

# FRIENDS OF BRAESIDE PARK NEWSLETTER

Dec 2009, no. 6



**BRAESIDE PARK**

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The opinions expressed in this  
newsletter are the authors' and  
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## Our healthy waterways

*From a report of the Streamwatch team*

Braeside Park's waterways are mostly in good health and some are in excellent health. How do we know this? From the insects, that's how.

November's survey of our waterways by the Streamwatch team found high insect diversity in the water at Bent Bridge (on the Red Gum Track). Notable were the numbers of dragonfly larvae (also called dragonfly nymphs). These larvae are fierce predators and need large numbers of insects, other invertebrates, and even small vertebrates such as fish or tadpoles, to eat. Only clean water supports such a variety of aquatic life; hence this finding points to good water quality in the Bent Bridge region. In addition, the team found the tiny tadpoles of Common Froglets—another pointer to good water.



Dragonfly Larva Photo: © Australian Museum, M. Bulbert

In the main wetlands, insect diversity was lower but still healthy. Phosphate levels were slightly elevated; this nutrient was probably washed in after the early November rains.

Thanks to the vigilance of the Streamwatch team, our waterways will hopefully continue to be healthy enough to ultimately support the birds that feed on all the creatures that live in the water. All interested members invited to participate; the Streamwatch team meets at the Park Office on the 3rd Tuesday of the month at 9.00am and finishes at noon.



Happy holidays to all our members and to Braeside Park staff. A special thanks to everyone who contributed articles and photos to the Newsletter. The next Newsletter will be in late January.

### Satisfying Spring cleaning in the Compound

*By Elsie Anderson*

Variety is the name of the game for Ernie's A Team (also known as the Wednesday Project Group).

After the winter/spring plantings in the Park there was a jumble of many hundreds of plant boxes, plant stands, used tubes, plant guards, frames and old timber, etc. They were all piled into an old hay shed in the Rangers' work compound. They spilled out and provided shelter for vermin and snakes. 'Can you tidy it up?' asked Ranger Ernie.

The Wednesday Group tackled the mountain. They carted broken tubes and boxes to the dumpster. They swept the area and took yet more rubbish to the dumpster. Then boxes, stands and tubes were neatly stacked ready for the 2010 planting season.

After a couple of hours six hot, dusty people were able to gaze at everything now fitting into a much smaller space. Anyone who has tidied cupboards would know the feeling of satisfaction that comes after such an effort. Another useful job done by the A Team.

Come along any Wednesday morning and join in the fun.

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	Dec	Jan	Feb
Committee Meeting	4th <b>Monday</b> , 1.00pm at the Visitor Centre	No meeting	18th note change	22nd
Community Projects Weekday	9:00 - 12:00 noon Wednesday at the Park Office	2 9 16 23 30	R E L A X	3 10 17 24
Plant Propagation Nursery Facility	10:00 - 12:00 noon 1st Sat & Mon 3rd Wed & Sun	5 7 16 20	2 4 17 20	1 6 17 21
Seed & Cutting Collection Meet at Robin Car park	10:00 - 12:00 noon The Fri. before the 1st Sat. of the month	4	1	31 Jan
Water Quality Monitoring Meet at the Park Office	9:00 - 12:00 noon 3rd Tues	15	19	16
Special Activities				

## Bird sightings and news

### Tawny Frogmouth nesting season

There were at least ten pairs of nesting Tawny Frogmouths in the Park this year. Most pairs have already fledged their young, but two pairs are still apparently sitting on eggs. These late breeders are the pair near the Park Office and near the playground (photo on page 4). Since frogmouths eat mainly large nocturnal insects and occasionally small vertebrates such as house mice, they are an important part of our ecosystem.

### Goshawk nesting attempt

A Brown Goshawk was on a nest in the Heathland, but it abandoned this nest in early November.

### Warm weather sightings

Mid November bird sightings in Braeside Park include Little Corellas, a Sacred Kingfisher in the Heathland, and White-winged Trillers (two males and one female) also in the Heathland. The Sacred Kingfisher is reported to be nesting in the Heathland.



Sacred Kingfisher Photo: J. Chapman

## The Enchanting Spring Walk

By Norm Cornwell

The word enchanting has several good meanings to it; three such meanings are delight, charm, and to cast a spell on, in a good way. It is hoped that you got the combination of all three during the Spring Walk. Well, it's all over for another year, the Spring Walk I mean.

By the time you receive this newsletter, Christmas and New Year are fast approaching. Where has the year gone?

The Spring Walk is in the Heathland area in Braeside Park—a restricted locality. There are several species of animal and plant life, many not found outside this area, including a mammal the Echidna. A plant, *Kunzea ericifolia* (Burgan), which is natural to the area, can take over and is controlled by management.



Tawny Frogmouth near Visitors' Centre on large nest.

### Frogmouths, Waterfalls and Witchetty Grubs

Those of us who were on last year's walk were delighted to see Tawny Frogmouths perching on branches near the Visitors' Centre. Had it not been for Ian Parsons pointing them out to us, we would not have seen them as they are so well camouflaged. It was a greater delight to see the same species virtually in the same place as they were last year [maybe they were statues!]. The birds were pointed out to newcomers on our walk.

On our way to the Heathland we crossed over a bridge where we could see a small waterfall running, because of the rains that we recently had. What a difference it made to the area—these 2-3 metre falls. It prompted me to find out where the highest falls could be found in the world. Venezuela is where they are located. The Angel Falls have a drop just 21 metres short of a kilometre, with the longest single drop being 817 metres.

Throughout the bush several species of wattles are to be found. One such species observed was *Acacia mearnsii* (Black Wattle). Unlike the other wattles found here this one retains its fernlike foliage, giving the tree a softer look. Most wattles we know of have shades of yellow blooms, but the large clusters of creamy scented blossoms on this species wafted their

perfume over the area, giving you an 'enchanted' feeling. The specific name honours Dr. Edgar A. Mearns (1856-1916) who spent most of his life as a doctor in the US Army. This Australian plant was first named from material that was thought to be a native of South Africa.

Whilst there are several healthy wattles in the Park there are several that have died. These make good 'lookout towers' for birds to spot predators or their prey from. Most of these trees have died due to borer attack which eventually ringbarks the tree. Fortunately they seed readily and are fast growing.

The grubs that attack these trees are the larvae of the Wattle Longicorn Beetle. We sometimes erroneously call them Witchetty Grubs. The true Witchetty Grub is found in *Acacia kempeana* (Witchetty Bush) and *Acacia ligulata* (Umbrella Bush). The name witchetty is probably derived from the Aboriginal spelling 'witjuti' which means acacia. 'Mako' is the Aboriginal word for grub. These grubs are a source of food for the indigenous people. If eaten raw, they have a texture of butter (yuk!) and if roasted, they taste like pork cracknel (yum!). Remove the heads prior to eating.



Norm explaining the Park to his grandsons. Photo: VL

### Wildflowers and Red Gums

Along the track we were greeted with bright yellow flowers of *Hibbertia fasciculata* (Bundled Guinea Flower) sporadically growing on the side of the tracks. I call these plants 'ground sunshine' as they light up the sombre surroundings. They are very difficult to grow and they need areas like our Heathland to survive. *Hibbertia* was named in honour of George Hibbert (1757-1837) who was involved in many activities including a patron of Botany.

*Eucalyptus camaldulensis* (River Red Gum) is widespread in the Park, coming in various shapes and sizes. It is one of six species of eucalypt here and is found across mainland Australia, but strangely not in Tasmania. It is readily identified by observing the small flower buds which have pointed caps.

(Continued on page 5)

## The Enchanting Spring Walk, continued

*(Continued from page 4)*

As our walk was nearing its end, Elsie Anderson diverted us off the main track to look at some special Red Gums. What magnificent specimens they were; I would estimate one to be 200 years plus and the other 250 years plus. Some of the branches, particularly on the older tree, were larger than the trunks of other surrounding trees. Growing near each other, they would be a 'city' in themselves for food and shelter for wildlife.

The plant in particular we came to see was our floral emblem the Wedding Bush. It was at its best. The enchanting (that word again) old white scented blooms that had that addictive effect on you. They illuminated the areas they were growing in so well, you would have thought the area was lit up. Can you imagine what it must have been like in spring prior to European settlement? No wonder the plant was used in bridal bouquets in the early days.

As farming and development took over in many areas, these plants (along with many other heathland species) disappeared, never to return. Like many of the

heathland plants they are very difficult to grow under cultivation.

How fortunate we are to have this piece of undisturbed heathland in Braeside Park, enabling us to see what the areas were like prior to European settlement.



Part of the group among the Wedding Bush. *Photo: VL*

## Banding bantering-October results

*From the report by Malcolm Brown*

(A small group of bird-researchers meets in the Park's Heathland regularly to capture and band bush-birds. This is Malcolm's summary of their findings for October.)

A good day with twenty birds being caught made up of the following seven species:

**2 Eastern Yellow Robin**

**3 White-browed Scrub Wren**, 2 of which were re-traps

**3 Red-browed Finches**, one being a re-trap.

**4 Brown Thornbill** two being re-traps.

**5 Superb Fairy Wrens**, four being re-traps

**1 Noisy Miner**

**2 Red Wattlebirds**, (one a juvenile with sharp claws)

Interesting results considering that at the start of the year we were getting very small catches. It's good to see to see the Eastern Yellow Robins which were notably caught in the thicker vegetation.

Also good to see a remarkable minimum age of 6 years and 4 months for a Superb Fairy Wren.

An unusual re-trap was a Red-browed Finch that was over 3 years old. This is unique for this species. In general, Red-browed Finches are short lived and tend to move about a lot. I personally colour banded 43 Red-browed Finches at Rye and only two birds stayed at the site longer than 18 months despite food being offered each day.



Red-browed Finch in the Park. *Photo: VL*

## Nursery News—mapping the pipes

**Seed planting and collecting:** The Nursery is undertaking a trial of direct seeding of mixed grasses into tubes. Recent seed-collecting reaped *Bossia*, *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*, and *Acacia dealbata* seeds.

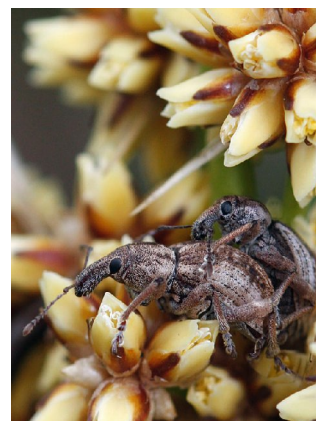
**Improvement projects:** Work is nearly completed on the new tables in the igloos and shadehouse. The plumbing upgrade for the hardening-off areas is well underway. Part of the hardening-off area will be covered with shadecloth to protect plants from the summer sun. Many thanks to staff and volunteers for all the hard work they are doing on these projects.

**Mapping the pipes:** Over the years a great deal of piping has been laid in the nursery area—for irrigation and connections from the rain-water tanks. An up-to-date plan of this plumbing maze is sorely needed. So another project is being worked at, that of completing the GPS mapping of these pipes.

**Schools' gardens:** The schools area will soon feature a decorative wall, which is currently under construction. The Killester and Mentone Girls Grammar students have also completed ingenious art displays—their 'year boards'. The plan is to create a new board each year and display the board on the wall of the shed.

### Visit of Mick Connolly

In October Nursery volunteers took Mick Connolly from *The Age* newspaper through the Heathland and described our work to him. Mick took some stunning photographs and kindly sent some to Marj Seaton. Mick is an award-winning photographer and film-maker who also loves the outdoors and met Marj while both were working at Greenlink and The Grange.



Weevils on *Lomandra* flowers.  
Photo © M. Connolly



Tiger Orchid in the Heathland.  
Photo © M. Connolly

*(Editor's note: best wishes to Marj Seaton for a speedy recovery from hand surgery.)*

## Park Report—Possum numbers down

*From Ranger reports*

### Staff news

With the early hot weather, Ranger Digger has already been involved in fire fighting at Point Nepean. The coming summer fire season will no doubt involve most of the Park staff. A Summer Ranger is scheduled to start in the Park in December.

### Possum numbers plummet

Surveys have revealed that possum numbers in Braeside Park have dropped dramatically, compared with previous years. This may have been caused by lack of rain resulting in poor nutrient value in the possums' plant food. Anecdotal evidence suggests that

many possums may have dispersed to surrounding well-watered suburban vegetation.

### Community Garden progress

The chessboard in the Federation Trail site only needs to be sealed and more mulching on the surrounds to be completed. An official opening is planned. A Garden Open Day is likely to occur in May 2010.

### Owl surveys

Two surveys for owls in the Park were held in November, but no owls were heard or seen.

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