



# spring 2005 ponderings

Newsletter of the Moonee Ponds  
Creek Co-ordination Committee



It's a family affair at MPCCC! Matt, Jack and Tahlia joined Elissa (MPCCC's schools liaison officer) at the planting day down at Gowanbrae in September. As you can see, kids love to plant too!

## co-ordinator's ramblings...

Dear Creek Dwellers,

Here it is again, another jam packed issue of Ponderings with some absolutely wonderful articles for you to read. These days I don't get to do much Ponderings writing any more, but I think that might be a good thing, given the quality of articles that Deb and all of our other wonderful contributors are producing. They're always so informative, yet entertaining at the same time, and that's what Ponderings is all about. I hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as I did. If you're thinking about starting a Friends group, or

are wondering what it's all about, you can always download a copy then read Judy's inspiring article from our website. It's been a busy spring planting season again, with all of our Friends groups powering along as usual. Thank you wonderful Friends for your efforts this year and also to the extended MPCCC planting staff – Steph, Maddie, Elissa, Deb, Penny and Trevor. And finally, congratulations Steph on writing a successful Grass Roots Grant for preservation of a rare plant species in Strathmore. Yay! (we'll tell you all about it in the next issue of Ponderings....).

If you haven't yet filled out our survey, please do. If you've lost it,

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creeky memories

# gumboots, grass fires, thistles and ferrets

Marcia Cavanagh and her dog Bronson quite often attend planting days at Jacana Wetlands. Marcia was kind enough to share her memories of the Moonee Ponds Creek with us.

My family moved to Oak Park in August 1956. The area was open grassland with houses being built at random. There were few made roads, no storm water drains and the night cart serviced the area. Oak Park station opened in mid-August 1956 and train travellers walked long distances through paddocks, even crossing the Moonee Ponds Creek to catch the train. Gumboots were lined up at the station daily, with the owners retrieving them on their return to Oak Park station. With no storm water drains in the area, all grey water eventually found its way into the creek. The area was covered in Scotch Thistles, Bullrushes and Briar Roses. Each summer, the Scotch Thistles would

let go of their seeds and what we call "robbers" would float on the wind.

In 1976 I moved into my first home in the valley of Glenroy. Each morning I would see the cows grazing on the western side of the Moonee Ponds Creek. Riders exercised their horses by galloping along the flat land near the creek. Grass fires in the summer were also a regular occurrence, taking out most of the western slopes of the valley. Even though the area was not as attractive as it is now, it was still used by the locals. An example of this was a man in Moonee Boulevard who used the area to exercise his ferrets.



Marcia and her dog Bronson really enjoy their planting days at Jacana Wetlands. Marcia's efforts rejuvenate the Moonee Ponds Creek, and restore her connection with the area.

## royal park remnants

a poem by Sandy Simpson



Is it an Australian Owlet Nightjar stridently churring in the dark shadows before dawn.

Or is it an antechinus, like a possum or a mouse.

A White's Skink scuttles to its house in an old log hollow.

Two kookaburras laugh.

Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos perch on Silver and Black Wattles, whose blossoms smell like sunshine and lemon.

And flowers of the correa hang like bells and saltbush spreads its ruby fruit.

A small Spotted Pardalote with a yellow-orange throat hovers about the myoporum's white flowers at dawn.

A Varied Eggfly Butterfly flutters.

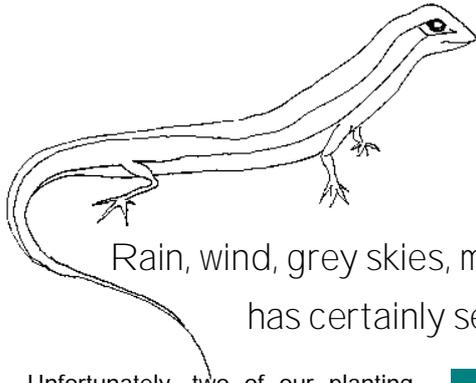
Velvet wings; pink, black and blue.

And Blue Wrens dance in the dew.

Amber sap glows golden in sunlight on the eucalypt trees.

Wallaby Grasses lean slightly and casuarinas sigh in the light breeze.

Sandy Simpson, 2005



# spring planting season

Rain, wind, grey skies, more rain, hail, even snow! The 2005 Spring Planting Season has certainly seen it all when it comes to Melbourne's ever-changing weather.

Unfortunately, two of our planting days were cancelled, due to the rather chilly and wet weather on those days.

The MPCCC doesn't like to see our planters go without though, so the two cancelled days have been rescheduled for October.

Contact Stephanie on 9333 2406 or [steph@mpccc.org](mailto:steph@mpccc.org) for further information.

## Friends of Strathmore Ponds

Saturday 8 October  
10am—12pm

Meet at the end of Gregory St, Oak Park.  
Melways 16 G7

## RESCHEDULED! Strath-Oak Planters

Saturday 15 October  
10am—12pm

Meet at the end of Margaret St, Oak Park.  
Melways 16 H7

## RESCHEDULED! Essendon Residents

Saturday 22 October  
11am—1pm

Meet along the creek at the Moreland Rd end of Hopetoun Ave, Essendon.  
Melways 29 A3

## plant (or fungi!) star of the season

# the lovely world of lichen

Judy Allen has taken a liking to lichen. She has discovered that they are a fascinating group of living things, with a story of their very own.

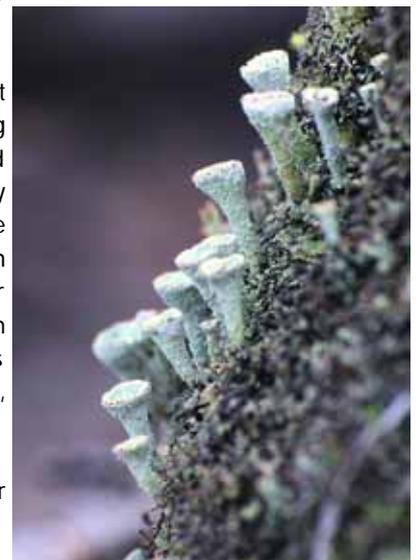
Lichen belongs to the fungi kingdom; not the plant kingdom, and certainly not the animal kingdom. Lichens are composed of two components. Their outer body is a fungus that houses and protects the second component, which is an algae. The algae provides food for both partners by photosynthesizing.

Lichens grow on the left-over spots in the natural world, where plants can't grow. These places include bare rock, desert sand, dead wood, bones, metal, and of course, our house roofs. They are able to grow in the most unlikely of places, as they become dormant in unfavorable conditions such as excessive heat, cold, salt or drought. Dormancy, like hibernation, stops them from dying, and they may be dormant for most of the year.

Growing in such harsh and unlikely places means that lichen need to spend a lot of their time gathering nutrients in preparation for growth. They capture and concentrate small amounts of nutrients from very dilute sources. The nutrients come from the substrate that they are growing on, from the dust that lands on them and from the air around them. Unfortunately for the lichen, they also capture poisonous elements from the air, such as pollution. When pollutants such as sulphur accumulate to high levels, the algae is killed, subsequently, the lichen dies.

Therefore, lichens are known as nature's clean air indicators.

What I find most curious about lichen, with such a tiny growth rate of just 2mm per year, is the uses people have found for them. They have been used for fabric dyes, hair tonics, and as nappy and mattress stuffing. Their medicinal properties are known in many cultures, including Chinese, Native American and Pacific Islanders. And because many lichen have anti-biotic properties, soldiers are said to have used lichen for dressing wounds in war-time!

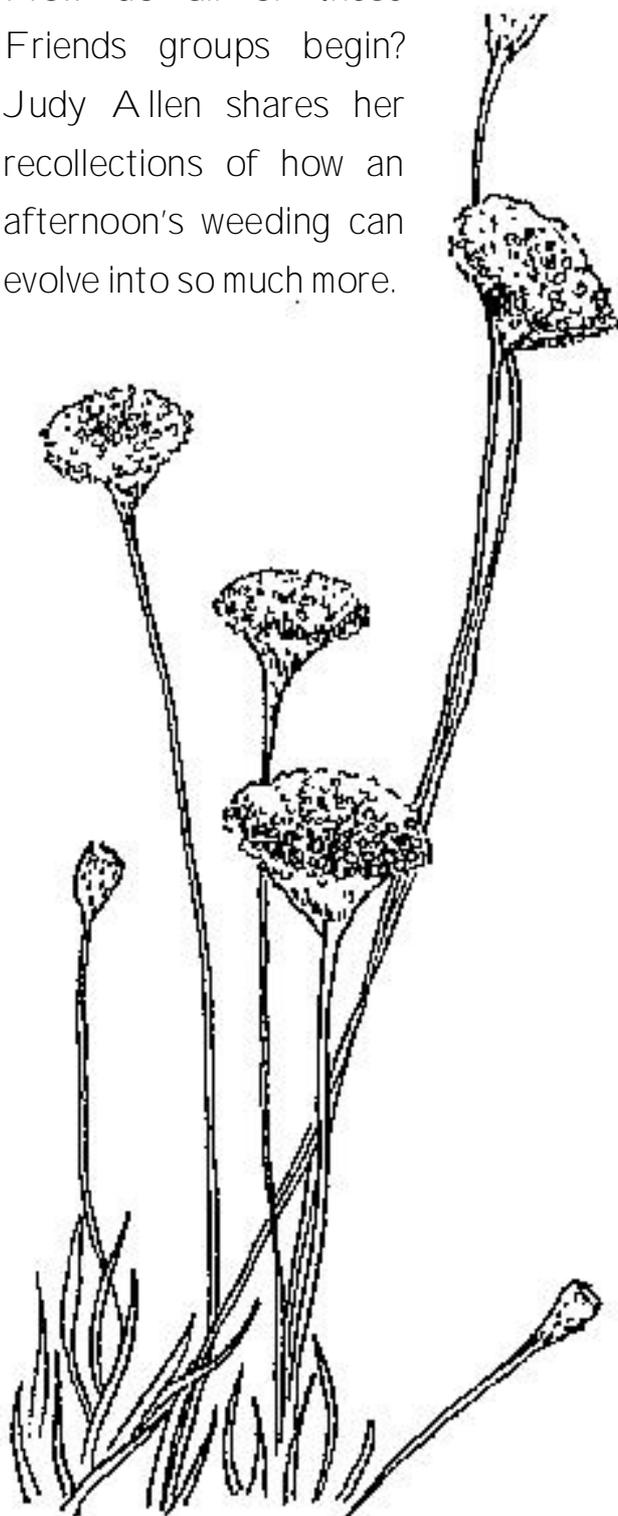




# starting the friends of strathnaver reserve



How do all of these Friends groups begin? Judy Allen shares her recollections of how an afternoon's weeding can evolve into so much more.



I have three Friends groups. I nurture each site, develop each vision, eager to take each step to the next, embrace every new understanding and observation, and every meeting – what? – now I know I'm crazy.

My hope is that my story will invigorate people to see, to do, and to inspire others to join, or even start, a Friends group.

Judy Allen

I like walking along the Moonee Ponds Creek. People say good morning, water gurgles over rocks and Galahs feed on the grasses that grow on the footy ground.

One day I was passing Strathnaver Reserve and saw some purple flowers on the slope. I pulled out some of the Giant Mustard weeds to help display the flowers. I saw how lovely the flowers looked without weeds, and thought how beautiful the slope would look without these weeds. Clean, cared for and natural. I spent a couple of Sunday afternoons pulling out weeds, sitting in the sun, listening to the radio. Ducks would fly overhead.

It was when I needed identification of what I thought may be an invasive weed that I contacted the Moonee Ponds Creek Co-ordination Committee. They couldn't have been more helpful. The grass was identified and an eradication program was started. And the planning for the very first planting day began.

This was the start of the Friends of Strathnaver Reserve. Neighbours, residents and the local community all wanted the Moonee Ponds Creek to look loved and cared for, in a way that wasn't happening. We have held planting and hand-weeding days, and "looking at the wildflowers" walks. We care for the plants, share observations and stories of the past, plan the future and learn together. The English don't have 'Friends Of' groups, they have 'Green Gymnasium' groups. After a couple of hours planting I feel like I've had a Green Work-out too.



### the best features of strathnaver grasslands

Lichen.

Call me crazy, but I love looking at the lichen on the rocks. It grows at 2mm per year and there are huge patches of it.

Rocks.

The white rocks are silcrete, which was used in aboriginal culture for slicing and carving meat. Every silcrete rock site is an important aboriginal cultural site.

Flowers.

Bluebells, rare Rice-flowers, purple Glycine and Everlasting Daisies, who all grow in tough and dry situations, have lived through neglect and are thriving with care.

Grasses.

Kangaroo Grass, Wallaby Grass, Common Wheat-grass, Weeping Grass. Although these are inviting names, they are a little more difficult to get to know.

### highlights of the friends group

Having so many people turn up to a planting day once that we ate the lunch table dry.

Seeing the success of the second planting, which grew, flowered and seeded in a single season.

Hearing stories of how the Moonee Ponds Creek used to look and sound - ponds, frogs, Blue-tongue Lizards, birds and Artichoke Thistles.

Spending an afternoon filming at Strathnaver Reserve for the ABC's 'Gardening Australia' program.

### the future for strathnaver grasslands

More planting days, more weeding/caring for days and more wildflower walks.

More people involved in the process of discussing what happens next.

Greater council support for the site and for those who look after it on behalf of the whole community. This includes better funding for MPCCC, a Management Plan and Works Timetable for Strathnaver Reserve.

Removal of inappropriate tree species, which are a legacy of past 'care'.

Integration of Strathnaver Reserve into the whole slope and into the creek line. Ok, this is a big one but I have time!

### Friends groups are about changing, creating and sharing

Changing the landscape.

Changing attitudes. It can be hard to love prickly little plants that stick to your socks. It takes time to see the beauty in the wild spaces.

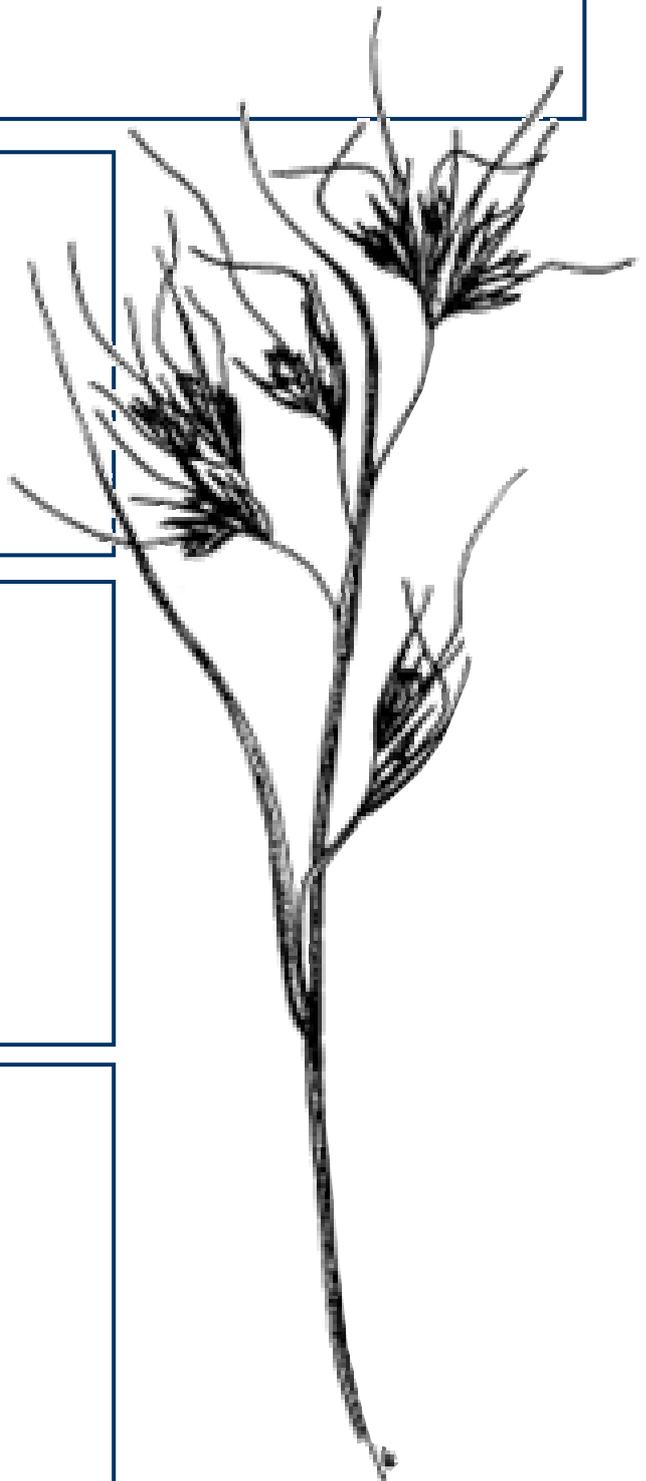
Creating bird-friendly spaces and frog-friendly spaces.

Creating safe and inspiring play spaces for our children.

Sharing a vision of how things could be in the future.

Sharing time together whilst gardening in a sustainable manner.

Sharing memories of the Moonee Ponds Creek, and of course, of food.





## people like us



The North Melbourne Sustainability Street Group is gearing up for action, and hitting the road! Why not head down to the Spring Fling Festival and say hello to the members of this group. Gabrielle Stannus fills us in with all the important information.

This group was formed as part of the Sustainability Street program and is supported by the City of Melbourne, Vox Bandicoot, Environs Australia, City West Water and others. The program is founded on the belief that we can all do something to have less impact on the planet – everyday.

Our group is therefore dedicated to improving our local environment and increasing community and social links. We participate in a wide range of activities, ranging from community plantings, clean up days and drain stencilling. Our group has also distributed calico bags and vouchers from Metro West Waste for subsidised compost bins and worms farms to local residents.

Upcoming activities include a community environment stall at the annual Spring Fling Festival, where we plan to tackle the plastic bag issue.

We have a trolley full of green products to give away in a great competition at this stall. We will also be giving out FREE calico bags to people participating in our survey on local environment and sustainability.

We are planning a barbecue and social get-together for December.



All North and West Melbourne residents and traders are welcome to be involved in the North Melbourne Sustainability St groups activities. Meetings are to be held on the first Tuesday of the month from 7.30–8.30pm (second Tuesday in November) during 2005.

If you would like more information, please contact Gabrielle Stannus on 9329 2801 or [gabstar3003@yahoo.com](mailto:gabstar3003@yahoo.com).

Get on board!!!



## waterwatch

# less fishy finds, but it is not all bad news

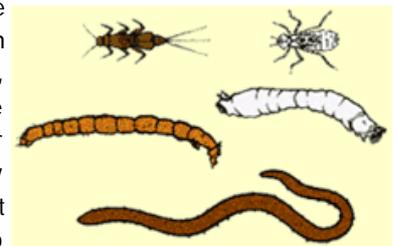
There is good and bad news to report since the last Waterwatch column. Helen Suter, our regular volunteer Waterwatch co-ordinator, informs us that bad news can sometimes be good, especially when it comes to our native fish.



Common Galaxias (*Galaxia maculatus*)

The good news is that we're pretty sure the fish we found in the creek during autumn were the native Common Galaxias (*Galaxia maculatus*). The bad news is that we have not seen any since, and the only fish that we have found during winter are Mosquito Fish (*Gambusia holbrooki*). Mosquito Fish are considered a noxious species according to the Victorian 1995 Fisheries Act, and it is an offence to place any captured Mosquito Fish into a waterbody. These noxious critters have even been referred to as the 'fish destroyer'. We have been doing our duty, removing the captured specimens from the water, once we have correctly identified them. Information about Mosquito Fish can be found at the Department of Primary Industries [www.dpi.vic.gov.au/dpi/index.htm](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/dpi/index.htm) website in the Fisheries Note (FN0068).

But the bad news is not all bad. The native Galaxias appears to have an interesting life cycle. During the autumn high tides, they move down to estuarine environments to spawn in the terrestrial vegetation. When the tide rises, the eggs become immersed in water, which triggers the hatching cycle. The young spend the winter in this estuarine environment, around five to six months, before moving upstream into the freshwater habitats. The fish that were sighted in autumn may have been adults on their journey downstream to Port Phillip Bay. As the adults usually perish after spawning, we would not expect to see any Galaxias until summer, when the young will start moving upstream to freshwater. Understanding the Galaxias' lifecycle helps us explain their recent absence. However, we are unsure if they are able to make the journey back from the Bay, considering the number of barriers that hinder their upstream movement. It will be very interesting to witness what happens this summer. Although most adult Galaxias seem to spawn at one year of age, some do not, so these may still be found in the freshwater environments. Go to [www.nativefish.asn.au/common\\_galaxias.html](http://www.nativefish.asn.au/common_galaxias.html) for more info on the Common Galaxias.



The Common Galaxias eat a diet that includes small aquatic insects, especially larvae. They also eat any small insects from the surface, mid-water and on the bottom, including wasps, ants and bees.

An article in The Age, 1 September 2005, reports on a (controversial) plan to spend \$300 million to upgrade northern suburban sewerage systems. The Moonee Ponds Creek was mentioned as one of the targeted tributaries. An upgraded network will prevent sewerage overflows that occur after heavy rain, and assist in the reduction of pollution loads to the Yarra River. The report stated that overflows can occur "dozens of times a year", and Melbourne Water apparently has recorded 42 spills (in the Yarra catchment I believe) from July 2004 to June 2005. Another good reason to not go water monitoring after heavy rains!

Thanks again to all those dedicated Waterwatch participants: Gabrielle, Zak, Carolyn, Nonie, Patricia and Jenny. Contact Helen Suter at [helensuter@pacific.net.au](mailto:helensuter@pacific.net.au) or MPCCC on 9333 2406 if you would like to join in.

The late-winter rains have caused the water levels in some sections of the Moonee Ponds Creek to rise quite dramatically. This photo, taken on Sunday 21 August, shows the elevated water levels looking downstream from Jacana Site 1 towards the top of the northern wetlands. This is the first time we have seen water flowing through the litter trap (on the right-hand side).





# spring sightings

We welcome all of your interesting wildlife observations, be they big or small! Don't forget to check out [www.mpccc.org/fauna.htm](http://www.mpccc.org/fauna.htm) where all the Moonee Ponds Creek wildlife sightings are now listed.



Silveryeye

A meander through Woodlands Historic Park on an extremely windy afternoon in late August revealed some lovely birds.

A large flock of **Silveryeyes** were moving rapidly through the eucalypt canopy, dashing into the air on the next stage of their journey, calling constantly to each other with a thin peevish 'psee'. Some **Grey Fantail's** followed me from their usual 'just-safe' distance, entertaining me with their beautiful sweet, tinny, animated, ascending, fiddle-like



Grey Fantail

song, which ends in a drawn-out, rising, silvery note. A single **Whistling Kite** soared buoyantly in small circles overhead; an **Australian Raven** kept him company. A party of **Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes** flew above the eucalypt canopy with their distinctive 'shooting' flight pattern, calling to each other, 'chereer, chereer'.

Early morning at Woodlands also rewards the bird observer. The cool, clear, frosty mornings of early September are beautifully still and quiet. An **Olive-backed Oriole** was heard. A graceful thrush-like bird of the treetops, they are olive-green and about 26-28cm in size. Perhaps you have heard a rolling, mellow 'orry, orry-ole' or 'olly-ole'? A pair of **Laughing Kookaburras** flew from tree to tree. They lifted their beaks and called to each other.

Bliss! I know that you are all familiar with that particular bird call.

A flock of seventeen **Crested Pigeons** were industriously feeding on the grasses at Strathmore North Primary School, reports Steph. They are Australia's only grey pigeon. Listen out for their funny call, a repeated 'whoop!'



Mel stated joyously, "The Firetails are back!". Melanie sighted a flock of **Red-browed Finches**, who are also sometimes known as Red-browed Firetail Finches, at Wright St, Westmeadows in

August. They flew all around her in a large flock of around 30; their scarlet bill, eyebrow and rump making i.d. easy.

A pair of male **Flame or Scarlet Robins** were seen at Jacana Wetlands in early September. They were both perched on the old metal fence.



Flame Robin

## ...upcoming events

**Waterwatch Canoe "Come and Try" Day.**  
Sunday 16 October.  
1 hr sessions departing 10-11am, 11-12 noon, 12-1pm & 2-3pm.

Take a paddle down the Yarra River with an experienced instructor from Canoe Vic. who will provide all equipment needed and canoes!

Check out the health of the Yarra River with the magnificent Waterwatch Trailer which has lots of interesting living creates from the Yarra River.

Meet at the Canoe Launching Place at Westerfolds Park, Fitzsimons Lane, Templestowe. Bookings are essential. More info? Call Canoe Vic. on 9459 4251 or email [deb@canoevic.com.au](mailto:deb@canoevic.com.au)

**Friends of Organ Pipes National Park.**  
Walk Around Banchory Grove Nature Conservation Reserve, Sydenham North.  
Saturday 22 October.

The Friends of Organ Pipes National Park date back to 1972. They are an active Friends group who have monthly working days and other activities.

The Friends will be leading a walk around Banchory Gve Reserve.

Then visit Watson Rd and Sunbury Rail Reserve to see the spring wildflowers and weed control.

More info?  
Contact Robert Bender on 9499 2413 or email [rbender@netlink.com.au](mailto:rbender@netlink.com.au)

**Spring Fling 2005**  
"My Place, Your Place, Our Home".  
North & West Melbourne Community Festival.  
Sunday 23 October.

Spring has finally arrived and you are invited to join in the festivities of Spring Fling 2005, the annual North and West Melbourne Community Festival, which is proudly presented by the North and West Melbourne Neighbourhood Centre.

This year Spring Fling celebrates its 28th year as Melbourne's unique and longest running community festival that is organised for and by the local community.

More info?  
[www.springfling.org.au](http://www.springfling.org.au) or email [info@springfling.org.au](mailto:info@springfling.org.au)

**Melbourne Water Frog Census Program.**  
Targeted Frog Census On The Growling Grass Frog.  
Saturday 5 November.

The Melb. Water Frog Census Program is a community-based frog monitoring program.

Targeted surveys provide specialised training for Frog Census volunteers.

The Growling Grass Frog is an endangered sp. that has only been recorded 9 times in the Frog Census Program.

You must be a registered Frog Census participant and bookings are essential. More info? Call Melbourne Water on 131 722 or go to [www.melbournewater.com.au/frogs](http://www.melbournewater.com.au/frogs).

**Friends of Woodlands Historic Park.**  
"A guided tour of Providence Rd woodland".  
Saturday 12 and Sunday 13 November.  
2.00pm.

Join the Friends of Woodlands Historic Park in an informative walk and talk about the flora, fauna and history surrounding the area of woodland that lies along Providence Rd in Oaklands Junction.

Meet at the Providence Road carpark at Woodlands Historic Park in Oaklands Junction.

Please ring beforehand to confirm that the day is going ahead. Contact Jeff Triplett on 0404 830 227 or Sue Wright on 9306 8124 (ah) or 0414 526 407.