



spring 2004 ponderings

Newsletter of the Moonee Ponds Creek
Co-ordination Committee

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☆☆ **!!Hurrah!!** ☆☆

**The splendiferous
MPCCC Christmas party
is on once again.**

**We would all love to see
you there.**



co-ordinators ramblings...

Yes, it's time again for another co-ordinator's ramblings and I'm feeling a little bit displaced as a result of spending seven weeks out of the country, most of it in the peak of our Spring planting season. However, the MPCCC fort was held by the most capable Steph, and I've heard many stories about our busy Spring planting season. I managed to get to a couple of our plantings at the tail end of the season and it was great to re-connect with our creek community again - there's nothing quite like it out there in the big wide world. To find out all the gossip on the full season, turn to page 4 for our magnificent four page spread. A big thanks to Steph for juggling all the MPCCC balls on her own, as well as all our wonderful volunteers and MPCCC planting staff including Deb, Penny, Sarah, Natasha and Michael the marvellous trailer tower. Talking about volunteers, we would like to acknowledge the extra efforts of a few that have made a difference to what we can provide to our creek community. Many of you may know Judy Allen from VINC, but Judy is also the key contact for the Friends of Strathnaver Grasslands. Judy has been leading the Strathnaver wildflower walks for us and any of

you that have attended one of these days know there's much to learn about what a fascinating site this is - thanks to Judy. Not only is she a mine of information on grassland plants, Judy has written some great articles for us also - page 2 contains another intriguing expose on the fascinating root systems of some of our local indigenous species. Judy shares page 2 with an article on the latest waterwatch results, by Helen Suter. Thanks again Helen, for continuing to single-handedly run our volunteer waterwatch program for us. And last, but not least, thanks to the persistent Doug Brown, of the Boeing Reserve Troopers, who has planted 54 River Red Gums along the creek at Strathmore. Thanks to all our creek volunteers, your contributions are truly appreciated, no matter how big or small. Thanks also to Deb, on putting in a great effort getting to know Publisher and getting this edition of Ponderings out for us - it looks great, doesn't it? Please don't forget that we welcome any contributions to our Pondering, be that in the form of letters, articles, fauna sightings or reminiscences about the creek. It's been another successful year of creek life - plantings, waterwatch, wildflower

walks, clean ups and spruce ups - and to celebrate, we'd like to invite everyone to our third annual Christmas Merrymaking Event on Friday 17th December - more details on page 11. We look forward to seeing you then.

Eastern Rosella



:: water watch

mayflies in the creek!

By Helen Suter

September and October samplings have brought new and exciting surprises for our Waterwatch volunteers.

It has been a whole year since we started our water monitoring program on the Moonee Ponds Creek, and at last we are starting to see some new bugs. Our new discoveries include Mayflies (bug score 7) at Jacana Reserve during our September and October sampling days, and a Net Spinning Caddis Fly (bug score 7) at Mitchell Parade Weir. We think the Mayflies may have appeared because a still pool in the creek has been created while construction of the northern wetlands takes place, and this has provided the Mayflies with their favoured habitat. Spring is certainly an appealing month for critters and humans alike with more of both appearing on these warm days. We're hoping for a bumper bug count in November.

The Environment Protection Agency (EPA) has released the State Environment Protection Policy Waters of Victoria that sets out their environmental objectives. In an attempt to see how the creek compares with their objectives, we have embarked on a different process of bug classification, with identification now being completed to the family level. This has been ongoing for two months and we are learning a lot with the help of Jessica Miller from Waterwatch Victoria. The theory is the same as the bug score, giving the bugs a score based on how sensitive they are to degraded conditions, but now it is called a SIGNAL score.

We now have enough data to see how the physical and chemical parameters recorded in the creek compare to the EPA environmental objectives. The outcomes are unfortunately not good. The only sites that the objectives are being met are at Jacana Reserve (Jacana Site 1) for pH levels, for turbidity levels at Mitchell Parade Weir and Holbrook Reserve (the advantage of having a concrete base!) and for soluble phosphorus levels at Holbrook Reserve. It

looks like we'll have to keep monitoring to see if the measures being taken to improve the Moonee Ponds Creek can help us reach the EPA objectives. I'll try and get some more details up on the website soon.

Thanks again to all those enthusiastic water monitors, Daniel, Patricia, Noni, Carolyn, Rebecca, Gabrielle and Jenny. If anyone else is interested in coming along to a sampling day to see what we get up to then please contact me on helensuter@pacific.net.au or at MPCCC on 9333 2406.

For more information on Waterwatch on the Moonee Ponds Creek go to www.mpccc.org

Have you ever thought how does that persistent South African weed Onion Grass (*Romulea rosea*) get so deep in the ground?

If so, then read on.....



contractile roots

By Judy Allen

It was this question that came to mind the other day when I was digging some Onion Grass out of the garden, and discovered some as deep as 10cm. How can a plant with such a small seed become so deeply buried in the soil? Surely it couldn't just 'float' down, because it would never rise to the surface again.

Information gleaned from my book on propagation techniques gave me some of the answer. The roots of a plant generally have three important uses: to anchor the plant to the ground, to absorb minerals and water, and to store food, in case anything should happen to the top of the plant. Then I discovered the term 'contractile roots'. Plants that have contractile roots have an unusual growth habit: they grow straight down out of the bulb and then start to shrivel or shorten. This pulls the whole plant down into the soil a few millimetres above the original soil level.

Plants that have contractile roots are mostly those with bulbs and corms, such as lilies, daffodils, freesias and crocus. That Edna Everage Moonee Ponds favourite, the gladiolus, also has them. Those pesky weeds can have them too, such as Onion Grass and Dandelions, making them very difficult to remove.

There are many Australian plants that have contractile roots to pull the important growing tip closer to the soil line. Some of these include the Pale Flax-lily (*Dianella longifolia*), Grass Trigger-plant (*Stylidium graminifolium*) and Chocolate Lily (*Arthropodium strictum*). This growth habit protects these plants from animal grazing and bushfire, as well as providing a more stable temperature over the extreme seasonal periods of summer and winter. Some of our native lilies die back completely to avoid the heat of the summer months, and the contractile root pulls their growing tip into the ground for protection. This is obviously a very clever adaptation for our harsh Australian weather conditions.

sweet memories of the creek



“At least you know that you will never be built out!” This comment was made in passing to Audrey Biggs, this editions memories celebrity and Brunswick Sth West Planter. If only they knew how much their creekside backyard would change in the future.



Audrey Biggs and her husband built their home on the banks of the Moonee Ponds Creek in Brunswick West in 1958. Audrey herself spent her younger years just around the corner, so she really is a true local. Audrey has many special memories of the Moonee Ponds Creek.

“The Chinese garden on the banks of the creek at the end of Hope Street grew lots of different vegetables. Mum

A very clear memory is of making daisy

chains by the creek, sitting in the grass, and it was just so quiet, except for the skylarks

used to send me down to get a lettuce sometimes. They used to decant water into big barrels, then scoop it out into pails which they carried around on wooden yokes across their shoulders. And they wore

big wide straw hats. I remember the clip-clop of the horse at 2 o'clock in the morning as they traveled into the Victoria Market with their flat cart piled with fresh vegetables. They would return at 10 o'clock that morning. On Sunday's they would all dress in suits and walk single file down the road. I'm not sure where they were going to though.”

“Back then it was semi-rural, and so peaceful. In winter, these dense fogs would creep across the creek and settle over the low-lying parts. It was so thick. I think it was because of the water, the fogs, we don't get them now, there is too much heat, from all the buildings and roads. To go from something so peaceful, from

being one of the quietest parts of Melbourne to one of the noisiest, it isn't always easy.”

“We used to have bonfires. We'd go around collecting up all the rubbish and boxthorn. There were boxthorn bushes everywhere, nobody had fences, just boxthorn hedges. It really was a lot of fun. And we would cook potatoes in the fire. Mrs Flannery would pay us kids one shilling each to cut her boxthorn. One shilling!! That was a lot in those days. Mrs Flannery was a little woman who owned the land in between Hunter and Whitby Sreets. She couldn't remember how many children she'd had, it was around twelve I think.”

“Behind our house, the creek was really deep. My husband used to float a tin dinghy on this deep bit. The creek was shallow in some sections, and then deep in others. I guess this was the 'ponds' that the creek is named after. My uncles used to swim in the deep sections, that was around the early 1900's. A lot of people learnt how to swim in the creek back then. I don't remember the creek ever drying up, it always seemed to be moving.”

“I remember hearing lots of frogs and seeing all the different birds, there were so many birds along the creek then. I never see red robins anymore, and we used to see 'cranes' in the creek too. We would catch yabbies and collect frog spawn and tadpoles to take home.”

we 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 for more information on pay rates and dates.

We promise we won't make you walk over hot coals!



friends of jacana wetlands,

8th August

9th October

The Friends met three times this season for planting days and also for a Spruce Up Day.



Smile everybody!

The scattered planting beds along the creek are now beginning to link up with one another and the riparian edge is really starting to come together! A Melbourne Water Community Grant has enabled the friends to begin planting along the flat above the creek edge, and we will soon be installing some nesting boxes in the larger trees in the area, as they are not yet old enough to have developed hollows for nesting fauna.

Now that's a tube snake! Go kids!



18th July

Spruce Up Days are becoming regular events for the friends, this season jute mat was re-pinned, tree guards were straightened, and many weeds were hand-weeded from the beds. The Jacana Valley is just looking better and better!!

spring planting season

By Stephanie

In this edition I would love to say a ginormous thank you to all of our willing volunteers who have helped to beautify our natural environment.

With thirteen friends group plantings, three school plantings and two big days out at Westmeadows we managed to plant 9,170 plants this season. We also donated 350 plants to Brunswick Sth West Primary School.

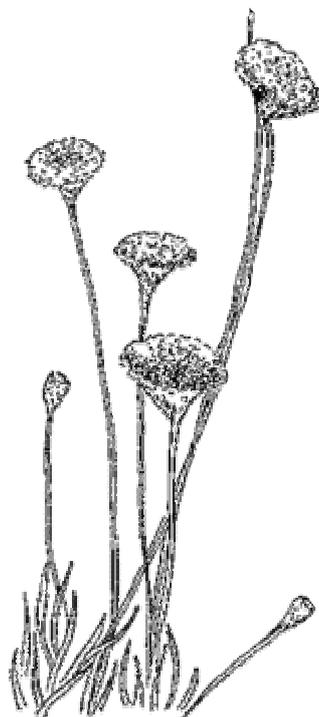
The creek would not be the same without you all.

boeing reserve troopers

14th August

The sky was grey and clouded on the Saturday afternoon the Troopers were set to meet...

and when the rain came it was decided by all (except the hire car that was bogged!) that the rain had made the site too dangerous and uncomfortable for planting and everyone went back to their cozy homes... But have no fear!! Local resident Doug Brown has been working hard at planting the remaining shrubs and groundcovers. He has also planted, staked and guarded 50 River Red Gums along the West creek bank. Well done Doug, the creek thanks you for your amazing efforts!!



friends of lower moonee ponds creek

15th August

Between Bent and Bruce street we met to hand-weed and plant groundcover and grass species.



Thank you girls!

13 volunteers busily worked in some of the first rays of sunshine for the season. We trialed a new method of marking out plants so that weed spraying contractors can see where the Friends have been re-vegetating. This was done by hammering in a bamboo stake next to the newly planted tubestock or cell. (Hopefully this will ensure that there is no confusion between weed and indigenous plants in the future!)



The possums will all thank you one day!

gowanbrae residents

The Moonee Ponds Creek will be a Red Gum lined paradise for all to enjoy

Thanks to the efforts of 5 local residents who staked and guarded the trees along the creek bank. The group has now completed a corridor of riparian species that runs along the entire creek in their suburb. Well done!



Is that Sean Connery and Michael Caine with Mel?

strathmore ponds

3rd october



Opposite Strathmore North Primary, 4 dedicated volunteers worked away re-vegetating this popular creek crossing point. We will continue to work in this area and hope to create a shady over hang for the creek and replace the existing exotic shrubs with indigenous plants.

strath-oak planters

11th September

Shrubs, groundcovers and grasses were planted at the end of Margarete Street in Oak-Park.

The Friends worked away to extend the planting bed along the creek taking care not to slip on the rather wet jute mat. Their efforts were greeted by a downpour, perfect for watering in newly planted flora! Luckily the Friends sheltered (once again) under local 'Strath-Okian' Nina's verandah to enjoy a hard earned lunch!



Oh joy to the rain! .



Serrated Tussock makes a good dog bed, but its not good for the environment!



friends of upper moonee ponds creek

The Friends are at it again! Planting and guarding 112 tubestock at the She-Oak Rise in Westmeadows. The invasive gorse thickets that have been sprayed out in this area are gradually being replaced by a more appropriate prickly shrub, Hedge Wattle, *Acacia paradoxa*. This ensures the continued protection for fauna, such as the Superb Blue Wren and the Red-browed Finch that take refuge in the depths of these thickets. Thank you to Hume City Council for organising and preparing this event, we were even lucky enough to see a baby Whip or Brown Snake curled up next to a dead tussock!

travancore residents

21st August

This ongoing revegetation project is starting to take shape. Last years efforts have revealed pigface cascading down the slope of this planting bed. This season the local residents met to continue planting the mulch bed with groundcovers and grasses. It is truly complementing the beautiful Community Arts mural mounted to the freeway sound barrier above this site! Next time you drive along the Tullamarine Freeway remember all the great projects going on behind the concrete wall!!!



Look at me Mum!

The ever enthusiastic Brunswick Sth West Planters tackle that tricky slope.



brunswick south-west planters

24th July ,21st August & 2nd October

The Brunswick South West Planters meet on the 4th Saturday of every month between March and November. This Spring season the group have continued to care for their special spot along the creek.

MPCCC were involved in three planting days with the friends group this season. We planted between the bike path and the creek bank adding to the 'green corridor' feeling this group has created. When we returned the next month we tackled the sheer slopes next to the freeway bridge which were no match for the Friends! They had done it all before on the other side of the bridge just a few years ago! Further up stream we planted, staked and guarded escarpment species at Denzil Don Reserve, while other members hand-weeded around some native grass species. This dedicated group will be meeting again in November on the 27th to continue their fabulous efforts. For more info contact Steph on 9333 2406 or steph@mpccc.org



Friends of Sacred Kingfisher

19th September

This group, based in Westmeadows, who's name is inspired by the sometimes seen Sacred Kingfisher meet on the 19th of September. They planted riparian species in a mulched bed along the creek bank. This thicket will be great for the visiting Kingfishers of the future! Many thanks to Hume City Council for organising this days planting.

Friends Of Strathnaver Grasslands, Planting and Wildflower Walk

5th September, 30th October

This delightful remnant sight was visited by 15 volunteers in September for a Community Planting. Tubestock and cells of species grown from seed collected off the site were planted in drifts in the Western side of the site. These plantings are in an area where weed species had been previously sprayed out and our aim is to fill these empty spots with more appropriate species.



Judy Allen explains about silcrete rocks.

We re-visited the site again in late October to embark on a Wildflower Walk guided by Judy Allen. Local residents, young families and members of the Strathmore Scout group came along and showed a keen interest in the wildflowers. The tour began at the significant silcrete rocks where old growth lichens exist. Participants came across carpets of pink *Convovulous* and were shown some special plants such as the locally rare *Goodenia pinnatifida*. The group also visited the area where the community planting took place, and the plants are powering along!

ANZ Planters, Wright Street Westmeadows

30th September

So the perennial favourite - the tube tree is not just for the kids!



150 volunteers assembled at Wright Street and with gusto, they took to the task of revegetating what appeared to be large crop circles of sprayed out Serrated Tussock. The group was shown by helpful demonstrators the ins and out of planting, staking and guarding. Within 2 hours the group had planted all the tubestock and began weeding and removing tree guards from the 3 year old 'Trance Plant beds'. Two more trailer loads of plants arrived and the ANZ workers began planting again. Lunch was served and everyone enjoyed stretching out in the sun before heading back to plant the remainder. All up 3,400 tubestock were staked and guarded, an incredible effort by all! Many thanks to the crew from ANZ, Danni + Anna from Hume City Council, Michael + Sarah from Melbourne and Dee from Tree Project for contributing to the day.

A huge day, but what a great day! Can we have music every time!



Trance Plant Festival, National Tree Day

25th July

More than 3,000 plants were staked and guarded during the day's events!

Along the banks of the Moonee Ponds Creek at Wright Street Reserve members of the community, MPCCC, Hume City Council, Melbourne Water + Trance Plant joined together for the 3rd year running to celebrate National Tree Day. The event enticed about 150 eager people who planted to the sound of the music thanks to a wind generated sound system installed in an old Bedford truck. The panoramic views at this site were accentuated by rolling clouds that swept the sky during the day, and the many glistening tree guards from past and present planting days. The afternoon brought new people to the site and many of the morning crew re-charging their batteries with the delicious vegan lunch prepared by Kangan Tafe.

Oak-Park Primary, Legless Lizard Garden

What a fantastic day! Grasses, ground-covers, lilies and wildflowers, with the odd shrub here and there, make up this new habitat garden in the school grounds. Three groups of students were involved in planting the locally indigenous flora that were chosen for their shelter, food and educational values. Students were familiar with endangered species such the Legless Lizard and Golden Sun Moth that require particular environments and food sources for their survival. By monitoring the growth of their garden and the special species within, the students will be able to gain first hand, an appreciation for our local environment and the history of our local flora.

The students were also involved in spreading the mulch in their new garden and will take part in weeding activities in the future. Well done to John, Trevor, Jenni and all the students at Oak Park for doing such a great job and working so well together!



Enthusiasm plus!! Our school planting days are always so much fun.

Source to Sea

Penola Catholic College has run their successful Source to Sea project again this year. The Year 9 students explore and investigate the Moonee Ponds Creek through various activities such as group research projects, bike rides and historical reports. One such activity involved planting indigenous species along the creek in West Melbourne where an amazing 1,300 tubestock and cells were planted by about 140 students.

Students also planted along the creek bank in Westmeadows; while half the group were busily planting, the other half conducted a commendable clean up of the area. Thank you to all students and teachers for their efforts, and thank you to Serco, and Hume and Melbourne City Councils for their input in the events.

:: people like us

cultivating community



A few weeks ago I had the pleasure of attending a wonderful and inspirational conference entitled "Dirty Hands, Happy Hearts" held at the Collingwood College, home of Stephanie Alexander's Kitchen Garden project.

The conference was presented by two organisations who both share a passion for bringing people and plants together: Cultivating Community and the Horticultural Association of Victoria (HTAV).

Cultivating Community is a grass-roots not-for-profit community organisation that promotes, supports and advocates the development of community garden projects. Their initial focus was on inner-city public housing garden projects, but this is now expanding into areas such as community based local food initiatives and sustainable urban agricultural practices. They also promote the cultural richness of food, plants and people within community gardens. These projects see them work with a wide range of people to cultivate 'community' as well as the 'soil'.

HTAV is also a not-for-profit organisation of people who promote and support the therapeutic and recreational benefits of horticulture. Horticultural therapy is used in settings such as community centres, schools, aged care facilities, hospitals, adult training support centres and rehabilitation facilities. People of all ages and varying abilities can benefit from these programs.

Community gardens are wonderfully vibrant places where people of different cultures come together to grow vegetables, fruit, herbs and flowers in a supportive community environment. Melbourne has many inner city community gardens, including one on the banks of the Moonee Ponds Creek in Flemington, which should hopefully be up and running next year. A garden for community members gives locals a strong sense of community spirit by participating in a common enterprise. Tilling the soil, connecting with our neighbours and enjoying fresh home-grown produce increases our mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing.

We can create a culture of generosity, reciprocity, conviviality, sharing, trust and self-help. It really is possible.

Urban agriculture has a long tradition, dictated largely by necessity. Before modern-day cities

emerged people were more often their own providers. Today society tends to regard urban agriculture as a hobby for people who like gardening rather than as an activity that can make our cities better places to live. Unfortunately, planning for modern cities has not seen gardening and farming as a valid land use. As part of urban agriculture, community and backyard gardens have the potential to integrate food production, organic waste recycling and social equity into our cities to create an ecologically viable and socially just food system. The environmental benefits of producing food close to home are many: less transport, refrigeration, storage, packaging, energy use, pollution and CO₂ emissions.

A wonderful quote that I heard recently was "Ten steps to saving the world. Step 1. Don't shop at supermarkets. Step 2. Don't shop at supermarkets. Step 3. Don't shop at supermarkets. You get the drift! Local food systems support community, backyard and small-scale gardeners. By shopping at your local farmer's

market or becoming a member of a community supported agriculture (CSA) group, you will be directly supporting the grower, helping to shorten the distance between producers and consumers, encouraging the diversity of varieties and leaving behind a smaller ecological footprint.

These concepts are all about taking back the ability to produce food for ourselves. At the supermarket, not only do you not connect to the food system, but the money goes out of the local region. Everywhere people are searching for a sense of community, and this can be found in your local community garden, a place of kindred spirits. Urban community gardeners are bringing life and livability, seed by seed, back to their neighborhoods. Their gardens nourish the body and also the soul. Their gardens enable them to share local and traditional knowledge. Their gardens enable them to develop innovative ways of living sustainably in our cities. Let's face it; cities are here to stay, so let's find new and exciting ways to dwell within them.

There is a deeper meaning to gardening. Each sprouting seed, new leaf or shoot provides immediate proof that our nurturing activities have been successful. This positive feedback entwines us even more closely with our plants. The investment of time, physical labour and personal aspirations are rewarded when the plant blooms or bears fruit, bringing almost parental feelings of pride. It is then that we gain a sense of joy in experiencing the sacred simplicity behind our act, the reconnection with the earth.

"Parks, street trees, and manicured lawns do very little to establish the connection between us and the land. They teach us nothing of its productivity, nothing of its capacities. Many people who are born, raised, and live in cities simply do not know where the food they eat comes from or what a living garden is like. Their only connection with the productivity of the land comes from packaged tomatoes on the supermarket shelf. But contact with the land and its growing process is not simply a quaint nicety from the past that we can let go of casually. More likely, it is a basic part of the process of organic security. Deep down, there must be some sense of insecurity of city dwellers who depend entirely upon the supermarkets for their produce. (*A Pattern Language*, Alexander, et al. 1977 p.820)"

For more information on Cultivating Community (and CSA) call 9415 6580 or e-mail: info@cultivatingcommunity.org.au

To learn more about Flemington Estate Community Garden, contact the Manager of Community Gardens Basil Natoli at the Office of Housing, Department of Human Services on 9616 786 or go to www.housing.vic.gov.au

To discover your local farmer's market, go to www.farmersmarkets.org.au

:: backyard thugs

be swept away...

One word sums up bushland invaded by this edition's backyard thug: devastated. Be swept away by this information!!

The highly invasive weed English Broom is capable of totally transforming habitats that it invades. It does this by crowding and shading out shrubs and tree seedlings, which eventually stops any further regeneration. The structure of the bushland changes and the plant diversity is depleted.

English Broom is spread by seeds that explode out of their pods in summer, anything up to 4.5m from the parent plants. The seeds remain dormant in the soil for at least 20 years, with fresh seed having a 90% chance of germination. There can be over 12,000 seeds per square metre under established plants and disturbance stimulates mass germination. Mature shrubs are usually 1-4m high and may live for 27 years. The long golden-yellow pea-like flowers occur in spring and summer. Of course, they are drought and frost tolerant, and occur in full sun to partial shade.

This garden thug is making life very difficult for the Mountain Pygmy Possum. The Cooperative Research Centre for Australian Weed Management has discovered that not only do these weeds harbour populations of Red Foxes, which prey on the possum, but they out-compete its food plants. So there is a two-fold impact on the Mountain Pygmy Possum, an introduced predator to contend with, and less food to survive on.

English Broom can still be purchased in nurseries almost anywhere in Australia in a variety of colours (yellow, red or purple), even though it is a noxious weed in Vic, NSW, SA, Tas and ACT. In areas with dry summers and cold winters the leaves drop off, making it look dead, dreary and unattractive for most of the year. Boycott this destructive backyard thug and plant a native bush pea or a Golden Spray instead!

:: plant stars of the season

two sexy show stoppers

The gorgeous alternatives to the wicked weed English Broom are indigenous plants that belong to the same family as Broom; the Fabacea family. This month we will highlight the Large-leaf Bush-pea and Golden Spray.

The Large-leaf Bush-pea (*Pultenaea daphnoides*) grows naturally in dry sclerophyll forests and grassy open forests. It is an attractive soft branching shrub, 1-2m, which easily adapts to garden conditions, growing in full sun, partial sun or full shade. The leaves are a flat, olive-green, wedge-shape. They grow moderately quickly in well drained stony or sandy infertile soils and are frost hardy and drought tolerant, the perfect choice for water and fertiliser-conscious gardeners.

Bush-peas are a sensational feature in the garden, growing happily under mature trees. They also look wonderful when planted in drifts amongst other flowering shrubs and smaller plants, their cheery yellow-brown-red 'egg-and-bacon' flowers providing splashes of colour from August to November. It's a good idea to give Bush-peas a light prune when flowering has finished to keep a compact shape, and don't forget to mulch.

All members of the pea family are particularly beneficial to local wildlife populations. This species will attract birds, butterflies and insects which feed on the nectar-rich flowers. Insect-eating

bird species will then be attracted to your garden to feed on the insects. These birds will help control insect pests on your other plants if you avoid using sprays that might harm them.

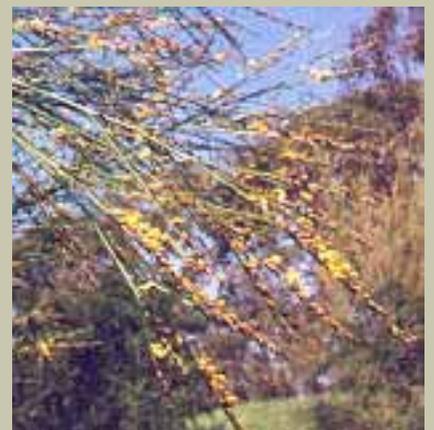
Our other plant star of the season is Golden Spray (*Viminaria juncea*). Golden Sprays are normally found growing on seasonally wet slopes and damp depressions. They are a fast growing plant, 2.5-5m, and tolerate poor drainage, seasonal waterlogging, frost, semi-shade and sandy soils. They prefer an open position in wet winter/dry summer soil and full sun. Avoid permanently dry soil and pruning. With their soft needle-like slightly weeping leaves and long drooping sprays of bright yellow pea flowers from October to February, Golden Sprays are a winner.

If you have a spot in the garden which tends to become boggy over winter, perhaps somewhere you wish to run your grey water too, or maybe you have a natural looking pond or bog garden, why not try a grove of Golden Sprays. To create a grove, plant these small trees in clumps of 5 (minimum) at 2 metre spacings. The open weeping habit of this plant is used to best advantage beside pools, where it is allowed to hang over the water.

Golden Sprays provide seeds for insects and seed-eating bird species, and in turn, insects for insect-eating bird species, as well as shelter.



Pultenaea daphnoides



Viminaria juncea

the journey of a short-finned eel

Short-finned eels used to be found in the deep pools of the Moonee Ponds Creek.

My life began in the spawning grounds, deep in the South Coral Sea, off the coast of north Queensland near New Caledonia. At this time my appearance was that of a tiny, clear, gelatinous leaf-shaped larva, and they called me *leptocephalus*. The east Australian currents carried me thousands of kilometres away, towards the eastern Australian coastline, where I settled upon the continental shelf. It was here that I floated for six months, swept along in the same currents as millions of my planktonic companions, vulnerable to all plankton feeders.

Then metamorphosis took place, and I became a glass eel or 'glassie'. Now I look almost like an adult eel, 30cm long, about six months old, and virtually transparent. At this time I am large enough to fend off my predators.

At the end of autumn, I was compelled to travel downwards towards Bass Strait. When I reached the coastal estuaries, I quickly developed my full brown pigment and adjusted one to three years old, known as an elver or 'bootlace'. Here my excellent sense of smell to detect the rich cocktail of organic molecules that flow from every river mouth, and I was thus guided towards the freshwater or dams and away from my marine existence. My brothers stayed behind in the coastal estuaries.

The my

going is never easy when you're an eel. I faced many obstacles along my journey upstream; dam walls, weirs, waterfalls, logs and the huge spinning turbines of hydro power stations. Never fear, we eels have a secret weapon that no other fish possesses. My slimy skin is covered with tiny scales, which allows me to 'breathe' on land, obtaining some oxygen by direct diffusion through my skin. As long as it's a dewy or rainy night, I can leave the water and wriggle stealthily across land and even straight up dam walls. I do appreciate those fish ladders and dams covered with AstroTurf though.

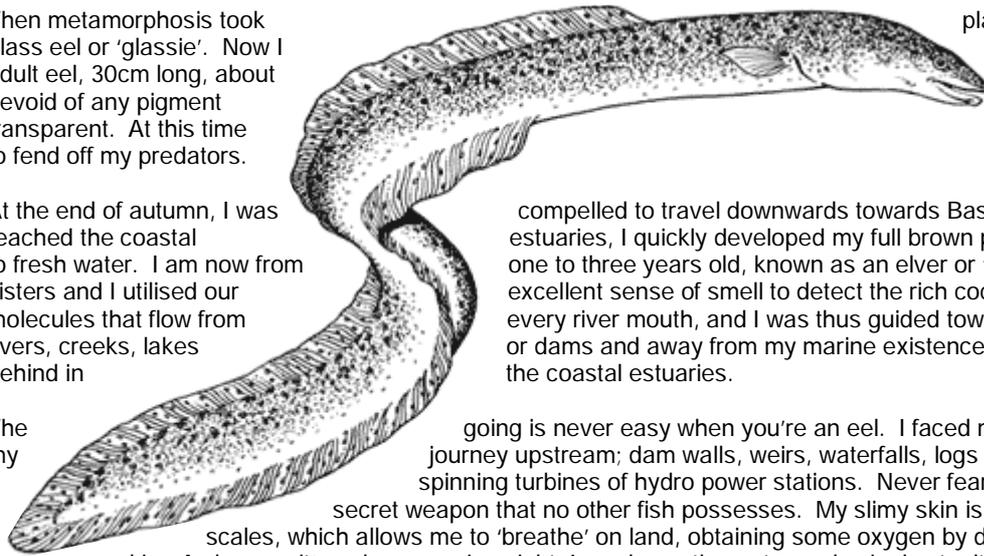
On a new or full moon when the tide is running in, me and thousands of my sisters can be seen moving upstream, particularly in Victoria's Snowy River. This phenomenon is called an eel run or eel fare.

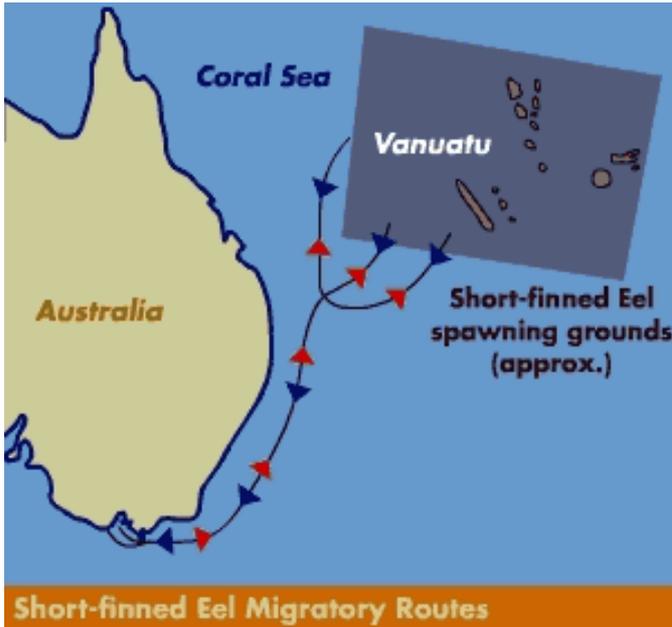
The seasons keep turning, and around springtime, I find myself in the upper reaches of the river. I am now a mature adult short-finned eel, around 1m long; my slimy skin glowing golden olive green. It is here that I will dwell for decades, perhaps up to 50 years. My role in the riverine ecosystem is important. Tasty crustaceans, dragonfly larvae, insects, yabbies, shrimps, frogs, molluscs, frogs and small fish I caught and ground up with my plate-like teeth, feasting on them in large quantities, ever growing fatter. It is here that I stayed.

My skin has begun to change colour, turning a beautiful silvery grey. This coincides with the onset of autumn rains that swell the headwaters of Australia's easterly rivers. My confinement of decades of languishing and feasting is ending, I must move downstream towards the coast. What triggers our migration, is it a combination of low atmospheric pressure, high rainfall and a new moon? You humans do not really know yet, but we do. If the right conditions for migration don't occur, some of my sisters become landlocked for the rest of their lives, and can grow to an enormous size of 20kg and 2 metres long.

This is my final journey downstream, and a number of strange changes are taking place. My skin has already begun to darken and thicken, and my fins and eyes have grown larger. Now that I move closer towards the sea, my stomach degenerates to free up vital resources needed for my reproductive organs and the anus constricts to reduce water.

This would have been the time of year when the local indigenous people would set hand-woven conical traps to catch us - autumn was known as eel season and a time of plentiful food. There is vivid testament to these times at Lake Condah, in western Victoria, where the remains of stone fish traps perhaps 8000 years old indicate that the local people took advantage of the migration cycle of short-finned eels. They trapped us and then smoked us in the hollows of nearby trees for eating and trading.





My journey has only just begun. Although I have reached the sea, already I have travelled hundreds of kilometres from my riverine home. Now I must turn north, and travel back to my breeding ground somewhere in the South Pacific, up to several thousand kilometres away. You have not yet discovered how we find our way to the spawning grounds. Some of you have suggested that we use magnetic cues or that we pop up to the surface and navigate by the stars. Although we do swim against the southerly flowing east Australian current as a guide, how we find our way to the exact spawning grounds is still one of our best kept secrets.

When I reach the spawning grounds of waters more than 300m deep, I will have up to five million eggs spawn and then - although again, you do not really know for certain - I will die from exhaustion. Why do we go to all this trouble, when many other of my fishy friends live out their lives quite happily in one river? Perhaps it's because we may be descended from fish which, millions of years ago, lived out their entire life in the deep tropical ocean. Perhaps the echo of their far off ancestors just keeps calling us back to our oceanic origins. Or maybe we just like to travel.

the mpccc christmas party!!

Come along to our third Christmas bash at the Woodlands Depot, so we can say a hearty "thank you".

So many great things have happened this year and what better way to celebrate than with fun, frivolity, classy drinks, vegetarian delights and of course, gourmet snags done with our usual MPCCC flair.



Meet us at our lovely depot in Woodlands Historic Park (refer to map) on



Friday 17th December



Merriment begins from 4.30pm but will surely carry on until the fairy lights come out.

Please RSVP by Friday 10th December on 9333 2406 or e-mail info@mpccc.org



A reminder to all Friends of the Moonee Ponds Creek members that the AGM will be held just prior to the Christmas party at 4pm at the depot.



spring sightings

Ode to our beautiful birds, where would we be without you! The sightings column would surely be much shorter if it were not for your presence.

The pretty little New Holland Honeyeater has been spotted at Boeing Reserve. Keep an eye out for this often-spotted bird, they form localised groups and are most active around nectar-rich blossoms where there are regular fights, chases and noisy "corroborees". They prefer eucalypt forests and creeksides with a healthy shrubby understorey. This species is actively

breeding right now, from July to January, creating a rough small cup of twigs, grass, stems, spiders' web and plant-down nestled into the fork of low dense shrubs.



The large family party of Red-browed Finch's have once again been sighted at Wright St, Westmeadows. This very small bird has a bright scarlet bill, eyebrow and rump feathers.

A huge flock of around 200 Straw-necked Ibis were having a lovely time feeding on some marshy ground at the Woodlands depot a few weeks ago.

Our ever intrepid planter Julie Law has seen two White-backed Australian Magpies in the Westmeadows area thoroughly engaged in their nesting duties; one bird had a twig, the other fragments of jute-mat.

Glenda Robinson has had many sightings in Woodlands with Kookaburras, Red Robin and an Echnidna.

The warmer weather is bringing out the

reptiles!! A Common Bluetongue has been spotted sunning himself against a log at the carpark of the Moonee Ponds Creek Committee depot. And Pobblebonk frogs have been heard at Westmeadows near Mickleham Rd in late September.

Carolyn Layton and a group of students from Penola Catholic College found fresh Eastern Grey Kangaroo prints, and sighted a Black Swan carefully building up the edges of their platform nest, with a cygnet hovering, nearby at Jacana Wetlands.

A resident has seen Long-necked Turtles in the creek at the Wright St Retarding Basin behind Koala Crs. These turtles are generally shy, though if agitated they release an extremely pungent and unpleasant odour.

Alan Flack and Audrey Biggs sighted Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoo's on the creek in West Brunswick. With their slow mannered flight and pleasant wailing whistles, they resemble lumbering galleons. They are in search of the Wattle Goat Moth larvae that bore their way through the trunks and branches of wattles and pine trees.



...upcoming events

Spotlight Tours

La Trobe University
Any time!

Why not go on a spotlight tour at La Trobe University Wildlife Reserves/Melbourne Wildlife Sanctuary? The best time for spotlight tours are now: spring and late summer. Tours run all year round and start 15 minutes before sunset.

To book contact the Bookings Officer on 9479 1206 or email wildlife@latrobe.edu.au

Volunteer Seed Collecting and Cleaning

Tree Project
Weekends during
November to
February

Are you suffering Friends group planting day withdrawal symptoms? If you answered yes, have you thought about seed collecting? The Tree Project is now into its first year venturing into native seed collecting thanks to the work of a keen group of volunteers. Join the group and get out of the city, breathe some fresh air, explore parts of Victoria, and learn more about native plants and their colourful seeds.

Visit treeproject.asn.au for more details.

Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival

CERES
20th November

The CERES Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival is an annual community celebration welcoming the Sacred Kingfisher back to its original habitat along the banks of Merri Creek in Brunswick. The festival is a community ritual of creative environmental, artistic and cultural significance. This year's Festival will expose the artistic exploration of water and fire.

For more details visit www.ceres.org.au

The 13th Annual "Buy Nothing Day"

26th November

For 24 hours, millions of people around the world do not participate -- in the doomsday economy, the marketing mind-games, and the frantic consumer-binge that's become our culture. We pause. We make a small choice not to shop. We shrink our footprint and gain some calm. Together we say to Nike, Coke and the rest: enough is enough. And we help build this movement to rethink our unsustainable course.

For more info visit www.adbusters.org

Introduction to Mosaic CERES

11th and 12th December

Learn the technique and practice of mosaic from a professional mosaicist in this 2-day intensive workshop. Create your own stunning take-home piece and collaborate in the design and construction of a beautiful mosaic & ferro-cement bench. Learn the mosaic skills and techniques that were applied to the "Gateway to Community" Project.

For info on bookings ring CERES on 9387 2609 or visit www.ceres.org