



Ponderings

Summer 2013

Issue 39

Seasonal Newsletter of the Moonee Ponds Creek
Coordination Committee Inc

advocate educate interpret participate rehabilitate revegetate

John Smith – Litter Crusader

For at least the past seven years, John Smith has been quietly picking up the detritus that collects along the Moonee Ponds Creek, putting it into bags and then trying to find some authority willing to take responsibility for removing it.

While MPCCC still had an office, he would call Stephanie and ask for her to arrange for it to be collected. And depending where his latest pile was established, this is what she did. It was often difficult – John works on the lower reaches of the Creek, where there are multiple owners, and multiple organisations that could potentially have jurisdiction over the banks of the Creek – it could be railway land, Port of Melbourne, Melbourne Water, Melbourne City Council, or any number of other authorities. And often Steph was passed from person to person – they didn't seem to know either, if they were responsible for a section of the Creek – and they decided they were certainly not responsible for collecting bags of rubbish!



Bags of rubbish John collected, at the rear of the film studios, Docklands

Recently, we have been able to organise for Melbourne City Council to pick up some of John's efforts, although they probably weren't really responsible for that section! So well done MCC!

And this is one of his recent hauls of rubbish – it is sobering to think of all this washing down the Creek, and more sobering to think of what would have happened to it, had John NOT collected it.

Thank you John Smith for your continuing efforts to protect the creek's environment.

In this issue:

- ◆ John Smith – Litter Crusader!
- ◆ FO Westbreen Creek
- ◆ Melbourne Water Healthy Waterways
- ◆ What the Councils are doing
- ◆ Bike trail reopens under M80
- ◆ No frogs in Cambridge Gardens Wetlands

We need coordinated action from councils and the other stakeholders ...

It is a sad fact that most of the rubbish that appears in the Creek, arises from the surrounding areas – washed down the stormwater drains into the Creek. There is also littering of the banks from users of the shared paths.

There are only two litter traps in the section of the Creek from Racecourse Road to Footscray Road, and their inadequacy is obvious at the lower reach of the Creek, near the Ice House. Melbourne Water is the responsible authority for the Creek itself, from Racecourse Road to Footscray Road, after that it is the Port of Melbourne Corporation.

Justifiably, these authorities could argue that councils should be doing more to stop litter getting into the stormwater drains in the first place, and of course Victoria's State Governments, past and present refuse to put deposits on drink containers, which would help with some of the litter.

The Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek have been urging Melbourne Water to improve the litter collection from the Creek, but progress is very slow.

In its 2011 draft Landscape Masterplan, the Port of Melbourne Corporation states: *Litter accumulation along the edges to water predominantly arrives from outside the port, but needs to be regularly removed as it impacts on the image of the port and poses a risk to wildlife.* With so much awareness of the problem it is disappointing that so little is being done.

Don't forget Clean Up Day – Sunday 3rd March!

At the time of going to print, there are three sites along the Creek: Adelaide Boulevard, Gowanbrae – meet Andre at the rotunda, (Melway 16 C3), from 10.30am, Boeing Reserve, Strathmore Heights – meet Paul at the pagoda next to the bridge over the Creek, (Melway 16 D5) from 9.00am and Cross Keys Reserve, Essendon – meet Ginni at the pedestrian bridge across the Creek, (Melway 28 K2) from 9.00am. Sadly, there will be no festivities at Debney's Park School this year. For maps and information go to the CUD website: www.cleanupaustraliaday.org.au

The all pervasive PLASTIC ...

Have you noticed how much of the litter that collects along the Creek is *plastics* of one form or another? And how much of it is from 'luxury' items – chocolate wrappers, drink bottles, take-away containers, drinking straws, chip packets, and of course the ubiquitous plastic bags – so many brightly coloured, to make them alluring to humans. But unfortunately they are also alluring to fish and birds.

I am sure you have heard of the 'floating rafts of plastic' (although these are more like huge bowls of soup of small pieces of plastic rather than rafts) in the five oceans of the globe? The problem with plastic is that not only is it indigestible for the creatures that eat it thinking it is food, but it also absorbs all the other toxic nasties that humans produce then discharge into the sea, so if the blocked guts don't kill them, the poisons will.

I am sure that in 100 years, our descendants will look back at our profligacy and wonder at how we could have been so stupid to use so much plastic for everything.

Yellow-nosed Albatross.

Albatross are attracted to plastic bottle tops, which collect in their gut preventing them from digesting food.



Friends of Westbreen Creek

Reclamation of a little gem

For much of its length, Westbreen Creek (a tributary of the Moonee Ponds Creek) has been forced into a concrete pipe and hidden from view, but in the K W Joyce Reserve, Pascoe Vale, it is, in part, free to meander and change its course just as rivers do. It is only little, fed, for the most, by water from the Northern Golf Course, but it is a tranquil tree-lined creek, that has been significantly improved over the last seven or eight years.

In 2005 it was a weed-choked ditch, much of it covered in Kikuyu, and blackberry, but with some well-established trees, including one gnarled old red gum leaning across it, and it drew the attention of Judy Allen and Jude Larkin who decided to establish a 'Friends of Westbreen Creek'.



Bare banks in 2007 now covered with shrubs and grasses (below)

The local residents and the MPCCC got involved and soon a large group of volunteers was working to improve it.

The first thing to be done was to clear the creek and its banks of the matted Kikuyu and blackberry, and in amongst the long grass this dedicated group found seedlings from remnant Sweet Bursaria, *Bursaria spinosa*, encouraging them to keep going. They held regular Sunday weeding and clearing days, long before any planting could be done, and three truckloads of weeds, including piles of blackberry, were removed!

Melbourne Water also devised a long-term plan for the creek, but in 2005, this was not entirely welcome. The likelihood of insensitive construction work and the use of non-provenance or inappropriate plants were of concern to the Friends Group. Growling Grass Frogs had been heard along the creek, and white-faced herons regularly used the big rocks in the creek as perches. While trying to 'improve' the creek, there was the potential for contractors to do considerable damage. Later plans by Melbourne Water were more sensitive, and the work that has been carried out complements the efforts of the Friends of Westbreen Creek.

The Friends planted thousands of tube-stock plants – initially sedges and semi-aquatic plants in the creek or on its edges, then a wonderful mixture of grassland species in the riparian zone. Judy Allen had propagated many of these plants herself, from seeds collected locally. The floods of the last couple of years have spurred hundreds of red gum seedlings to germinate, and now there is a dense thicket of saplings near the old red gum.

The Kikuyu could not be eradicated completely, and it is back in the creek, but nothing like what was there before, and there are *Persecaria* sp, and *Cyperus* sp also flourishing by the ephemeral ponds. A few of the grassland species have survived, *Wahlenbergia* and *Chrysocephalum* adding colour to the tufting grasses. Further south, where Melbourne Water has undertaken major works, the creek is looking good, with some deeper pools and dense planting. I heard a Pobblebonk (Eastern Banjo frog) there, but sadly, no Growlers. There is plenty of bird life however,



Swathes of mown grass (June 2006) have been replaced by more natural mulch, leaf litter and grasses. (January 2013)



and, despite its proximity to quite dense housing, the park is well worth a visit. We have Judy and Jude and the Friends of Westbreen Creek to thank for taking the initiative to rescue this little piece of tranquillity.

Clearing Kikuyu from the creek. Piles of blackberry in the background, July 2005



Exploratory hand weeding in April 2006



Bare soil beneath the old Red Gum in August 2005, now replaced with a thicket of saplings and grasses



Frogs and amenity are Melbourne Water's focus for the Creek over the next 5 years (from Melbourne Water)

After a lot of hard work and valuable input from everyone involved, Melbourne Water's draft Healthy Waterways Strategy and Stormwater Strategy have been updated in response to feedback received during the public consultation period in May/June 2012. The biggest changes are that the Stormwater Strategy has been restructured for clarity and local information about waterway condition and values have been incorporated into the Healthy Waterways Strategy.

The draft strategies are part of the information that supports Melbourne Water's Water Plan submission, which is currently being reviewed by the Essential Services Commission (ESC). The strategies will be finalised following the ESC's determination. The final ESC decision is due in June 2013 for implementation in July 2013.

This is part of the *Healthy Waterways Strategy's* report card on Moonee Ponds Creek

Frogs Eleven of the expected 15 species have been recorded in this management unit, which is home to endangered and vulnerable species such as Bibron's Toadlet, Growling Grass Frog and Southern Toadlet.

Fish Nine of the expected 32 species have been recorded, five of which are native. This management unit is home to the endangered Macquarie Perch.

Birds Seventy-four of the expected 113 species of streamside birds and 41 of the expected 57 species of wetland birds have been recorded.

Priority areas Moonee Ponds Creek has priority areas for amenity and frogs. Management objectives are to maintain amenity and improve abundance, distribution and diversity of frogs.

Future management [By] 2030 upper sections around Woodlands Historic Park [aim to] have been revegetated and weed control measures ... put in place and streamside condition along the urbanised sections of catchment ... improved.

What's happening along the Creek?



Good news for the Creek at JP Fawcner Reserve by Lori Arthur



Melbourne Water is supporting Moreland Council to undertake a woody weed removal and revegetation program in 2013 along the Creek in Oak Park through the Corridors of Green program.

Works will involve the removal of a stand of Elm suckers at the rear of JP Fawcner Reserve, locally referred to as the 'old ford site'. There will also be further weed control and revegetation downstream and improvements to the pedestrian access at the end of John Street as part of the project.

The Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek and local schools will be invited to join Council in the follow up revegetation of the area.

Moreland will also continue to support other planting groups along the creek in 2013 with activities for the Brunswick South West Planters and the Friends of Westbreen Creek.

Keep an eye out for the Moreland Community Planting Calendar in March and the next edition of *Ponderings* for planting dates.



Preserving Napier Park by Michelle Gooding



In 1920, Theodore Napier donated 10 Acres (Four Hectares) of land, now known as Napier Park, Strathmore, to the community. It was a condition of the donation that no trees were to be cut down, to preserve and protect the landscape character of the park, including the indigenous river red gums.

These trees form part of a significant and protected community of vegetation, called Plains Grassy Woodland and the park has one of few examples in Melbourne of the pre-European vegetation of this area.

This year, Moonee Valley City Council will undertake a major conservation project in Napier Park. The project will recreate the original ephemeral watercourse, which flowed only after rain. The stormwater was directed underground in the 1960s because at that time, this was the standard approach to stormwater management. As a result the river red gums received significantly less water, which has contributed to their decline in health.

The project will direct stormwater through a vegetated swale, which will remove pollutants before it flows into an underground tank. The collected water will then be reused throughout the park to re-establish soil moisture levels.

As well as providing a sustainable water source to irrigate these important trees, the new swale will clean the water before it flows into Five Mile Creek, on to Moonee Ponds Creek, the Yarra River and then the bay and will also create additional habitat within the park.

The project, due to start in March, will cost \$460,000. This includes \$100,000 funding from Melbourne Water, who also helped fund the design of the project.

If you would like to receive ongoing information about the construction of the swale via email, send your contact details to parkimprovements@mvcc.vic.gov.au to register your interest.



Hume's planting season kicks off at The Tarnuk by Cassandra Borg

Hume City Council will be launching into the 2013 planting season with a community planting along the Moonee Ponds Creek at The Tarnuk on Sunday 5 May.

There are two key Friends groups that work in the Hume area along the Moonee Ponds Creek. The Friends of the Sacred Kingfisher have achieved amazing results with their woody weed removal and planting thousands of indigenous plants, creating valuable habitat for the native fauna.

Since 1994 the Friends of Upper Moonee Ponds Creek, in conjunction with Hume City Council and Melbourne Water, have completed a number of weed control and revegetation projects, culminating in the establishment of thousands of indigenous plant species. The group formed informally as a result of a community meeting in 1995 about the establishment of a Management Plan for Wright Street Reserve (The Tarnuk) with Melbourne Water and Council.

Come along to see the wonder of the Moonee Ponds Creek by participating in one of five community planting days in 2013.

Planting Days along the Creek in Hume

Date	Friends Group	Location	Time
Sunday 5th May	Friends of Upper Moonee Ponds Creek	The Tarnuk, end of Wright St West Meadows (Melway: 5 G6)	10am-12pm Lunch at 12pm
Sunday 30th June	Friends of Sacred Kingfisher	Moonee Ponds Creek, Westmeadows Opp Circular Rd (Melway: 6 B8)	10am-12pm Lunch at 12pm
Sunday 28 th July	National Tree Day	The Tarnuk, end of Wright St West Meadows (Melway: 5 G6)	10am-12.30pm Lunch at 12.30pm
Saturday 24th August	Friends of Sacred Kingfisher	Moonee Ponds Creek, Westmeadows Opp Circular Rd (Melway: 6 B8)	10am-12pm Lunch at 12pm
Sunday 29 th September	Friends of Upper Moonee Ponds Creek	The Tarnuk, end of Wright St Westmeadows (Melway: 5 G6)	1pm-3pm Afternoon Tea 3pm

Great news for those who like to ride along the Creek at Jacana!

The long wait is over! After 2 long years the Moonee Ponds Trail is rejoined under the Western Ring Rd Bridge. The workers huts are being dismantled and we'll watch with interest to see how the area is rehabilitated.

It was brilliant to be able to get to the North Jacana Wetland although some fencing still prevents access to the ridge between the wetland and the creek.

No longer do you have to stagger up the steep diversion to get across the road, and then take your life into your wheels to get down the death-defying track on the other side.

As Anna's picture shows, there is now a gentle gradient and smooth path, down under the bridge. Now you can enjoy both north and south parts of the wetlands without that daunting barrier in the way.

Why don't you go exploring – carry on up the Creek. There are some wonderful stretches at Westmeadows where it meanders under Johnstone Street, on up to The Tarnuk and then to Woodlands Historic Park.



Where have the frogs gone? Cambridge Gardens Wetlands fall silent

Anna Lanigan tells of her disappointment at one of her favourite frog spots

Cambridge Gardens is a housing estate adjacent to the Moonee Ponds Creek, upstream of the Mickleham Road bridge. Houses of considerable size have populated the hillside giving commanding views of the valley and the city beyond. In the early development days a wetland area was created consisting of a series of small ponds. It serves as a valuable filter for the runoff from the estate before it enters the creek system. Within a year of its construction, populations of Spotted Marsh Frogs, Pobblebonk and Common froglets migrated from the nearby creek into the wetland. Whistling tree frogs made a home in the fringing bottlebrush and the quintet became complete with the arrival of Growling Grass frogs. For this Frogwatch participant it became Census heaven.



Red gum remnant at Cambridge Gardens Wetlands



2nd Strathmore Scouts Frogwatch night (photo Michael Cudmore)

That is until last Spring! I was so confident about the reliability of this wetland that I had no hesitation making it a destination for an evening with the cubs of Second Strathmore Scout Troop. To my dismay, despite a patient hour or so of waiting, just a couple of lonely Pobblebonk and Common Froglets were heard in the middle pool. It was almost a year to the same evening I had recorded scores of frogs in November 2011 with the usual quintet hell bent on outdoing each other to top the croaking charts. Fortunately (always good to BE PREPARED) I had the recording with me to prove it, and the Cubs and parents still claimed the visit was a huge success and want to return.

I stayed on that evening for over an hour after the Troop departed and still no frogs and I've been back another four times with the same disappointing result. What I did see on each of these visits was a cat. In the poor light it seemed to be a black or dark tabby. On approach it scuttled into the bushes. It was hours after sunset and should have been behind closed doors. One cat alone can't account for the absence of frogs but its persistent presence forced a report to Hume Council with the hope they'll set a trap as suggested.

The mystery of the frogs could have several resolutions. They may have all mated earlier in the season and I just missed them. The unusually dry Spring and now hot dry Summer may have triggered a decline. Similar poor results were recorded in the Jacana Wetlands. Could frogs have an instinct that predicts conditions with the same uncanny accuracy of kangaroos. More disturbing is the prospect that the Cambridge pools may have become too degraded from the surrounding runoff. I plan to continue monitoring the situation, which leads me to a request.

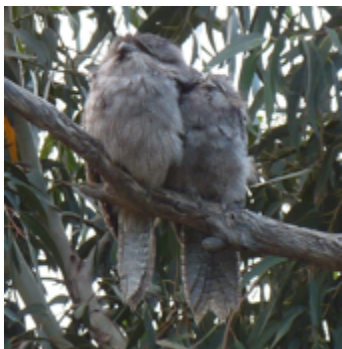
It would be great to have some local spotters to report frog activity and indeed feral cat activity as well. I've been trying to encourage Melbourne water to incorporate a reporting ability on their website but in the meantime if locals along the creek could contact me when they hear frogs are active, I'm happy to make the journey from Strathmore to record them.

The Cambridge Gardens Wetland is a valuable resource that deserves our guardianship. The walking paths and picnic area provide a pleasant retreat and the frogs when on song are amazing. The ancient River Red Gums and more recent plantings around the wetland create a diverse and beautiful habitat. Long may it continue to be cared for and protected.

Anna Lanigan. please text 0421 578 523 or leave a message on 9379 1761.

Sightings

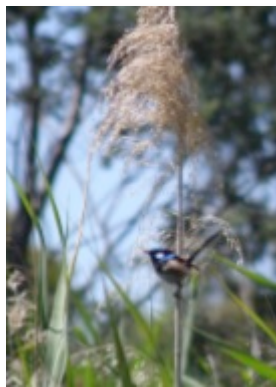
If you see anything interesting, please tell us about it. Contact Stella, at ponderings@mpccc.org.



Two Tawnies on the Creek

Both Judy Allen and Nina Eason reported seeing Tawny Frogmouths. These two young ones were in Judy's garden in December – such fluffy little fellows.

Fairy wren on *Phragmites* stem



Fairy wren (photo: Anna Lanigan)

Here's another of Anna Lanigan's great photographs, taken at Cambridge Gardens Wetlands – what amazing acrobats Fairy wrens are!

Black-winged Stilts at Jacana Wetlands

Anna Lanigan also reported seeing Black-winged Stilts at Jacana. These elegant birds need shallow water and soft mud to feed, so the recent dry months in Victoria will have been hard on them.



Black-winged Stilt on its spindly red legs, foraging at Jacana Wetlands (Photo: Anna Lanigan)

Bat Count

At the January count, a total of 23,000 bats were counted – a fairly typical number for summer.

The next counts are on Wednesday 27th March, with a meeting time of 7:00 pm; and 24th April at 5.30pm.

We will be meeting in the usual meeting spot at the Car park for the Yarra Bend Park Golf Course (Melway map 2D G7), which is on Yarra Bend Rd, which runs off Heidelberg Rd

Your continued assistance with this project is greatly appreciated! New counters and regulars are very welcome. For more information, contact Rod van der Ree on 8344 3661, 0412 562 429 or rvdr@unimelb.edu.au

