridge; the *absence* of the noisy, out-of-place Groves timber yard in Merri Parade, which some benighted bureaucrat nearly allowed to stay!; the little hillock and community garden west of Rushall station, now that's more like it; the elegant Old Colonists' village; the footbridge and Aboriginal-themed murals on the rail viaduct, and the pram-, skateboard-, bicycle- and wheelchair-friendly Koonda Lat.

Upstream we are honoured to have the iconic CERES, the so appropriately located ACES Aboriginal retirement home, and the stately Russian Orthodox Church with matching hall. CERES incidentally has some of the twenty-odd outdoor artworks adorning the Merri or its tributaries, while there are also numerous historical relics such as the Hall Reserve bluestone shed (thankfully recently saved) and the Edwardes Lake steam-engine.

We've got the spectacular Coburg Lake (from decades before 1974), the broad Edwardes on the Edgars, the modest Broadmeadows one on the Merlynston; quite recently we gained the enormous

bonus of the former VicRoads land by Murray Rd being handed over to Moreland Council – it always looked like public open space, but now it really is. And what was it doing in the motorway monolith's mitts in the first place? Oh, something about a proposed freeway from Fawkner to Clifton Hill, that's all... part of the 1969 plan for a monstrous network of roads criss-crossing Melbourne.

On a happier note, a great bunch of environmental groups: Wallan, Merriang Landcare, Malcolm, Coburg Lake, Edwardes, Edgars, MECCARG, Darebin Bushcrew, Ross Street, Quarries, all passionate about their patch. Most fundamental of all, the traditional owners, the Wurundjeri, who join with us in the year's highlight the Murnong Harvest and other activities; they have a base at the treasured Abbotsford Convent, whose rescue from desecration was an outstanding win for our heritage.

With this and the Farm and the Falls and the fish ladder, and the old mill and the spiritual Koori Garden, it's a wonderful conclusion to our beloved Merri Creek.

Paul Prentice

The dam/wetland at CERES in East Brunswick, with the Eco House and electric car in the background.



Walking with weeds

Walking can be a way of knowing a place, and in turn a way of knowing oneself. The pace and nuance of repetitive footfall on ground encourages reflection as well as a focus on the present moment. Trained in printmaking, I am tuned toward the multiple, the repeat, the copy. So it is that repeated human actions appear as central concerns in my practice – in this instance the repetition of getting up each day, donning a fresh pair of weed-dyed gaiters and continuing downstream. The gaiters absorbed physical

traces of the walk, recording the space between my body and the creek, documenting my footsteps as I followed the footsteps of others, and in doing so bearing witness to the creek's resilience in spite of incessant anthropogenic wear and tear.

Rebecca Mayo

This article is an edited excerpt from Rebecca's exhibition catalogue, Walking the Merri: From Source to Confluence. The beautiful catalogue, which features thread binding hand-dyed with weeds from Merri Creek, is available at the MCMC office, 2 Lee St East Brunswick for \$35.

Continued from page 9

Friends of Edgars Creek Focus

Welcome to another update of the Friends of Edgars Creek.

We have seen another successful year of planting activities come and go, and we recently completed our planting season at our “Christmas in September” planting with 593 plants finding a new home in a series of mulch beds at the Ronald St footbridge area. This was also the area of our first planting in April 2014, and we have now undertaken a number of major planting events that form a link to the now burgeoning Gooseneck Meander site. We also have funding for a further project targeting the channel bank adjacent to the latest planting site – I can’t wait to see this area transform in the months and years ahead! Look what’s happened at another one of our sites in the “before and after” photos below.

FoEC has maintained our advocacy work for the Edgars Creek corridor, and we have been engaged with Moreland City Council and other stakeholders in the preliminary work associated with a proposed wetland development for the Cash Reserve area (the old golf range area in the vicinity of the confluence of the Edgars and Merri Creeks). We look forward to the commencement of community consultation for this project, and welcome input from all community members who utilise this area. We are very excited by the scope of the proposed wetland, the benefits it will bring in terms of quality of storm water run-off entering the waterways, the potential for wetland habitat creation and other accompanying revegetation works around the wetland. The project will also see the creation of a cycling link between the Merri Creek trail and the Ronald St area (including the future link with the Kodak Bridge at Coburg Hill and beyond).

A final note – we wish to thank the outgoing member for Pascoe Vale – Christine Campbell – for her support of FoEC over the years and also for our community in general since she was first elected to parliament in 1996. She was a strong supporter of the effort to save the Edgars Creek parklands – a fight that has only relatively recently been permanently resolved with Moreland City Council taking over management responsibility for the 10.7 hectares of former Vic Roads land along Edgars Creek. Enjoy your time outside public service, Christine, and we hope to see you on the creek!

David Pavone President, Friends of Edgars Creek



'Before' in the vicinity of the remnant redgum at our "Caravan Park site."



'After' showing planting around the remnant redgum and above the rocky escarpment to the right. These projects have been funded by Melbourne Water and DSE at this site.

NOVEMBER

EVENTS

DECEMBER

Saturday 1: MECCARG* Preparation for Murnong Gathering

Meet at Connolly Avenue Coburg, south of Murray Road bridge, 1–3pm. Melway 18 A11. Wear sturdy footwear and gloves. Phone Mel 0404 043 010.

Sunday 2: Litter Clean Up – Reservoir

Edgars Creek below Edwardes Lake Reservoir, 10am–12noon. Melway 18 D5. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 2: Streamteam Water Quality Testing

Upstream of St Georges Road bridge, enter from Miller Street, North Fitzroy, 2–3.30pm. Melway 30 C10. Phone: 9354 9885.

Saturday 8: MECCARG* Murnong Gathering

Don't miss this unique cultural event. Meet at the old quarry, near the footbridge on the Merri Creek trail between Murray Road and Bell Street Coburg, 1–3pm. Melway 18 A11. Wear sturdy footwear and gloves. Phone Mel 0404 043 010. Funded by the City of Moreland.

Sunday 9: Fourth Merri Creek Bird Survey for 2014

Nine sites along the Merri. See page 8 for details.

Sunday 9: Twin Lakes Walk

Meet at Lake Grove Coburg, 1.30pm. Melway 17 H10. Hike off-path up the Merri to Edwardes Lake and back down Edgars Creek. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Tuesday 11: Friends of Merri Creek Annual General Meeting

Room 3, Van Raay Centre at CERES, Roberts Street East Brunswick, 7.30pm. See page 1 for details.

Saturday 15: Summer Loving Weed Workshop

Merri Park Wetland, Northcote, Sumner Avenue near Traill Street, 1.30–3.30pm. Melway 30 C8, follow the flags. Help rejuvenate Merri Park. Funded by Communities for Nature and supported by the City of Darebin. Phone Ray or Monica at MCMC 9380 8199.

Sunday 16: Fourth Bird Survey for 2014 at Bababi Marning

See page 8 for details.

Sunday 16: Friends of Edgars Creek Site Maintenance

Meet at the Silurian Cliff site — access via Ronald Street and head north past the bridge, 1–3pm Melway 18 A8. Maintenance at the Silurian Cliff site. Phone David on 0428 130 268.

Late November to December: Golden Sun Moth Survey

Please register with Ray or Monica at MCMC on 9380 8199 or email: admin@mcmc.org.au by 21/11/14 and we will let you know ASAP as to which day will be most suitable. Funded by Communities for Nature.

Sunday 23: Last of 5 woody weed control Block B Bababi Marning

The last of 5 days to rid block B of Broom, Gorse and Briar Rose bushes. Light refreshments provided. Bababi Marning (Cooper Street Grasslands). Meet at gate opposite 111 Metrolink Circuit (Road Runner factory), in between Transit Drive and Connection Drive Campbellfield, 10am–12.30pm. Melway 180 K12 — park on the factory side and check the No Parking signs. Phone Ray 0422 989 166.

Sunday 30 : Historic Merri Creek Cycle

Meet at Creek Parade Northcote 1.30pm. Melway 30 F12. Ride to Coburg Lake or on to Jukes Road Fawkner and return the same way or by the Upfield rail bike path or by train. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

*MECCARG = Merri & Edgars Creek Confluence Area Restoration Group

Wednesday 3: Help plan our 2015 planting activities

MCMC office, 2 Lee Street East Brunswick, 6.30pm. All FoMC members are welcome to help planning for 2015. Phone Ray 0422 989 166.

Saturday 6: MECCARG* End of Year Celebration

Meet at Connolly Avenue Coburg, south of Murray Road bridge, 1–3pm. Melway 18 A11. Wear sturdy footwear and gloves. Phone Mel 0404 043 010.

Sunday 7: Litter Clean Up - Northcote

Walker Street East, Northcote, 10am–12noon. Melway 30 F12. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 7: Triple Treat Tour — Ride, Ramble & Row

Meet at CERES, Stewart & Roberts Streets, 1.30pm (Melway 30 B7) or at Fairfield Boathouse, 2.30pm (Melway 30 J12). Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 7: Streamteam Water Quality Testing

Upstream of St Georges Road bridge, enter from Miller Street, North Fitzroy, 2–3.30pm. Melway 30 C10. Phone: 9354 9885.

JANUARY 2015

Early January: Kangaroo Grass Seed Harvest

Please register with Ray or Monica at MCMC on 9380 8199 or email: admin@mcmc.org.au by 19/12/14 and we will let you know the site and which weekday will be most suitable. Funded by Communities for Nature. (Please note that this activity may involve rigorous exercise in high temperatures and may not be suitable for people with a medical condition.)

Sunday 4: Streamteam Water Quality Testing

Upstream of St Georges Road bridge, enter from Miller Street, North Fitzroy, 2–3.30pm. Melway 30 C10. Phone: 9354 9885.

FEBRUARY 2015

Sunday 1: Litter Clean Up - Coburg

Bell Street Coburg, 10am–12noon. Melway 30 A1. Phone Paul 9489 5062.

Sunday 1: Streamteam Water Quality Testing

Upstream of St Georges Road bridge, enter from Miller Street, North Fitzroy, 2–3.30pm. Melway 30 C10. Phone: 9354 9885.

Saturday 7: MECCARG* Site Maintenance

Meet at the Merri path south of Murray Road bridge Coburg, 1–3pm. Wear sturdy footwear and gloves. Phone Mel 0404 043 010.

Sunday 15: First Merri Creek Bird Survey for 2015

Nine sites along the Merri. See page 8 for details.

Sunday 22: First Bird Survey for 2015 at Bababi Marning

See page 8 for details.



Friends of Merri Creek Inc.

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