

Friends of Braeside Park – Annual Report – 2007-8

In each of the past nineteen years the Friends group, together with Park Rangers and others have helped transform paddocks and scrub into beautiful parklands . Here is a summary of our work in 2007-8.

Plant Propagation and Planting. The propagation group has produced about 13,000 indigenous plants for the Park. Members collect seed and cuttings then use them to produce the healthy plants that the Friends and community groups have put into the Park. Drought and signs of global warming have continued to affect our plans by reducing the period when the ground is damp enough for success. We are often amazed by the resilience of last year's plantings. Most are coping well and some that seemed killed by the long summer have sent up new shoots with winter rains.

The important nursery area continues to improve. We now have three large tanks collecting water from shed roofs. These have been variously funded, one by Parks Victoria, one from a Federal Smart Water Fund grant and one paid for by the Friends. This, together with modifications to the plant watering system, should make us self sufficient in water. We have helped rangers with Community plantings and sometimes with visits of school groups. Altogether we have added to the salinity reduction plantations, have helped reduce the Burgan monoculture in the heathland, increased vegetation round the car parks and along the Howard Road Trail and also in the Federation picnic area and continued restoration of our native grasslands.

Project Days. Up to six members meet each Wednesday morning to undertake varied tasks assisting rangers – planting, weeding, spreading mulch, removing tree guards for reuse as well as mowing, fencing and rabbit control. Often it is bush gardening in a delightful setting. We welcome regular or occasional additional members.

Bird Group. Led by Ian Parsons this group continues to monitor wetland birds each month providing valuable information on changes to Park populations. A similar activity each quarter is now done for bush bird populations. All records go to the Park and can help inform management about the ecological health of the area...

Newsletter. There have been six interesting newsletters edited by Val La May. This is important in helping members keep in touch with the Park management and with Friends' plans. The editor welcomes contributions and suggestions.

Community Garden Project. State government funds have been allotted for some trial Community Gardens including one in Braeside. A small group is interested in developing a display area in the Park of native plants suitable for the home garden and eventually to produce some of these plants for sale. Most of the necessary infrastructure is now in place. The group has been working with the Friends in practicing propagation and two members of the Friends Committee have been participating in their meetings.

Website. Our website (www.braesideparkfriends.org.au) is kept up to date by Ricardo Simao and is a valuable form of communication with Friends and the community. This is an on going cost but the number of hits to the site suggest it is a worthwhile expenditure.

Waterwatch. Two of the Friends regularly monitor water quality within the Park. They take test samples from three sites to note improvements and check on potentially harmful changes. Our wetlands receive their water mainly from street run off and can be quite polluted. This water flows through several stages in the Park wetlands which are designed to improve its quality before it enters Mordialloc Creek and the Bay. They also monitor salinity and ground water levels in several bores in the Park.

Showcase Displays. From time to time Val and Joe Christoph and Bev. Bancroft renew the display of wild life specimens in show cases in the Visitors Centre, These also have to be inspected and treated at regular intervals Occasionally we take out specimens for public showing and they always arouse great interest. We look forward to adding to these displays

Grants We have very limited funds from membership, donations and the occasional sale of surplus plants so we rely on grants. Seeking these is a very time consuming task mostly done by our treasurer Bev. Bancroft. The City of Kingston has helped by providing \$1,250 for a new heatbed in one of our plant igloos, Melbourne Water gave us \$330.00 towards our newsletter which we used to pay for the special insert of photographs. We received \$11,434 in a Federal Smart Water Grant to cover the installation of a water tank and associated plumbing and electrical work. Parks Victoria has given us another grant of \$6000 for work replacing Borgan in the heathlands and a further grant to extend the salinity reduction plantings. . .

Relations with Park Staff. We see our role as assisting a dedicated ranger staff in caring for and improving Braeside Park. The addition of a fifth full time ranger this year was welcome. We have contributed 3698 hours of volunteer activity.

Friends Committee. While many of our activities have their own momentum, forward planning and evaluation of our work is necessary. The Committee of eight which does this has met nine times over the last year. We appreciate the attendance of Des Lucas, Ranger in Charge at most of these meetings. He helps us keep in touch with all that is going on in the Park. We welcome additional people and ideas about activities.

Membership About ninety individuals and family groups are members. We appreciate their commitment to the Park. However much of the work outlined in this report is done by a fairly small proportion of that group. We know most people lead busy lives but would urge a greater number to join in an occasional activity to see if it adds to their enjoyment of the Park.

Other Activities. Braeside Walkers continue their popular twice weekly morning gatherings. In March we held a very successful Astronomy Night with the help of the Astronomical Society of Victoria whose members set up telescopes for individual viewing after Perry Vlahos had given an introduction to the night sky. Norm Cornwell led a popular Spring Walk in the Heathland in September timed to view the wedding bush in full flower. We took a stall at the Sustainable Living Expo at Parkmore Shopping Centre where our printed material and the display of some of our mounted specimens of wild life aroused interest. An interesting trip on Westernport to view water birds was held in February. Each year Parks Victoria honours some outstanding volunteer contributors to the Park system. We nominated our multi skilled and hard working Bev. Bancroft who received a Kookaburra Award.

Some Other Plans. Friends who are skilled photographers have many beautiful photos of the Park. They have suggested that we put these on a screen in the Visitors Centre to give a rolling image. .

The celebration in 2009 of 20 years of the Park will be a special occasion. We hope to help the Park with this. Other ideas about talks and demonstrations, wild life monitoring, holiday activities for school groups etc. all depend on human and financial resources but would be very worth while – so much remains to be done – we welcome suggestions and offers of help.