



Ponderings

Spring 2012

Issue 38

Seasonal Newsletter of the Moonee Ponds Creek
Coordination Committee Inc

advocate educate interpret participate rehabilitate revegetate

Planting at 'Bill's Hill'

If you have driven along the M80 on the new bridge across the Moonee Ponds Creek at Jacana recently, you may have noticed the bare hill off to the north west of the bridge. The Tulla Sydney Alliance folk nicknamed this hill, 'Bill's Hill' after the Senior Project Engineer for that area, Billy Tran.

In early September, local residents and members of the Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek got together with staff from the Tulla Sydney Alliance and their families, to establish a copse running along beside the road at the foot of the hill.

Local Wurundjeri elder, Colin Hunter welcomed us to Country, and gave us each a gum leaf as a passport and to remind us to take responsibility for the earth. Then with the help of pre-dug holes, we quickly planted over 700

plants – a mixture of *lomandra* and *dianella*, shrubs such as wattles, and some red gums and *casuarina*. Then we looked around for more to plant!

After not really working very hard, we were treated to a sumptuous lunch, which beautifully rounded off a great morning.

We look forward to seeing the results of this shared effort. Thank you Tulla Sydney Alliance!



Colin Hunter, Wurundjeri elder, and Kaye Oddie of FoMPC planting the first Red Gums



Chris, Jessie and daughter Samantha. (Chris is Tulla Sydney Alliance's Environmental Manager)



Julie and little Edie give a dianella a new home

In this issue:

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Congratulations Anna!!

Our very own 'Frog Listener' – Anna Lanigan – has received a Meritorious Award in the Spirit of Moonee Valley Community Awards.

Anna was nominated not only for her dedication to frogs – (which is enormous!) and her knowledge of frogs (which is huge!) but also for her enthusiasm for getting others involved; for her long-term involvement in community activities especially along the Creek (which is tremendous!) and her tenacious advocacy for her amphibious friends (which is great!)...

GO ANNA!!



Anna - frog listening!

(Pic: Leader Newspapers)

Moonee Valley Community Grant for FoMPC

Moonee Valley City Council have awarded the Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek a Community Grant to improve the habitat on a finger of land bounded by a meander of the Creek, between Boeing Reserve and Strathnaver Reserve. (The nearest street is Strathnaver Avenue, Strathmore Heights). The picture below shows the site, with the MVCC and Moreland boundary to the left, running along the Creek.

The plan is to establish an area of mid-storey shrubs to create a habitat for the little birds such as wrens, scrubwrens and thornbills. These little birds live in the understorey of woodlands, where they are sheltered from predators and can find either food or refuge and nesting sites. Willy wagtails also like this type of undergrowth for their nests, (see Sightings for a picture of a Wagtail's nest in a wattle tree).

Moonee Valley will prepare the site and provide the plants and together with the FoMPC will hold a planting day in Autumn next year. So provisionally, mark your diary for Saturday 25 May 2013. More details will be provided in the next edition of *Ponderings*, everyone is welcome, and lunch will be provided.

So do come along and help to create something special along the Creek.



Aerial view of the site



Strath-Oak Planters: from 'eye-sore' to "I saw...!"

The Strath-Oak Planters is a group of folk who saw an area that had been ignored as just the bank above a concrete channel, and took on that strip of weed-infested slopes and transformed it into a bushy boundary to the Creek.

The instigator of the Planters was Nina Eason, who, in 2003, approached Steph at MPCCC for help to establish a Friends group for the Creek between Bass Street and Margaret Street, Oak Park; and next to Brosnan Crescent Strathmore. With the help of enthusiastic local residents and the Strathmore and Oak Park Cub Scouts, the group gradually took on the kikuyu smothering the bank, and worked south, planting shrubs, trees and other natives. Now that strip has become a corridor of green, especially welcomed by the little birds that need this type of vegetation for their habitat.



Despite repeated efforts, planting on this strip, on the Strathmore side, has not been successful as these pictures from 2007, and this year, show. It faces north, the soil gets baked and water can't penetrate.

Looking both ways (north and south) along the Creek in September 2003



And the same views in October 2012



The view across the Creek from Nina's house in 1998 and 2012.

Nina's Story

We have been living here in this house in Brosnan Crescent, (that runs along the Moonee Ponds Creek in Strathmore) for 18 years. The neighbour tells me that about 25 years ago, the cyclone fence on the side of the creek was removed. It was an eyesore apparently. Around 1996, the council decided to do planting along the road, but the plants really struggled. There was only one area that survived and thrived and that was across the road from George who lived three doors away from us. He would drag out his hose and use his own water to water the plants. We call this George's garden. Old George sadly passed away about five years ago. He had lived in this street for over 50 years.

I then got in touch with the Moonee Valley Council, which arranged for a few more plants to be planted, but I lost interest – it was all too hard. The council took too long to get organised back then when it came to creek plantings. I later came across Stephanie and the crew at MPCCC and we started planting across the creek, on the Moreland side, and filling the gaps in the areas that MVCC had previously arranged. Bob Steadman used to come and water the plants using a pump and the water from the creek. I used to sometimes get out with my two boys and the neighbourhood kids in summer to give the plants a drink with buckets. We also did a few plantings with Strathmore North Primary School and Strathmore and Oak Park Cub Scouts and Guides.

The soil along Brosnan Crescent was terrible. MPCCC even had the soil tested as the plants struggled there, more than in any other area along the creek. We have never had a problem with the plantings on the Moreland side as the embankment is beside the oval, so when Moreland had the sprinklers on for the oval grass, the plant received the runoff.

The changes across the road from our house have been amazing. It feels like we are in the country with all the trees; and in fact, when we renovated our home, we made sure our living area looked out at the creek. In the old days, the creek was an eyesore to residents. As a child, my parent's house backed the Creek and the only rooms that looked out to the creek were the laundry and third bedroom!

I have lived along this creek for over 30 years now. Look out if anyone calls it a drain. It's a creek and I love it!

Onion Grass' amazing trick

I came across this article in an old edition of *Ponderings*, and thought it was so interesting it was worth including again. So here, with Judy's kind permission, it is.

contractile roots by Judy Allen



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

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 below the original soil level.

Plants that have contractile roots are mostly those with bulbs and corms, such as lilies, daffodils, freesias and crocus. That Dame Edna 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.

What's been happening along the Creek

Hume Greening Program 2012:

A Planting Success by Cassandra Borg

2012 will be remembered for another tremendous planting season!

The Hume Greening Program has been running since 1996 and has involved thousands of people who have planted well over 100,000 trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses across the municipality.

The program engages schools, environmental groups, multicultural groups and members of the community in planting projects on Council-owned public land in Hume. It encourages community members to become active in the long-term care and improvement of their local environment through activities such as planting of trees and shrubs, weeding, waterway and wildlife studies.

This year the Greening Program kicked off in May with a well-attended planting day at The Tarnuk in Westmeadows with the Friends of Upper Moonee Ponds Creek, and they and the Friends of Sacred Kingfisher made the best of the year's favourable conditions. Over five planting days the Friends replaced 2,540 indigenous plants along Moonee Ponds Creek, helping to transform the environment to one beneficial to both the community and the numerous native mammals, birds and reptiles that call the creek home.

Hume City Council would like to send a big thank you to all the Friends Groups and volunteers that have made the Greening Program a success yet again in 2012.

For more details, visit

www.hume.vic.gov.au/Waste_Environment/Environment/Get_Involved/Community_Tree_Planting or contact Council's Greening Officer on 9205 2200.



Combined Melbourne Water, Moreland and Moonee Valley activities, by Michelle Gooding

Melbourne Water is putting together a capital works project for revegetation with assistance from Moreland and Moonee Valley City Councils. The project is located along both east and west banks of the Moonee Ponds Creek between the 5 Mile Creek Confluence and Eric St, Essendon. It will focus on the removal of woody weeds and noxious climbers and planting of indigenous shrubs and trees. The project will be undertaken over the next three years and in future there is scope for a continuation of the works a little further south where the creek corridor narrows and access is significantly more difficult.

Further information about this project will be provided to residents in the immediate vicinity of the project via Melbourne Water and to the broader community through future *Ponderings*.

Five Mile Creek Confluence, left bank Moreland, right bank Moonee Valley and revegetation in the foreground is Moonee Valley with Melbourne Water grant funding.



Moreland City Council update by Lori Arthur



Council officers are currently scoping a creek enhancement project extending from the ford at JP Fawkner Reserve to Margaret Street in Oak Park for implementation in 2013. It is anticipated works will include woody weed control, revegetation to extend and link existing vegetation and landscape enhancement works at the creek access areas at the end of Margaret and John Streets. There will be opportunities for involvement of the Friends of Moonee Ponds Creek and local residents as part of these works.

With the assistance of Sustainable Gardening Australia (SGA), Council has recently developed a *Sustainable Gardening in Moreland* booklet aimed at encouraging residents to garden with consideration for the local environment. The booklet covers topics such as garden design, organic soil improvement, habitat gardening and sustainable plant selection, including encouraging the use of indigenous plants and avoiding garden escapes. A copy of the booklet is available on Council's website www.moreland.vic.gov.au. Limited hard copies of the booklet are available by contacting Council's Operations Centre on 8311 4300.

Also programmed for the 2012-13 financial year is an open space planning activity for the Gowanbrae area, particularly looking at path networks, land use and capabilities and opportunities for landscape improvement. This will be undertaken in consultation with the Gowanbrae Residents Group, local residents and other interested stakeholders.

Gift of *Acacia implexa*

Judy Allen, who was a founder member of the FO Strathnaver Grasslands, now works with the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, Women's Prison (among many other things!). They grew 2,000 healthy *Acacia implexa*, using seed collected from Moonee Ponds Creek, for a project that was subsequently cancelled. As a consequence they had all those seedlings ready to be planted, but nowhere for them to go! Judy kindly offered them to the FoMPC to distribute for planting along the Creek.

Some have gone to the councils, some have gone to rejuvenate the lower reaches of the Creek. All have been most welcomed and we thank the women who cared for the seedlings so well. We were very happy to have been able to give the plants a new home. It would have been terrible if they had gone to waste!

Sightings

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

Here are two encouraging springtime sightings from along the Creek – one from Kaye Oddie at the southern end and one I saw at the Strath-Oak Planters' site

Popular P20!

Black swan (white collar, number P20) is back along the Moonee Ponds Creek with her mate (with no collar) and their five cygnets providing enjoyment to passers-by on the Capital City Trail.

P20 was originally tagged on Albert Park Lake and is about six years old. She is part of the ongoing project of zoologist Dr. Raoul Mulder, University of Melbourne, which is tracking the swans' movements around the waterways as well as their health and well-being. To report sightings of any collared black swans or for more information about the project, go to www.myswan.org.au.



Willy Wagtail chicks in their tiny nest bound together with spider's web. The nest is only 8 or 9 cm across; it is amazing that two fat little chicks can squeeze in there!



My Creek by Tony Smith



Taken at a recent Nursery Bend planting, this picture encapsulates my hopes for

the future of Moonee Ponds Creek.

As it has been through my life, our Creek should continue to be a place for the young and young at heart to explore, play and reconnect with an inescapably urbanised sampling of natural systems.

The Moonee Ponds Creek is defined by intensive urbanisation, though the upper reaches of its main branch retains "green wedge" protection with hints of the character that reached into the Pascoe Vale and Strathmore of my childhood.

My childhood home included a vacant block next door with an earthen cliff that was further eroded whenever the Creek flooded and beyond our back fence there was, to me, a vast paddock bounded on three sides by the meandering creek, left vacant as the planned route for a freeway that would eventually be forced a block north to demolish our little brick house and all the others in our short street.

I was the youngest of the second intake at Strathmore High School where the creek at lunchtime, despite the boxthorn, was such an attraction that we celebrated when the school gained access to the extra meanders on the other side of the railway line where there were stepping stones to a steep track up to Bell Street.

We children knew no better than to welcome the "progress" of the freeway and its spectacular flyover from Bell Street, which, in one swoop, obliterated many traces of the pleasures of childhood and adolescence. Fortunately there were wiser heads with environmental concerns from the municipality of Broadmeadows (which then covered Strathmore) who began objecting to the northwards march of

creek concreting beyond the freeway works, a cause then taken up by Strathmore Progress Association, forcing a halt behind Strathmore North Primary School, though not to the straightening and sculpting to provide "efficient" flow even with the flood mitigation of the Jacana retarding basin.

Moonee Ponds Creek is more than the waterway. We are concerned as much with the open space corridor, the shared use trail, the tributaries and precious pockets of remnant vegetation, the beauty, natural complexity and critically endangered status of Victoria's volcanic plains grasslands which once extended from around the Merri Creek to South Australia. And it is also the great, though never finished progress with water quality that, along with those planning improvements that make it possible, remains another of those good news stories that nobody hurries to tell.

Looking at old maps makes it clear that even the Moonee Ponds Creek, free from the constraint of urban structures, wandered around its flood plain on a timetable beyond human ken. We cannot go back to some imagined previous natural state, although we can, and should, do all we can to ensure revegetation is locally indigenous. What really matters to me, and I hope to others, is that we continue to enhance the creek corridor so that it meets our human needs for re-creation: quiet, even temporarily private, places but with good access; naturalistic treatments, especially as a post-concrete phase develops; storylines from the Wurundjeri to the sometimes confronting places where our Creek more than touches every mode of modern transport, from coal barges to the Victorian Space Science Education Centre.

However modest alongside other waterways, the Moonee Ponds Creek carves an unparalleled slice through this most modern and liveable city of Melbourne, from green wedge farmland to a thriving port. We can and should continue to protect, plant, maintain, plan and build, with strong reference to natural and social history, a welcoming space where people of the future can gain inspiration, comfort or solace. Or kick a footy...

Read this article in full on the MPCCC website (MPCCC.org)

Bat Count

Many thanks to those who made it to the bat counts in August and September. For the August count, it stayed dry until just after the count and we had just enough people to have two people at every counting position, which is great because it means we can get averages between the counters, making our estimates much more reliable!! And so between us we counted just under 6,000 bats, which is about typical for this time of year. The numbers should start to pick up again over the next month or two.

A film crew from Scope (Channel 10, 8 – 14 year olds' science show) joined us at the September count, to highlight the count and bats etc, and this will be aired on October 29 at 4pm – part of the Halloween themed show.

The September count had a great turn out of counters and we counted just over 9,000 bats. This is a little higher than usual – and it probably reflects the arrival of a few bats from up north to Melbourne.

Our next counts are on Wednesday 28th November, with a meeting time of 7:45 pm; and the last count for the year: 19th December at 8.15pm.

We will be meeting in the usual meeting spot at the Car park for the Yarra Bend Park Golf Course (Melways 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

