

FRIENDS OF BRAESIDE PARK NEWSLETTER

November 2010, no. 6



BRAESIDE PARK

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The opinions expressed in this
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The Last Newsletter?

From the Editor

This will certainly be the last Friends of Braeside Park Newsletter produced by your current editor, as I am shifting to the country early next year.

It's an era of downsizing so the Committee has agreed to a contingency plan of a much-reduced publication from next year, mainly focussed on coming activities. Unless we find someone keen to continue this newsletter in something like its current format.

Sincere thanks to all who have contributed articles, photos, news, etc. to the Newsletter over the past five years. Also many thanks to those mainstays whose names have appeared, in the Helpers box below, for nearly every edition.

Producing this Newsletter has been an enjoyable learning experience for me; I'm glad I've been able to contribute to the Friends' activities in this way. Best wishes to all for a great Christmas and New Year.

Wednesdays with Ernie's 'A Team'

By Bev Bancroft

Our group has been very busy.

Grasslands Mowing and weeding continues. Another morning spent weeding only. The area is amazing with an increase in Chocolate Lilies, Pimelea etc.



Pimelea in the Nursery. *Photo: M. Seaton*

Fencing We have been out with the contractor and other volunteers to the Climate Positive planting area, helping erect new fencing.

Seed orchard A hard morning was spent mowing.

Climate Positive site We helped with the planting of over 2,000 trees south of Federation Drive.

Wednesday afternoon Work continues in the Community Garden area. If interested, please join us at 1.00 p.m. The hardening off area has been emptied of all plants & water turned off. Seed has been sown for

the 2011 plantings. Mentone Girls Grammar continue to maintain their area. They pricked out three boxes of Allocasuarina, did some Correa cuttings & consolidated other boxes of plants.

Extra help is always needed for a variety of jobs: meet at the Park Office, Wednesdays 9 am - 10.30 am morning tea (3 "C"s - Cuppa, Cake & Chat)

Friends' contributions to the Park

Friends have purchased a 28,000 litres rainwater tank which was delivered Friday 29th of October, installed that day and is now nearly full thanks to the heavy rains.

Friends have also purchased nine Nursery benches which have been delivered and will be installed shortly.

Apologies

Our Spring Bird Walk was scheduled for the 16th of October, but the day turned out most inclement with cold, rain and worst of all strong wind. Common sense prevailed and we cancelled the walk.

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	Nov	Dec	Jan
Committee Meeting	4th Monday, 1.00pm at the Visitor Centre	22	No Meeting	24
Community Projects Weekday 'Ernie's A Team'	9:00 - 12:00 noon Wednesday at the Park Office	3 10 17 24	1 8 15	R E L A X
Plant Propagation Nursery Facility	10:00 - 12:00 noon 1st Sat & Mon 3rd Sun	6 8 21	4 6 19	1 3 16
Seed & Cutting Collection Meet at Robin Car park	10:00 - 12:00 noon The Fri. before the 1st Sat. of the month	5	3	31 Dec
Water Quality Monitoring Meet at the Park Office	9:00 - 12:00 noon 3rd Tues	16	21	18
Community Projects Weekends	9:00 - 12:00 noon, follow the signs			
Special Activities		VNPA picnic Sun. 21 Nov. 9am—4.15pm Follow the signs		

Recent owl sightings in the Park

Ranger Glen and friends conducted an evening bird survey in Braeside Park on the 20th of October. Playing calls of Barn Owls and Boobook, the group heard a responding call from a Barn Owl near the southern half of the access track. Then they saw a Barn Owl flying toward the wetland.

As the group were leaving the Park, they were fortunate to spot a Boobook Owl. They also heard another owl call, but were unable to identify the owl. Who knows, it could have been a Powerful Owl; as these birds have been resident in the Melbourne area for the past several years. Our possum population provides the perfect feasting-ground for these predators.



Boobook Owl in a Bayside garden.
Photo: I. Parsons

Pipe dreams on the pathway, Spring Walk 26th September

By Norm Cornwell

For the past two years, on the commencement of our walks, we would see a pair of birds known as the Tawny Frogmouths huddled closely together appearing to be inseparable.

We wondered if we were going to see them for a third time. We did see one. Was this bird a remaining partner of the pair we saw previously, or had the pair 'flown the coop' [found somewhere else more suitable] and the bird we see now is a newcomer. This we will never know.



Norm and the group near the Heathland. Photo: VL

Rainbow lorikeets were quite numerous in flight, chattering cheerfully amongst themselves whilst 'on the wing'. Oh! If only I could flap my arms and fly like they can—one of many of my **pipe dreams**.

Whilst our aim was to come and see the Heathland flora, we often overlook the 'lower classes' of plants. One such plant is the **lichen**. The lichen is a rootless and leafless plant, consisting of a fungus and alga structure. There appears to be three forms of this unusual plant: fruticose (branchlike), foliose (leaflike) and crustose (crustlike). The one we saw in the Park was of the crustose variety, growing on the bark of a River Red Gum. This one [to me anyway] seems to be the most common. It can be found growing on a variety of objects and in various climates and conditions. Lichens are very colourful, ranging from greenish grey to deep russet tonings; they are often seen growing on rooftops, particularly on slate and cement tiles.

At last—this year has been the closest we have had to our normal winters for at least a decade or so, as the aquatic species seem totally rejuvenated especially **Tall Spike-rush** and **Water-ribbons**. The **Blackwood** and **Hedge Wattles** must have benefited by this winter as they were at their "bloomin' best".

We were now approaching a fenced off area of heathland that we were going to walk through. How fortunate we are to have someone to fence off this area of the Park, as it contains several species of plants not found elsewhere in the Park and it gives you

an idea of what the bush was like prior to European settlement.

I mentioned earlier the 'lower class' plant the lichen; I would like to mention another plant that has some interest about it also. We saw this 'little fella' on the sand track entrance to the Heathland. It was probably *Crassula decumbens* (**Rufous Stonecrop**) growing in the compacted sands of the path. It would take hundreds of these plants to cover a 30cm square area. They have a reddish hue about them (hence their common name Rufous). They would hardly be more than 2-3mm in size. Would you classify this plant in a micro-flora group?

The pathway to the **Wedding Bush** that we came to see, hopefully to be in full flower, had on each side **Bundled Guinea-flower**. This lovely little plant would have to be the yellowest of yellow flowers as it lit up the path like the lights do at night on an airport runway. But there was no big 'drumroll' to introduce the **Wedding Bush**. It had divorced us. This turned out to be a **pipe dream**. The plants were healthy but only in bud with one or two sprigs of flower. Had the normal winter delayed its bloom?



Wedding Bush, pipe dream version. Photo: VL

Our walk was very pleasant indeed as it mainly featured **Silky Tea Tree**, more **Bundled Guinea-flower** and the occasional **Blue Stars** in bloom.

Nearing the end of the walk we diverted off the track a little to see three magnificent specimens of **River Red Gums**. The oldest of the three would not have surprised me if it was up to 500 years old. It was as broad as it was high and what stories it could tell if it could talk.

In the past twenty years or so our discovery rate of inventions has increased greatly; years before this many inventions were only **pipe dreams**, but today are reality.

Do you think if we could make trees talk it would advance our knowledge even more—or is this just a **pipe dream** too?

Have a great Christmas and New Year.

Braeside Park Bird Group survey report, May—August 2010

From data compiled by Ian Parsons and the Bird Group

Early in the year the Bird Group reduced the frequency of its surveys of the Park's wetlands to one survey per month, rather than twice a month as was done previously. This reduction was due to the lack of birds in the wetland area and also the dwindling numbers of Group members fit enough to trek around the wetlands. The lack of surveyors is now a pity because bird numbers have increased in the last few months, thanks to the plentiful rain filling the wetlands. So high is the water currently, that gumboots are an essential accessory for negotiating the flooded track.

The table below summarises the findings for the four months. Highlights included an Australasian Bittern and 76 Straw-necked Ibises in May, and Whistling Kites in June and July. August was the least productive month, probably due to inclement weather; but it yielded 12 Black Ducks, 6 Purple Swamp Hens and 6 Eurasian Coots (which had been absent during most surveys in recent years). Since the surveyors were free to pick the date of their survey during their designated month, much of the variability of the results could be dependent on the conditions on the survey day.

	May	June	July	Aug
Total species seen	45	36	45	16
Total bird numbers	712	222	701	76
Species in highest number	Little Raven 78	Common Starling 80	Common Starling 134	E. Rosella 14

Banding bantering—October session

From the report by Malcolm Brown

Good results on the 9th of October, with thirteen birds caught and a new species for the banded list: Blacked-faced Cuckoo-Shrike.

Birds caught on the day:

- 4 Superb Fairy-wrens, 2 being re-traps, (one month ago and two years two months ago respectively)
- 3 White-plumed Honeyeaters
- 3 White-browed Scrubwrens, 2 being re-traps, (ten months and two years two months ago)
- 2 Red Wattlebirds
- 1 Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike

When you consider we have banded 389 Superb Fairy-wrens over the years of the project, it's amazing to think we still get new un-banded birds.

The Park is looking great with water and mosquitoes everywhere. There is a lot of bird activity in the Heathland.

The next banding session is on the 20th of November. It will be the last before Christmas.



The Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike caught on the day.
Photo: M. Brown

Our Wetlands—full of water at last

You can't have productive wetlands without water. Braeside Park's wetlands were a shrunken remnant for almost a decade. All the shallow ponds in the Park were bone dry most of the time since the last good rains in 1990-2000. The photo below shows the section of the wetland just south of the Bird Hide in March 2009. The nest boxes were intended for ducks and were well out in the water when they were built in the early years of the Park.



You can see that the pond had been dry so long that it was full of grasses and weeds.

Contrast the above view with a current photo below of the long-dry south-eastern section of the main wetland (the portion nearest Governor Road). This area had been so barren and weed-filled that its viewing platform was surely long deserted. So, when heavy rains this winter began re-creating this part of our wetland it seemed like a miracle to those of us who regularly tramp around the back of the wetlands to survey birds. The water level has recently been so high that several sections have been flooded.



Speaking of birds, we have observed a resurgence of our waterbird population, in numbers and variety of species, now that we have full wetlands. Swans are nesting and the variety of duck species has increased. (See the article on page 5 for more details.)

The Hide pond had also been dry periodically during the last few years. Now that the pond has water, it is populated with breeding Dusky Moorhens and several species of ducks. Hoary-headed and Australasian Grebes in breeding plumage at last have water to dive into for food. All this activity now present makes for a vastly more interesting viewing session in the Hide. Although the water is covered with Azolla fern, the plant does not seem to hinder most bird activity.



The view from the Hide—water covered with Azolla fern.
Photo: VL

It's not only the birds that have benefited from the abundance of water, our frog population is booming (literally). Short-finned Eels have again appeared (good tucker for cormorants); in fact Ranger In Charge Des Lucas recently saw an eel swimming across one of our flooded tracks.

One wonders whether the previous decade has indeed been a 'drought' and our rain has now returned to 'normal'. What will the future hold for our wetlands: will they soon dry out again or will they remain full of water for the next few years? Only time will tell.

Nursery News—what about the future?

By Marj Seaton

End of season Another planting season has come and gone, culminating with a visit from “Climate Positive” offsetting carbon emissions by planting nearly 2000 of our plants, just about cleaning us out of trees. With rain beforehand, there was plenty of moisture in the ground so we are hopeful many will survive the long summer.

Stock sale We still have some of this season’s plants left, so we welcome visitors to the nursery who might be interesting in purchasing plants at reduced cost. Knobby club-rush (*Ficinia nodosa*) we have in abundance so we can supply as many as wished to anyone wanting a hardy plant for wet or dry areas. A few Acacias and Allocasuarinas are the only trees left but there are plenty of native violets and quite a few grasses.

Sowing It is now time for us to sow seed for next year’s requirements. Acacias and Eucalypts have been sown and, in the next month or two, we will start on the grasses. *Austrostipa semibarbata* is particularly striking just now with its plumes waving in the breeze and the *Austrodanthonias* will shortly be showing their fluffy flowers. We’ll collect seeds for these around Christmas.

I have *Austrodanthonia geniculata* adjacent to my swimming pool; it makes a very pretty and soft verge - slightly spikey just after cutting, but we leave that until the seedheads have just about blown away and it grows well again afterwards. We have *Microlaena* too and its drooping heads take over once the *Danthonia* has finished.

Hardening off area Max has been working on our second hardening off area. This was in a poor state until he started replacing the tables and the watering system. We should be in good shape for toughening up our plants next season. Thanks to Max for all his hard work.

Weeds Like most home gardeners, we have a surfeit of African Panic Grass after the recent rains but it is easy to pull out and a couple of weeding sessions around the igloos should return us to a tidy propagation area once more.

Community Garden This is looking good after the rains and the frog pond is full. It may not stay that way over summer, but the base is gradually stabilising and there is hope that it will hold water for longer to give the frogs a chance to reproduce there.

The future Three regular sessions are listed in the calendar, plus seed collecting at the beginning of the month. As age wearies them, some of our stalwarts are unable to attend as often as in earlier times so we welcome any new volunteers, even if they could only attend occasionally. Wednesday afternoons see a small group doing jobs not usually done on other days including maintenance, especially of our erratic irrigation system, pot washing and occasionally getting out in the park for other reasons. This is also the time we have visits from schools helping both in the nursery and in the park. They too are looking for enthusiastic volunteers to help keep the nursery going. Our Park certainly needs them.

Park Report—water, water everywhere

From Ranger in Charge Des Lucas’ monthly reports

Staff A Summer Ranger has been assigned to the Park from December through February. Extra staff will provide welcome help during the busy warm months.

Revegetation program Since the start of July, over 11,000 plants have been put into the park by volunteers, staff and Ernie’s ‘A Team’. Jane St Quinton, a work experience student based in the Park, has consolidated the revegetation plan for the next thirty years. Future planting will place more emphasis on understory plants, which will provide a more diverse habitat for wildlife.

Pest animal program—rabbits Over 1,000 rabbits have been removed from the Park since April this year.

Control burn in Heathland Planning is underway for a control burn in the Heathland in the section cleared for

a golf course before the Park was created. Part of the burn area has been revegetated; after the burn regeneration will be compared in this area and the un-vegetated area.

Energy Efficiency Program Parks Victoria has funded an Energy Efficiency Program to examine strategies to reduce energy consumption. Braeside Park, with Karkarook Park, is a heavy user of energy due to use of water pumps in hydrology management. Alternative energy solutions, such as solar or wind power, could be implemented if the pay-back time is under eight years.

Near-record rainfall The October rain total for the Park, at 144.2mm, was the highest monthly total since

(Continued on page 8)

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

History Walk—Des's trek on 31 October

From the Editor

Intro in the Visitors' Centre

The walk, attended by eleven stalwarts who braved the forecast rain, had a very horsy theme. Prior to the walk, we met in the Visitors' Centre where Des showed us the location of Phar Lap buildings and the training track on aerial photos of the Park. He also showed us the site of the area's first homestead, built by William McMahan. This building is now located in the Southern Golf Club. The photos amply demonstrated the increase of vegetation in the Park and also the urban development in the neighbouring area since the 1960s.



Des and slightly damp listeners. *Photo: VL*

On the walk, Des led us to the area where Phar Lap's trainer Harry Telford had lived and also where the stables had been. Both buildings unfortunately burned down long ago. Throughout the morning, Des read us snippets of Phar Lap's life as we toured the Park.

Rain history

In answer to our queries on how much rain had fallen during October and also for the year so far, Des produced coloured graphs and tables setting out monthly rain totals since 1990. Colourful years had above-average totals; 2010 is the first such year since 1999-2000. Our monthly average has fluctuated around 600mm each year, except for 1991 to 1993, when the average was over 700mm.

The Track

Racing around the Park, trying to keep up with Des, we were drawn on in order to hear the next installment of the Life of Phar Lap. The horse's name comes from the

Thai for 'White Lightning'. Phar Lap had many nicknames, including 'Red Terror'.

In the Heathland, we saw the area for the proposed control burn. We also learnt that Bracken Fern is a management problem in the Heathland because it can take over areas. The Wedding Bush had lots of flowers but was bedraggled due to the heavy rains.

Stopping at Bent Bridge we were amazed at the mini-cataract of foaming water.

Wildlife highlights

The Park currently abounds in frogs, since all the ponds and wetlands are full to overflowing. On the day we heard calls of Common Froglets in nearly every body of water. Also calling were Spotted Marsh Frogs along Howard Road. At 'Mozzie Pond' which is south of Magpie Car park near the road we heard a few Striped Marsh Frogs.

Some good birds appeared during our walk. The highlight was seeing three Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos flying southwards. Fan-tailed Cuckoos were calling in the Heathland, as well as a Grey Shrike-thrush. As we left the Heathland we heard a Sacred Kingfisher calling and then we flushed a Common Bronzewing a little way down the track.

Many thanks to Des for a great day.



Cataract on the Dingley Waterway at Bent Bridge. *Photo: VL*

Park Report, cont.

September 1992, which had 147.8mm. This year could be one of the wettest since records began in 1990. Let's hope the rain keeps up for the remainder of the year.

VNPA Visit The Victorian National Parks Association is holding their annual picnic in the Park on November 21st, with about 150 members expected. Well-known

botanist and geologist Leon Costermans will lead a nature walk in the morning. Also the winners of the VNPA Best Friends Award will be announced at the end of the day. Friends of Braeside Park who would like help out with guided walks are welcome to contact the park on **9265 7300**.