



summer 2005 ponderings

Newsletter of the Moonee Ponds Creek
Co-ordination Committee



The 'Glory Hole' spillway at Jacana Wetlands shows us what it's capable of! We witnessed Jacana Valley in full flood. The lump that appears to be floating in the background is the very top tips of a mature River Red Gum. Now that's deep!
..... See page 4 for more details

traveler's ramblings...

Well, I have been away for a long time; 6 months around the world in fact! And, some may not believe it, but it is really good to be back on the creek again. I have seen some of the natural wonders of the world including the spectacular Amazon Jungle and the vast Pantanal Wetlands in southern Brazil. Did you know they are the largest inland wetlands in the world (the size of France!)? I have traveled through the rainforests and deserts of Mexico, Egypt and Thailand and observed some of the cultures who call these places home. After all of these amazing and eye-opening adventures, I can honestly say that I am newly inspired to contribute to the renewal of the Moonee Ponds Creek environment and continue to encourage the development of a local community who feel the creek is part of *their* home. There are many indigenous cultures all over the world, which have developed a special bond with their local environment and see it as intrinsic to their lives and wellbeing. It is for this reason alone that they are

passionate about its protection. This is a way of thinking that is sadly rare in our culture and difficult to promote, given the levels of degradation of many of our natural assets.

The Moonee Ponds Creek is a special case. It reminds us of the mistakes of the past, as well as what we still have: beautiful stretches of creek corridor such as the Jacana Wetlands teeming with birdlife (a future miniature Pantanal?), the serene Billabongs of Woodlands Historic Park, the glorious River Red Gums and the deep, still ponds of the upper catchment, not to mention the birdlife, frogs, kangaroos, echidnas and even the crazy microscopic beasties that live all along the creek from top to bottom, which make even the concrete-lined sections fascinating places to explore (I could go on). Last but not least, the creek is there to inspire us and remind us what is still possible to achieve.

Maddy, horse, pyramids, Cairo! →

And now for some last minute Co-ordinator's Ramblings.

It's been an exciting time here at MPCCC with our wonderful Christmas party and then the floods. Welcome back to Maddy and Elissa from their various journeys, both travel and with babies. It's great to have the full team back. If you would like to contribute in any way to our Ponderings, be it with your memories, a letter to the Editor, an article about anything creekly and especially wildlife sightings, please do! We'd love to have your contributions. And I guess this is a fitting time to thank Deb, who has been doing a most wonderful job with Ponderings – so go on, help her out and send us in your very own ramblings!



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memories of the creek

By Kelvin Thomson

In this edition Kelvin Thomson shares his memories of the Moonee Ponds Creek during his teenage years.

My strongest memory of the Moonee Ponds Creek is of the section in Pascoe Vale at the foot of the Gaffney Street hill. As teenagers, my brother Lex and I used to ride our bikes down the hill to the creek. This was before the Tullamarine Freeway, fast food outlets and the concreting of the creek. In those days, the area at the foot of Gaffney Street hill was a very substantial meander in the creek. Peppercorn trees, some of which still remain today, dominated the landscape and provided cool shade from the hot summer sun. Lots of other children used to visit this area and play in the creek too. There were fish, frogs, tadpoles, prickly hedges of box thorn and lots of fun places to hide. When the Tullamarine Freeway went through, this area that we used to play in was lined with concrete. Unfortunately a lot of the creek's natural charm, though not all, was lost.

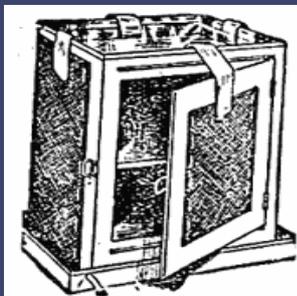
A large poultry farm was located downstream in the area now adjacent to Esslemont Reserve. And I also remember travelling much further upstream, to Westmeadows and the historic bluestone bridge. As a teenager, for whatever reason, this outing to the 'bush' always seemed a long way away, taking the best part of a day's travelling to get there. Today Westmeadows no longer seems very far away. I can drive there in twenty minutes and occasionally ride my bike. It is pleasing that the creek in Westmeadows still has some semi-rural character and charm about it, and that so many of the old eucalypts remain.

At times some parts of the creek between Westmeadows and Pascoe Vale were



unsightly. The Kingsford Smith Ulm Reserve in Glenroy used to be a rubbish tip. The area near the railway trestle bridge where the Gowanbrae Estate is currently under construction provided wide views of the valley. The valley was often infested with numerous weeds such as Scotch Thistles, and was burnt on a fairly regular basis during the dry summer months. The path that now makes access to both sides of the creek so easy, wasn't there beforehand. Intrepid prospective explorers had to struggle to gain access to different parts of the creek and make their way down whatever man-made paths they could find.

Keen on growing your own plants at home? Judy's little secret should help you out.



a shade house

By Judy Allen

There is a memory that I hold of when I was nine years old that I would like to share with you. My brother and I were 'helping' Mum out in the garden and a branch of fuchsia broke off. Mum wasn't too happy about this. Anyway, my brother simply poked the piece of fuchsia into the ground, and, to our joint amazement, when we revisited our poor little fuchsia branch one month later, it had put out healthy white roots. Sometimes gardening can be that simple.

There is one indigenous plant that is blissfully simple to grow from cuttings: the Hop Goodenia or *Goodenia ovata*. When grown in a nursery, with adequate bottom heat, rooting hormone powder and a regular soft misting of water over the foliage, the cuttings will produce roots in a mere ten days. At home, I place my cuttings in a shady and sheltered place near my back door. In this position, they will produce roots in three weeks.

It is here that I will reveal my secret of success: the mini shade house. My mini shade house is based on the design of that Aussie icon, the Coolgardie Safe. Cuttings prefer a cool, moist and humid environment, as they do not have any roots to give them more water. This necessary environment can be provided in a shade house.

My mini shade house is constructed by draping cloth over a wire frame and allowing the edges of the cloth to rest in a dish of water. I place my cuttings into potting mix in a plant pot, and then place the pot underneath the cloth. The edges of the cloth dipped into the water creates a cool, moist and humid environment as they soak up the water, which is then evaporated away.

The wire frame can be made of re-twisted coat hangers, or rummage through your local op-shop for a wire lampshade. These are often the right size for just one pot to fit underneath.

Cuttings, and gardening, can be that simple.

Water watch

another buggy summer

By Helen Suter



The bugs that call the Moonee Ponds Creek home have certainly been presented with some challenges this summer! Our fantastic Water watch volunteer, Helen, will reveal all in her regular contribution.

The Moonee Ponds Creek has carried an enormous amount of water since our last sampling date. What we are all very interested in, is the survival rate of the bugs, in particular which species and how many of them have managed to survive and continue dwelling in their habitats. We have also been keeping an eye out for any dead Short-finned Eels after the discoveries in the Merri Creek and Yarra River. Our report is that we have seen no eels, either alive or dead.

As I mentioned in the previous article, we are currently identifying bugs to Family level. The reason for this is so that we can develop a SIGNAL score for the creek, which can then be compared with the EPA Environmental Objectives for urban streams. SIGNAL scores range from 1 for a pollution tolerant community to 10 which indicates a pollution sensitive community. A site with high water quality will have typically a SIGNAL score of >6. A site with a severe pollution problem is a typical score of <4. Our bug identification skills are developing quite nicely and we are all becoming more familiar with the animals that live in the creek. Summer has provided us with some interesting findings. Yabbies have been sighted at Mitchell Parade Weir. Caddis Fly larvae, which are quite sensitive, have been identified at Holbrook Reserve. Unfortunately Jacana Site 1 above the Northern Wetlands has not had the best selection and number of bugs recently but we have found Mayflies which are quite sensitive. At this point in time, our SIGNAL scores suggest that the Moonee Ponds Creek is in the "polluted" end of the scale rather than the "high water quality" end.

A new timetable of water monitoring dates has been developed for 2005. We have included more weekend sampling dates this year and hope that some more of you will be able to come along for a look at what we do.

Moonee Ponds Creek 2005 Proposed Water Monitoring Dates

Month	Day	Date	Time
January	Monday	17th	10am
February	Sunday	20th	9am
March	Sunday	20th	9am
April	Monday	11th	10am
May	Sunday	15th	9am
June	Sunday	19th	9am
July	Sunday	10th	9am
August	Sunday	14th	9am
September	Monday	19th	10am
October	Sunday	16th	9am
November	Sunday	13th	9am
December	Sunday	11th	9am

Water monitoring commences at:

Jacana Site 1 and finishes at Holbrook Reserve

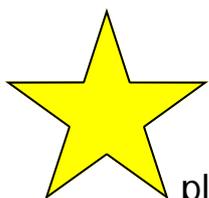
Itinerary for the 9am start:

Jacana Site 1 at 9am
 Jacana Site 2 at 10.30am
 Mitchell Parade Weir at 12.30pm
 Holbrook Reserve at 2.00pm

Itinerary for the 10am start:

all times are 1 hour later

There is always a certain degree of uncertainty with water monitoring, mostly due to rainfall. If you need to travel some distance to be a water watch volunteer, I would prefer that you call me, Helen Suter, on 0438 456 602 to confirm that the monitoring is going ahead. Or preferably register your name on the email list by sending your details to helensuter@pacific.net.au



We Still Need Walkers!



MPCCC needs a small group of dedicated people to letterbox drop planting day fliers. This helps us advertise our planting days and other activities throughout the year. This is also a great way of attracting new friends group members. Please contact Mel on 9333 2406 or email mel@mpccc.org for more information on pay rates and dates.

the great flood of 2005

It was Thursday, February 3rd when Melbourne awoke to continual rainfall and unbelievable floodwaters.

The Moonee Ponds Creek certainly experienced its own fair share of high flows. The most impressive sight was the Jacana Wetlands system. Murky brown water flowed over the lip of the glory hole, and only the top branches of huge River Red Gums emerged from the waters.

Who needs concrete! It was heartening to see the concreted sections of the creek completely covered by fast-flowing floodwaters. We wondered aloud, "Is this what the creek would look like if there was no concrete?"

How do floodwaters of this velocity affect the creek ecology? There are positives: indigenous seed germination, a flushing of the creek system, excess silt removal, reoxygenation of the water . Or there are negatives: adding chemicals from road run-off, eroding soil structure, ripping out riverbank vegetation, destroying in-stream snags, ripples and habitat.



Jacana Wetlands
When you stand at Jacana Wetlands and look up at the concrete glory hole, you think, "When is the water ever going to get that high!" Well it did. Witness the glory of the glory hole!

Jacana Wetlands
Looking south over the Jacana Wetlands system towards the Western Ring Road bridge. The water was almost touching the bottom of the bridge!



Jacana Wetlands
An aerial shot of the whole Jacana Wetlands system.

Nursery Corner Reserve
What bike path? The path was totally submerged in this section.





Flemington

A concreted section of the creek, near Macaulay Road.



Flemington

Looking towards Melbourne CBD.



Dawson St, Brunswick West

How different the creek looks without the concrete.



Union St, Brunswick

A very natural looking concreted section.



Strathmore Ponds, Strathmore

Where are the ponds?



Forester Hall, Westmeadows

Where has all the bank revegetation gone?!



Koala Cres, Westmeadows

Looking towards Woodlands Historic Park (left)



Mickleham Road, Westmeadows

The water was simply gushing!

billabong joy

“water brings life!”



A reflective Mel shares her thoughts about the floods, beautiful billabongs and regenerating Red Gums.

There has been a lot of talk lately in the local and state news about the devastating effects that occur during flooding events. Yes, it is true that floods can cause terrible damage, as can be seen by the after effects of the recent downpour on the 3rd February. At Westmeadows, the Moonee Ponds Creek broke its banks in the most spectacular fashion, rising up and flowing over the old Bluestone Bridge, lapping at the doors of the historic Westmeadows Tavern and threatening low-lying houses. Whilst driving along the creek three weeks afterwards, we spotted numerous scars in the banks of the creek where the swelling waters had cut into the soft soil. The result of this action is a number of erosion points, with some being quite large and obviously visible, whilst others are barely noticeable. There is also a high incidence of young plants bent over by a massive load of dislocated *Phragmites* reeds. At Jacana Wetlands, there is a myriad of piles of stormwater litter, especially plastic bottles, strewn over the length of the whole Jacana valley.

Frankly it all sounds quite bleak. What about discussing the positive effects of the creek (and other associated waterways), receiving, what after all, gives it life? Tucked away at Woodlands Historic Park is a system of the most beautiful billabongs that have been little but puddles for over seven years. In fact, they've been bone dry for four of those years. These billabongs are now full to the brim, absolutely beautiful and full of life. When we visited them the other day, we were lucky to witness the flight of hundreds of bright yellow and black butterflies, dragonflies, and damselflies. The chorus of Pobblebonk and Striped Marsh frogs and Common froglets almost deafened our ears. A pair of Hoary-headed Grebes floated smoothly along the waters surface. A Little Pied Cormorant circled lazily overhead looking for a feed. And there are SO MANY tadpoles, it is mind boggling. Seeing these massive populations of 'taddies' reminds me of my distant childhood, when there were tadpoles in every little puddle after rains. It will be interesting to see if there will be a crop of River Red Gum seedlings coming up - germination of this species is triggered by flood events, and seeds that have been sitting dormant in the soil for long periods of time will suddenly sprout into life.

In the next issue of Ponderings, we will endeavour to provide a more comprehensive report on the after effects of Melbourne's 1 in a 100 year flood event, both positive and negative. The results of recent water testing and Melbourne Water's assessments will enable us to gain a bigger picture on what those effects are. If you have any thoughts or observations on "The Great Flood of February 2005", we would love to hear from you. Our contact details are on the front of Ponderings, so please drop us a line to and let us know what you think.

clean up australia day sunday 6th march



On Sunday 6th March 2005, local residents and friends group members will once again join forces to clean up the Moonee Ponds Creek as part of Clean Up Australia Day. Over 100 people are expected at five sites along the Moonee Ponds Creek to show their support for our beloved waterway. They will help to reduce the estimated 180 tonnes of litter that washes into the creek each year via the stormwater system.

Clean Up's this year will also help to remedy some of the damage caused to the creek from the recent 1 in a 100 year floods, including litter pick ups and removal of reeds from newly planted trees & shrubs. The Clean Up Day is being coordinated by the Moonee Ponds Creek Co-ordination Committee and builds on the exemplary works put in by the fourteen Friends Groups that have been working along the creek over the last three years.

Creekline Clean Up	Jacana Wetlands North Clean Up	Jacana Wetlands South Clean Up	Cross Keys Reserve Creeky Clean Up	Flemington Road Bridge Clean Up
Westmeadows 10am to 12noon	Jacana 10am to 12noon	Glenroy 10am to 12noon	Pascoe Vale 10am to 12noon	North Melbourne 10am to 12noon
Our focus for this site is to remove the build-up of reeds from the trees and shrubs, and pick up litter.	Our focus for this site is to remove the huge amounts of rubbish left from the floods. The litter traps are currently empty, due to the huge volumes of water and strong currents that were flowing through them.	Our focus for this site is to, once again, remove the large amounts of rubbish left from the floods. How can there possibly be so many plastic bottles?	Our focus for this site is to simply remove the build-up of litter.	Our focus for this site is to remove as much rubbish as we can manage.
All willing rubbish removalists, please meet at the BBQ and picnic tables on Raleigh Street, Westmeadows.	All willing rubbish removalists, please meet at the creek footbridge next to Jacana Reserve Oval.	All willing rubbish removalists, please meet under the Western Ring Road bridge.	All willing rubbish removalists, please meet at the creek footbridge.	All willing rubbish removalists, please meet by Flemington Road Bridge along the Moonee Ponds Creek.
Melways: 6 A7	Melways: 6 D8	Melways: 6 E11	Melways: 28 K1	Melways: 2A D1
There is parking available.	Parking is available along Lorraine Court.	Parking is available along Moonee Blvd or at the Broadmeadows Club	Parking is available at Cross Keys Reserve.	Parking is available in Debney Park, enter via Mt. Alexander Rd.
Why not ride your bicycle instead of driving the car!		Melways: 6 E10.	Hint... Strathmore train station is a mere 5 minutes walk away.	The Flemington Bridge train station is opposite the site. Who needs a car?



Westmeadows: reeds and rubbish



Jacana Wetlands: "What a pile!"



Jacana Wetlands: "Lets clean it up!"



Don't forget to bring your sunhat, sunglasses, sturdy footwear and gloves.



live attentively feel a sense of belonging



Observing and recording the activities of plants, animals and insects is a wonderful way to tell the story of nature's path through time. Why not keep a diary of natural events?

Nature unfolds with the seasons. Watching the seasonal changes on your own patch of ground encourages and trains you to become observant. You will begin to live more attentively to place and feel a stronger sense of belonging to your local area. Keeping a diary of natural events encourages you to carefully observe and record what is happening in the natural environment around you, day by day throughout the year.

Most people who participate in systematic recording of natural history observations soon become fascinated by the regular and predictable sequence of happenings in nature. On comparing notes made with those of previous years, the outstanding impression is how much nature is "on time". Experienced nature watchers can get to the stage where they can predict to the very week of the year when a certain plant will commence flowering, or a particular migratory bird is sure to be seen or heard. Yet there is always something new to discover!

Once you "get hooked" on keeping a diary of natural events you realize what an enjoyable and rewarding activity it is. You can observe nature wherever you live, whether in a rural area, the confines of your own backyard, exploring a National Park or walking along the creek. The more experienced you become, the more you can guarantee to show your friends where particular native orchids flower, when Cicada Nymphs begin to emerge from the ground or where the Purple Swamphens are nesting.



"wildness... is the key to unlocking the miraculous in the commonplace; to the understanding that 'heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads'." Henry David Thoreau

How Do I Record My Discoveries?

Anyone can record interesting and useful observations. Here are some ideas on how to use a nature diary:

-  Set aside time once a week to observe and record nature in your backyard, by the creek or in your local park.
-  Try to make your observations at different times of the day.
-  On your first expedition, simply familiarise yourself with the area you are watching.
-  On subsequent expeditions, look for things that have changed.
-  Make a note of the regular occurrences as well as the unusual and interesting.
-  Take your Nature Diary and make notes whenever you visit the Moonee Ponds Creek and adjoining parklands.

Find a special place where you can experience the glory of nature. Sit still, alert, fully present, mindful, awake. Let all your senses absorb the scene. Can you hear running water? Smell eucalyptus or decomposition? Feel dampness? See shadows or bright colours? Taste the air? Later, when you are ready, capture your response in words, drawings or music.



What Should I Record?

Weather

Rainfall, temperature (max., min.), wind strength and direction, humidity, cloud cover, bush fires. Note for the day you make a record.

Plants

Observe fungi, moss, lichens, trees, shrubs, groundcovers, small plants, vines, ferns, etc. Record what species have buds, flowers, fruit, seeds, insect infestation, weed invasion, appearance of fungi, dieback, parasitic invasion, etc.

Animals

Observe fish, crustaceans, frogs, lizards, birds, mammals. Distinguish between indigenous or introduced species. Record what species are present and how many. Behaviour such as migration, feeding, breeding, nesting.

Insects

Observe beetles, bugs, spiders, ants, dragonflies, butterflies, cicadas, bees, wasps, etc.

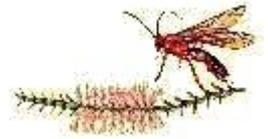
Record population explosions, stages of the lifecycle, behaviour, the activities and movements of favourite insects in your house and garden.

Habitats

Observe your backyard, the Moonee Ponds Creek, local parks, wetlands, remnant and revegetated bushland. Record plant communities, animal use of habitats, relationships between plant communities and site aspects, soil, water run-off.

Interconnections

Observe linkages, relationships, the turning seasons, migrations patterns, weather phenomena.



Some Hints For Recording Your Discoveries

-  Always record the time of day, date, month and year for each observation.
-  Keep weather and rainfall records. You can get these from your local newspaper, or the evening news, or just write, for example, "cold, raining" or "strong westerly wind".
-  Be systematic and organized. If you make a note on a scrap of paper, transfer it to the Nature Diary as soon as it is practical.
-  Take photographs to keep in your Diary, as well as relevant newspaper stories. Make notes to go with them.
-  You can make sketches of anything that is fascinating or unusual, or you can make a more detailed written account.
-  Use field guides to help with species identification. You will be amazed at how quickly you remember the names.
-  Summarise observations at the end of each month. For example: number of rainy days, bird behaviour, plants in flower, etc.
-  Keep your observations for comparisons in future years. You will soon start to see regular patterns emerge.



Dingy Swallowtail

backyard thugs

bird lollies?

What on earth does that have to do with weeds, and what does that mean anyway!?

Large-leaf Cotoneaster is a very popular ornamental throughout Australia. It is an evergreen or semi-evergreen shrub or small tree with many stems, growing to 5m tall. This long-lived, hardy species is tolerant of frost, cold or hot weather and seasonally dry conditions. Plants grow most vigorously in light shaded or sunny areas in woodland, forest and riparian environments. Most infestations occur in and around human habitation and disturbed, built-up areas.

Bright red berry fruits occur from February to August. They are nearly round to egg-shaped, bright green turning a glossy red and contain two seeds in each berry. Cotoneasters are promoted as bird-attractants for home gardens, and the bright red berries are just like tempting lollies for the local birds, in particular blackbirds, starlings, currawongs, ravens, silvereyes, cockatoos and rosellas. Seedlings are often found under prominent bird perch trees in bushland as a component of the 'bird poo halo'. Seed is also spread by foxes and in dumped garden waste. This species is commonly misidentified like many of the berry-producing plants still available in nurseries and garden centres and is especially popular for sale at markets and fetes. It can host fireblight bacterial disease which threatens fruit production in Australia. Berries can cause some degree of poisoning and gastroenteritis if eaten and are particularly hazardous for infants. To remove Large-leaf Cotoneaster seedlings and small plants, hand-pull or dig out and make sure all the roots are removed. For larger plants utilise the Cut-Paint or Drill-Fill methods. It is best to treat in spring to early summer, before fruit develops. Any cut material with semi-ripe or ripe fruit should be disposed of in a plastic bag in the rubbish bin.



Cotoneaster glaucophyllus

plant stars of the season

summer beauties



This season we will highlight two beautiful species which are flowering now: the delicate Acacia implexa and the sweetly scented Bursaria spinosa. Both species are common in revegetation plans, so I'm sure you have or will soon come across them.

Acacia implexa or Lightwood is a small graceful tree with an open form and long sickle-shaped, light green leaves. It can reach heights of 4-15m and spread to 3-5m wide. The profuse creamy yellow fragrant flowers are held in large clusters, occurring from December to March. The flowers are followed by clusters of strongly curved, coiled, light brown seed pods. The word "implexa" means entwined and refers to the twisted and contorted seed pods. Lightwood likes an open position in dry, well-drained soil and full sun. It will tolerate moist, well-drained soil and semi-shade, but resents poor drainage. Lightwood is a long-lived, fast growing, upright, drought tolerant species that makes an attractive screen, street or shade tree, and is useful for erosion control. Insect and seed-eating birds appreciate the numerous seed pods that Lightwood produces. You do not need to prune this species, it will sucker if cut back severely or if the roots are damaged. Watch out for snails when they are young. The leaves can be used for dyeing, the bark for tanning and the fibres twist into a twine.

Bursaria spinosa or Sweet Bursaria is a dense, slender to rounded shrub or small tree with small, oblong to spoon-shaped, glossy, dark green leaves and black, thin thorns, along stiff, angular stems. From November to March you will find large fluffy masses of tiny fragrant creamy white flowers on the ends of the

branches. These are followed by clusters of papery, heart-shaped, bronze seed capsules that remain until April. This slow-growing species can reach heights of 2-6m and spread 1.5-3m wide. Sweet Bursaria loves an open position in dry, well-drained soil and full sun. It will tolerate moist, well-drained soil and full shade, but resents permanent poor drainage. This species is very hardy, drought and lime tolerant. If you are after a hedge, prune the tips regularly to encourage dense growth. The nectar can be sucked from the flowers, and the leaves contain Aesulin, an oil used in sunscreens which absorbs ultra-violet light. The endangered Eltham Copper Butterfly loves *Bursaria spinosa*! The female adults lay eggs during summer on the shoots and stems of Sweet Bursaria, and sometimes in the leaf litter close to the base of the plants. The larvae hatch after 10-14 days and shelter and develop in the ant's nest located around the plants roots. Larvae are nocturnal, sheltering in the nest during the day and emerging at night to feed on the *Bursaria* leaves, where they are constantly attended by the ants. In return for this protection and care, the ants feed on secretions of sugar and amino acids from the larvae. This may keep the larvae free from fungal and bacterial disease. Adult butterflies emerge between late November and January. They feed on the nectar produced by the flowers of *Bursaria*, and sometimes on nectar of other plants such as *Hakea* and *Cassinia* too. The thorny stems and twiggy foliage provide an intricate architecture for spiders to construct their webs in. The sweet nectar from the flowers attracts many insects which are caught in these snares. Birds collect web remnants to knit their nests together before the breeding season



Acacia implexa (Lightwood)



Bursaria spinosa (Sweet Bursaria)



people like us timelines australia project

Recovering the Seasons

Australian aborigines lived successfully off the land for 50,000 years through their intimate understanding of regional climate patterns and the response of animal and plant communities to the underlying seasonal changes. Some of these seasonal calendars still exist in northern Australia where tribal knowledge has been preserved in ritual, art, dance, chant and the lore of the elders.

In an attempt to recover lost calendars in southern Australia, a group of field naturalists met at Warrandyte in March 1994 to pool nature event observations recorded in their own logbooks and diaries. When these were analyzed, a clear pattern of 6 seasons emerged for the Middle Yarra River region. The onset of 'pre-spring', for example, was recognized by the blooming of several species of wattles in late July and the subsequent nesting of many small insectivorous birds. In other regions, such as the Dandenongs and Port Phillip Bay, these patterns may be quite different.

In 1995, the Gould League published the 'Banksias and Bilbies Nature Diary', which described some of the known aboriginal calendars, gave broad habitat predictions week by week across Australia and introduced the Timelines Australia Project. In 1998, the Gould League produced a Timelines CD Rom which provides a simple standardized framework for the recording of significant event information.

"The aim of this project is to get everybody 'reading the landscape' with educated eyes."

Alan Reid, founder of the Project.

The Timelines Australia Project was originally designed to replicate the Warrandyte experience and to set into place the systematic collection of nature event data by community and friends groups in regions right across Australia.

In 1996 the Gould League received a grant from the Department of Environment, Sports and Territories to run regional workshops in Australian capital cities and to form core committees to continue the data collection and calendar development.

Aims of the Timelines Australia Project

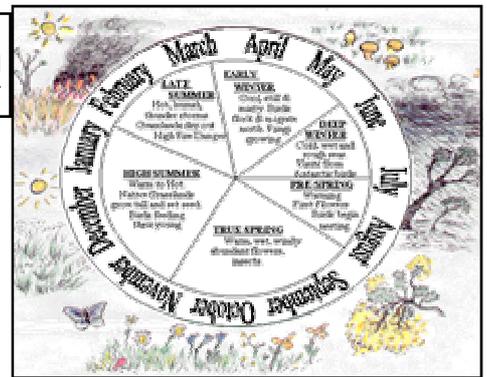
The Timelines Australia Project aims to recover natural event information held in diaries, library files and notebooks; analyze them and seek patterns of environmental changes such as local seasonal cycles, succession sequences, population declines and the onset of catastrophes. It also aims to encourage the establishment of ongoing event monitoring programs and databases for a number of bio-regions across Australia to assist members of the community with environmental management and planning.

The Project also plans to encourage the development of social and cultural activities based on the gathered information. Opportunities include the introduction of local seasonal festivals, the development of music, dance and drama programs, the enhancement of existing interpretation centres, creation of seasonal walking trails and the publication of meaningful interpretative materials such as books, pamphlets, posters, videos and education programs.

Regular Monitoring Programs

The Project wants enthusiasts to develop their own regional core committees, so that a Timelines Network is established across Australia, with the creation of a national database that links all of the bio-regional databases. Accumulation of historical data, together with ongoing regular monitoring should be invaluable in detecting trends such as the impacts of global warming, the impending local extinction of species, increasing threats to biodiversity, mounting damage to local ecosystems or, more positively, the success of revegetation programs.

Beth Gott's
Seasonal
Calendar



The Middle Yarra Timelines Calendar

The Moonee Ponds Creek and surrounding areas, unfortunately, do not have a calendar as wonderful as this one. The Middle Yarra Timelines Calendar is the closest calendar of its type to the Moonee Ponds Creek, and it is a safe assumption to make that the majority of the information crosses over into our catchment.

The Middle Yarra Timelines Project is being developed by the Field Naturalist Club of Victoria, Gould League and Yarra Valley Parklands (Melbourne Parks and Waterways) in an attempt to record and analyze seasonality themes, relationships, interactions and sequence of events of the natural history of the Middle Yarra area.

An interim six season calendar year has been produced from this data. The seasons are cyclic, sensitive to climatic variability and delineated by the occurrence and associations of natural phenomena, rather than dates. The idea behind this calendar is to represent a mythical day for each of those seasons.

Want to Join in?

To obtain a copy of the 'Banksias and Bilbies Nature Diary' (\$10 including postage) and to report your natural event recordings for inclusion in the national database, email Alan Reid at the Timelines Australia Project on timeline@pacific.net.au or post to PO Box 154, Whitemark, FLINDERS ISLAND 7255.

Macquarie University also have a national database of recordings. Go to bio.mq.edu.au/ecology/biowatch/Biowatch for all the necessary details.

To obtain a copy of the Timelines CD Rom and receive the Timelines Australia Project News (via email only) contact the Gould League on 9532 0909 or go to www.gould.vic.edu.au

To obtain a copy of the Middle Yarra Timelines Calendar (\$5.50) contact Kay Toussaint at Manningham Shire Council on 9840 9348.

seasonal nature notes

We have a brand new column for you this year! This is where you will learn about what to look out for when your wanderings take you creekside. Don't forget your nature diary!

MARCH "LATE SUMMER"

Rambling Rodents



From its broad beaver-like muzzle to its striking white-tipped tail, the native Water-rat can measure up to 60 cm. Their foraging range is now

extending from its normal creek and riverside habitats into lakes and dams and even out into the bays. Field Mouse populations are exploding as they feast on ripening grains, grasshoppers and field crickets. Predators like Nankeen Kestrels and Black-shouldered Kites follow their movements.

The Beautiful Moths of March

Keep an eye out around windows and streetlights this month! Humid



weather and heavy falls of rain encourage the emergence of several different large moths.

Emperor Gum Moths have beautiful muted patterns of wavy lines on both wings. Some Swift Moths have silver stripes on their forewings.

Water Fleas Beat the Drought

In dry late summers, resting eggs form in the brood pouch of female Water fleas as ponds and dams dry out. A dark covering called an 'ephippium' forms around the eggs and when the female dies, the eggs lie buried in the mud waiting for the rains to fill the waterhole. Also, Purple Springtails are appearing on the surface of puddles.

Bachelor Parties

Excitable family flocks of Magpies sweep the tree tops, their ranks swollen with the now aerially able sub-adults of the last breeding season. The young male magpies are being tossed out of their father's territory to fend for themselves. Until they are strong enough to establish their own territory and keep a mate, they join bachelor flocks, sharing roosting and feeding places which are often far apart. They may have to fly several kilometers along green corridors between established territories to reach their feeding grounds. You may see up to 30 in these bachelor flocks and some birds may stay in them for their whole life.

Glorious Butterflies

Two spectacular butterflies will be around our



gardens this month. The **Monarch of Wanderer** is thought to have introduced itself to Australia by island-hopping across the Pacific from America. The other butterfly is the tiny Silver Xenica. Its host plants are the native *Poa* grasses, so they are mostly confined to revegetation sites and bushland remnants.

APRIL "EARLY WINTER"

Its Fungi Time!

After the opening rains of April, the first fungi appear. A great diversity of fungal types emerges from the grass and litter of our bush reserves and backyards. Look for Field Mushrooms, Milk-, Shaggy- and **Inky-caps**, Boletus, Slender and Ragged Parasol, Tiny Mycenus, Scarlet Fly Agaric, Coral Fungus, Bracket and Luminous Fungi.



Ant Action

Sugar Ants are in the process of launching winged reproductive males and females in anticipation of a change in weather and windy weather to help dispersal. An immense amount of the Sugar Ant colony's energy is put into the preparation of each of the 'Flying Ants' for the launch. Huge 'Soldier' Ants strut around the perimeter checking security details. Common Myna's and other birds will take advantage of the swarming prior to late summer rainstorms by 'anting' themselves (using the ants to de-louse their bodies).

Skaters and Stirrers

Many small casualties fall onto the surface of ponds. Ready to pounce are three kinds of bugs and several beetles who use surface tension to skate and run. The constantly spinning Whirligig beetle is one such species.



Flame Robins Come Down From the Hills

Female and immature Flame



Robins are small brown birds with white flashes on their wings. In early April they will be seen at golf courses and sporting ovals, sitting on fences and low shrubs. A fortnight later, we

will see the brilliantly coloured males joining them in their winter feeding flocks. They return to the eucalypt-forested hills in August to claim their breeding territories.

Look Out For Black Swan Nests

Some Black Swan pairs are now building nests. Their nest is a large pile of vegetation, mainly reeds, in shallow water, on an island, or floating among reeds or other plants in deeper water.

Migratory Birds Return to Northern Asia

Around our bays and estuaries thousands of Curlews, Green Shags, Sandpipers, Knots, Plovers and Stints are gathering in pre-migration flocks. They are moulting into their more colourful breeding plumage. Great places to see migratory birds are Mud Island, Westernport mudflats and Werribee.

MAY "EARLY WINTER"

Aquatic Insects Are Hatching

Young water insects are appearing in newly filled ponds. Look for dragonfly and damselfly larvae, and many kinds of water beetles, midges and water bugs. They are tiny at this stage but grow rapidly after each moult. Most emerge as flying adults during the summer months.

Look For Vegetable Caterpillar Fungi

Cordyceps fungi have a remarkable lifestyle, taking over some grubs and caterpillars. Their spores are consumed by the tunneling larvae of beetles and moths. The caterpillars leave the tree to pupate in the soil. At this time, the club-like fruiting bodies emerge from the leaf litter beneath the trees.



Tasmanian Silveryeyes Cross The Strait

Flocks of the Tasmanian race, distinguished by their rich chestnut flanks, fly over in May to join their cousins in search of winter food. Tiny green Silveryeyes are common on the mainland. They forage on insects and nectar most of the year, and gorge on berries and soft fruits when they are ripe.



The Puffball Family

Little white puffballs and large yellow earthballs are common during May. A large number of their relatives grow in forests, including earth stars, **basket fungi** and the large horse-dropping fungus.



Eels Swim Seawards

Down from the streams, ponds and dams of southern Victoria and into inlets they come, ready to charge out to sea and their distant breeding grounds. They are the Short-finned Eels and they time their run for the eastern drift of the Bass Strait waters and then head for the mid-Pacific.



Saffron Milkcaps Under Pines

Large hollow concave tops, orange gills and a hollow stem reveal the Saffron Milk-cap which grows under introduced Pines and Cypresses. When it rains, a milky fluid collects in the middle of the cap.



summer sightings

Don't forget to report your sightings to us for our database.

F.O.of Bass St member Phyllis Angell has many birds in her garden: Willie Wagtails, Magpie-Larks, Magpies, Red Wattlebirds, and New Holland Honeyeaters nesting in the shrubs. They arrived last year and fly under the eaves of her unit to gather cobwebs for their nests. She also has a resident Pobble Bonk frog.

A male Growling Grass frog has been seen and heard on the Yuroke Crk in BVP by Judy Allen in January. He was sitting on the aquatic plants Water-milfoil and Water-ribbons, growing in the creek. She also heard 2 Growling Grass frogs, 1 Pobble Bonk frog, and sighted 4 Little Grebes, 2 Eurasian Coots, 3 Black Swans (1 juv.), 4 White-faced Herons, 20 Pacific Black Ducks, 4 Teal, 1 Golden-headed Cisticola, 4 Welcome Swallow, 2 Dusky Moorhens, 2 Cormorants and an immature Black-fronted Dotterel at Jacana Wetlands.

Natasha Baldygan sighted a Mortar or Blue-banded Bee pollinating *Dianella longifolia* at Jacana Wetlands. Mortar Bees

are medium to large insects with a body length of 7-20mm and a wingspan of up to 35mm. They typically have hairy bodies and banded abdominal markings in a bright, iridescent blue. These native bees are powerful tunnellers, excavating into compacted soil or the soft mortar between bricks of buildings. The larvae are housed in wax-lined cells, each provided with a pollen/nectar mix for the emerging larvae.

A pair of Australian Hobbies are regularly returning to their nest constructed of pine branchlets in a Norfolk Island Pine at Penola College. The pair leave around 8.00am and return around 4.00pm, and



Blue-banded Bee

they have raised one fledgling. This species is uncommon and some migrate in autumn-winter to northern Australia. The pair, and a single bird, were recently spotted in mid-February in a Cypress Pine and in the Norfolk Island Pine. The third bird appears to be the fledgling, which has survived and returned with the parents. They fly down birds like starlings, swallows and pipits with lashing wingbeats. and soar at dusk for flying insects. We will keep you posted on their progress!

A very exciting sighting this season has been the intensely beautiful Sacred Kingfisher. Mel spotted one flying across the driveway near the little dam at the MPCCC depot late on a January afternoon. Jo (ranger) related to us that the Kingfishers have been seen there before, usually when the dam has water in it and there are frogs about. They perch on trees, wires, posts, stumps and dart down to seize large insects, frogs and small reptiles.



Sacred Kingfisher

...upcoming events

Brushtail Possum and Masked Lapwing Population Numbers Data Collection

The collection of data on the population numbers of the Brushtail Possum and the Masked Lapwing may provide evidence of the extent of Red Fox predation. This data can then be utilised in current Victorian fox programs.

We would love to know if anyone is interested in doing some data collection on population numbers of these two common prey species. A presentation on the how, why and where can be arranged if numbers are sufficient.

Like to register your interest? Call MPCCC on 9333 2406 or info@mpccc.org

The MPCCC Community Indigenous Nursery

We have successfully obtained a grant to purchase equipment for the nursery outside the MPCCC office in Oaklands Historic Park.

We are putting the call out for our Friends group members to become voluntarily involved in producing our very own tubestock, cells and cuttings for sites along the creek.

Would you like to help out in our nursery? Call Steph at MPCCC on 9333 2406 or steph@mpccc.org

Autumn Equinox Harvest Festival CERES Sunday 20th March 2-9pm

The spectacular, famous and of course delicious Harvest Festival is on again.

Cultures the world over celebrate the richness of the Harvest by dancing, eating, drinking, cheering and feeling connected in community. The Ceres Harvest Festival is unique as it celebrates the Harvest, Australian style, which is a culturally diverse smorgasbord of the world's culinary delights.

More info? Ring Ceres on 9388 1707 or email ceres@ceres.com.au

Bicycle Victoria Bike Path Discovery Day "Let's Go For A Ride!" Sunday 20th March

Bike Path Discovery Day invites you to discover parks and trails into the city, enjoying a fantastic cycling experience all the way! The best thing about this event is that it is absolutely FREE!

We've identified six sensational starts, and the Moonee Ponds Creek Trail from Woodlands Park (Melway ref. 178 B6) is one of them!!

Choose your start time between 9am and 12 noon.

More info? Ring Bicycle Victoria on 8636 888 or email bicyclevic@bv.com.au

2006 Commonwealth Games Environment Program Tree Volunteers

Volunteers are needed to grow seedlings in their backyards to revegetate sites across Victoria. Register and you will receive a Grower's Kit to get started.

More info? Contact DSE on 136 186 or email customer.service@dse.vic.gov.au

And then help plant them out! Up to 1 million trees will be planted at 11 sites across Vic. as part of the Games Environment Program. Planting days will be held between Autumn and Spring 2005.

Like to register? Call 9655 2006 or email games.legacy@dvc.vic.gov.au