FRIENDS OF BRAESIDE PARK
NEWSLETTER

October 2009, no. 5

BRAESIDE PARK

Parks VICTORIA

Melbourne Water

City of KINGSTON

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Annual General Meeting Report

Highlights from the Friends' Annual Report

We planted over 17, 000 plants this year, raised in our nursery. The watering system and heat beds in the nursery have been much improved. We garnered close to $17,000 in grants to continue burgan removal and work in the grasslands. Water quality monitoring has continued faithfully each month. Activities included several bird walks, a star-gazing night at The Briars, and a Westernport cruise.

Notes from our history, from Eric Mitchell's talk

Braeside Park is on Kulin land and their elders once camped in the southern end of our Park. Years ago a local Aboriginal visiting the Park with Eric informed him that our 'scar tree' was in the wrong place and had the wrong sort of scar to have been made by Kulin people. However, in the Wetland area is a genuine local lookout tree with scars from the foot-holes climbers used.

Our Friends Group was the second one formed in Melbourne and our logo (on the cover of the newsletter) was designed by Evelyn O'Neil, an early member.

The Visitor's Centre was meant to be a temporary building, to serve as a classroom. Our first tree plantings were on the western boundary and also in the southern wetlands. We also had grand visions for a $70,000 bird hide, which had to be scaled down to the current version. In the early days there were 9 Rangers in the Park; now we are lucky to have half that number.

The Park's original emblem was a Pelican and we had a giant Pelican statue, which was moved later to another park in the western suburbs.

Park Report Highlights

The 'window' for plantings has shrunk from 8 months to the current 5 months, due to lack of rain. The dry conditions are enabling rabbits to breed year round, boosting their Park population. The Community Garden is progressing rapidly and a giant chessboard is now on the Howard Road trail, as part of stage 2 of the garden.

Eric Mitchell and Norm Cornwell at the AGM. *Photo: VL*

Watch for Bird of the Month

A new feature is appearing in the Visitors' Centre this year. Ian Parsons has been producing information sheets on a 'Bird of the Month', with a colour photo and notes on the bird's behaviour, distribution, etc. These sheets are displayed on the Friends' notice board near the western door to the Centre. September's bird was the Crested Pigeon and October's is a common Park bird, but hard to spot—check it out in the Visitors' Centre.

New format for the Newsletter

You may have noticed that the August Friends Newsletter was a new stapled A4 format. We are now using a new copier at the office of Federal MP for Isaacs, Mark Dreyfus, rather than at Braeside Park. The ancient photocopier at the Park had become unreliable. However, as this issue goes to 'press' a new copier has finally arrived at the Park. The new copier does not handle large A3 sheets, so the newsletter will continue as stapled A4.

Community Garden Open Day

Come and see the substantial progress in the Garden. Enjoy tours and photographic displays. The school plant areas should be in full bloom. Morning tea provided.

Sunday 18th October
Community Nursery south of Park Office
10am to noon

Plantings this year

Community planting days and Wednesday Project Group have put in close to 10,000 plants in the Park since May this year. Areas vegetated were the western picnic area, around the Visitors' Centre, some car parks and the Salinity area.

Thanks To The Helpers
Those who helped produce the newsletter:

Elsie Anderson
Bev Bancroft
Ian Parsons
Park Rangers

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Friends of Braeside Park

ACTIVITIES CALENDAR

Activity	Time/Day	**Oct**	**Nov**	**Dec**
Committee Meeting	4th **Tuesday**, 1.00pm at the Visitor Centre	27 Note change	24	No meeting
Community Projects Weekday	9:00 - 12:00 noon Wednesday at the Park Office	7 14 21 28	4 11 18 25	2 9 16 23 30
Plant Propagation Nursery Facility	10:00 - 12:00 noon 1st Sat & Mon 3rd Wed & Sun	3 5 18 21	2 7 15 18	5 7 16 20
Seed & Cutting Collection Meet at Robin Car park	10:00 - 12:00 noon The Fri. before the 1st Sat. of the month	2	6	4
Water Quality Monitoring Meet at the Park Office	9:00 - 12:00 noon 3rd Tues	20	17	15
Bird Group	9.00am at the Dragonfly Display, Karkarook Park Mel. 78, D7	**Bird Walk Karkarook Park Sun. 11th Oct. BYO a.m. tea**		
Special Activities		**Community Garden Open Day Sun. 18th Oct. 10am to noon Morning tea Follow signs to the Nursery**		

Buck the ferret

Since our rabbit population has boomed, any available control measure will help make a dent in the pest's numbers. Hence, a local ferreter has a licence to use his ferret to hunt rabbits in the Park.

Our 'resident' photographer, John Chapman, happened upon 'Buck' and his owner in the southern section of the Park on the 8th of August. The portrait to the left is the result of this encounter.

HELPING BRAESIDE TREES DEAL WITH SALT

By Elsie Anderson

What is the problem?
There is a salty water table below parts of the Park. When it rains fresh water may soak down and add to this salty layer, bringing it closer to the surface and to the roots of trees, causing gradual dieback. We think this is one of the main reasons for the large dead trees (mainly River Red Gums) in the southern part of the Park.

It was probably the removal of trees when the Park was farmland that originally caused the dieback in the remnant trees. The dead trees still standing are quite large, so growing conditions were better before clearing.

We have 6 bores in the Park, in which Friends and Rangers monitor water levels and salinity, providing useful information for management. Recent monitoring has shown no problems—water levels are so low due to drought that they do not show up in the bores, which go down 3 metres.

What can be done to combat future dieback?
By planting more trees, shrubs and grasses we ensure the plants use up rain water before it raises the water table with its salty layer. You may have helped plant and will likely have noticed the plantings as you wander through the Park. Our new trees may eventually tap into the salty layer. If this dose of salt occurs only occasionally the trees may adapt.

Another tactic used in some places is to train plants using slightly salty water during propagation. This practise would need careful monitoring and separation of plants, as only some would need to be treated. The extra work involved means this is not a preferred option for our nursery.

An even more labour-intensive solution would be to graft our River Red Gums onto Tasmanian Blue Gum stock. The Blue Gums have deep tap roots that are more salt tolerant. Again, we are not yet considering this option.

River Red Gums, living and dead, in the Park's south. *Photo: VL*

Another option Rangers have considered for the really bad areas of dieback is to create ephemeral wetlands to hold water after rain and to plant these areas with sedges, rushes and reeds which soak up water quickly. We could edge the wetlands with trees. This option would be costly since it requires machinery to create the wetlands. Limited resources mean that this option isn't being planned for now.

Our Arthritis Plant

From the editor

You never know what you'll learn when you explore our Heathland with Marj and Bill from the nursery. On the monthly seed and cutting session on the 4th of September, Marj pointed out the many echidna diggings near the Robin car park and in the Heathland, noting that an echidna's hole has a pointy bottom unlike shallow rabbit diggings. Some of the holes in wet Heathland sand were so fresh you could have made a plaster cast of an echidna's nose from them.

At one corner of the track, Marj and Bill noticed some Swamp Pennywort (*Centella cordifolia)*, a non-descript creeper somewhat resembling Kidney Weed. They said that Centella is related to the 'Arthritis Plant'. Having never heard of Centella before, I did some research in my plant books and on the internet.

According to Wikipedia the true Arthritis Plant is *Centella asiatica*, which occurs from northern Australia through PNG to Asia. This plant, known by a variety of names such as Gotu Kola and Asian Pennywort, is widely grown in Asia and used for food and to treat arthritis. It seems that our Centella is also used to treat arthritis, according to *Indigenous Plants of the Sandbelt*; but a search failed to find any recorded Aboriginal uses of this plant.

Our plant nursery has propagated Swamp Pennywort, as it is easily grown and is a useful ground cover for damp areas. The photo shows a nursery specimen, with its tiny flower head. What is needed is some Australian research on this plant's potential culinary and medicinal uses. Who knows, our Arthritis Plant could some day prove as valuable as its Asian cousin.

The Steel Blue Sawfly

By Ranger Glen Oliphant

This time of year on the eucalypts you will find black 'caterpillars'. These are not caterpillars but the larvae of wasps. The larvae clump together and communicate with each other by tapping their tails. The difference between caterpillar larvae and wasp larvae is wasps have 3 pairs of true legs and up to 8 pairs of prolegs. Caterpillars usually have only five pairs of prolegs.

Their common name of "Spitfires" comes from a defensive habit that these larvae have of exuding a nasty brown fluid. They don't actually spit but rather dribble the unpalatable fluid. The term "sawfly" refers to the ovipositor of the female wasp. This saw-like instrument is used to lay her eggs. The larvae pupate in leaf litter and the pupal duration can be up to two years

A Steel Blue Sawfly. *Photo: © Australian Museum*

The larvae can often be seen in large numbers defoliating eucalypts. An interesting fact about sawfly larvae is that males are rare and the females are able to produce fertile eggs without mating. This is common to many other wasps, bees and ants. Egg-laying females avoid laying in the shade and lay their eggs on the westerly side of the tree. The larvae will grow slowly if in the shade and generally do not survive. The adults will live for between 7 and 9 days.

The most common local defoliating species are

- Steel-blue Sawfly *(Perga dorsalis*),
- Large Green Sawfly *(Perga affinis)*
- Eucalyptus Sawfly *(Perga Kirby*) and
- Small Brown Sawfly (*Pseudoperga lewisii*)

References

Defoliating Sawflies Fact sheet No 8 (Rev. Dec. 1992), by Charlma Phillips, Principal Forest Health Scientist Govt of South Australia. Website: www.pir.sa.gov.au

Australian Museum website: www.australianmuseum.net.au/Sawflies-ants-bees-and-wasps

Wednesday Project Group: doing the work of wallabies

By Elsie Anderson

Behind a rabbit-proof fence, well away from cattle, Braeside Park has a wonderful remnant of native grasses. These grasses have deep roots, adapted to our dry summers, and were once important food for wallabies and kangaroos.

The Wednesday Project Group helped build the fence and have nurtured the grassland, assisted by grants from the Dandenong Catchment Authority. We mow round the edge to reduce weed seed, remove weeds and add to the plants with some from our nursery. The result is a dense growth of Kangaroo and other grasses tall enough to ripple in the breeze. In spring the area is dotted with wildflowers.

However, grasses need light grazing to maintain their vigour. Recently some of the Wednesday Group 'grazed' the spent seed-heads with shears. Ranger Ernie calls it 'de-thatching'. Thick new growth will follow providing shelter for insects, reptiles and food for birds. The grassland is an ecological heritage, disappearing in many parts of Melbourne.

On other Wednesdays our group did weeding and planting in some of the Park's car parks—only interrupted by morning tea and Stephanie's ever-varied muffins. Why don't you join us sometime?

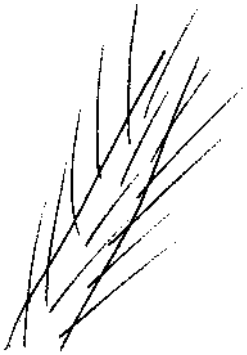
Wednesday Project Group fencing the Grasslands, December 2007. *Photo: VL*

Nursery News—microscopic identification

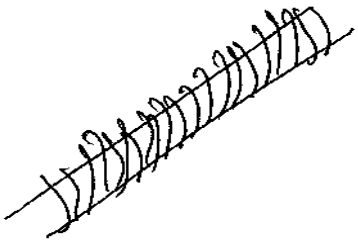
Text and drawings by Marj Seaton

Stock: The hardening off areas and shadehouse are relatively bare, but we have started germinating seed for next year's supply so the heat beds are beginning to fill up.

Microscope study: Brian brought his microscope in after we wondered about the nature of the *Austrostipa* that we grow. Whereas many of the other local remnant areas in our region feature *Austrostipa mollis*, ours is *A. semibarbata* and we weren't able to tell the difference. With the microscope though, it's quite clear, and now that we know, we'll be able to identify the two with a hand lens.



Austrostipa semibarbata - hairs straight



Austrostipa mollis – hairs spiralling

Seed collecting: As usual we met at Car park 6 on the first Friday. We were surprised at the number of echidna holes dug in the grass on the western side. The big round holes, unlike the elongated bunny scrapings, are a pointer to spring each year. The Wedding Bush in the Heathland is in flower as well as Bossiaea. No Aotus then - this tends to follow the Bossiaea by a few weeks; seeds of these will be a while.

Whilst out and about, we saw several Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos, one pair possibly feeding a young one [see ed's note at end], and a kookaburra.

In the nursery, we have collected *Allocasuarina paludosa* seeds from plants that were planted there when the nursery was first established. Not many of these have been grown in the Park previously but we hope this will change in the future.

Schools' gardens: Both Killester and Mentone have planted up their patches and these are looking very attractive. *Acacia brownii* features in both gardens and will be a valuable source of seed for us in the future. Several *Indigofera australis* are flowering, forming a picturesque grouping and *Hibbertia prostrata*, with their bright yellow flowers, line the edges of the beds.

Volunteers welcome: We encourage anyone who has an occasional hour to spare and who would like to learn a bit more about the vegetation in the Park to join us at one of our sessions in the nursery. We supply most of the Park's needs but our helper numbers are dwindling and we'd love some new blood. Please consider volunteering. Our hours are shown in the calendar on page three in this newsletter. It's a good time for a natter too.

[Editor's note on the Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoo feeding: it is likely the bird being fed was a female, performing part of its courtship ritual. As the cockatoos nest in spring in SE Australia, young birds would most likely only occur later in the year. The birds were near a large hollow tree, but have not been there recently. Source: *Handbook of Australian New Zealand & Antarctic Birds*, v.4, p. 72.]

Park notes

Interesting sightings
Recently a White-bellied Sea Eagle and a Wedge-tailed Eagle made an appearance in the Park. Some warm-weather migrants are starting to appear, including White-winged Triller, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike and Dusky Woodswallow.

History grant
There is potential for assistance in writing a history of Braeside Park, including interviews of early participants in our development. Information will be sought on the availability of a grant to assist in producing a history.

Help is at hand for injured wildlife: call **AWARE** (Patterson Lakes Branch) on **0412 433 727**