

Moomba Park

Fawkner

SITE INFORMATION NOTE 4

The Moomba Park, Mahoneys Road plantings come of age

Special points of interest

- In 1988, plantings at this site used cross-cultivation, fertilizers and gypsum to help plants cope with the heavy clay
- It was soon discovered that local plants were well adapted to the local soils and subsequent plantings have thrived without this help
- The original Mahoney's Road and Moomba Park plantings in 1988 had over 40 individual plots



A few nationally endangered Matted Flax-lily survive along the escarpments of Moomba Park

In 1985 a one million dollar grant to plant at several sites along the Merri Creek was awarded as part of Australia's Bicentennial commemorations.

Plantings in Moomba Park Fawkner, a site that 'had most of its natural attributes degraded and removed', were started in 1988 by the Merri Creek Coordinating Committee (MCCC). MCCC's successor organisation, Merri Creek Management Committee was established in the following year and has grown alongside these plantings. A design rationale from this time reads; '...it is believed that if indigenous vegetation is to be used to revegetate, an attempt should be made to produce the most "natural result" possible.'

In 2009 the plantings were twenty-one years old and the success of this attempt is becoming evident.



'You wouldn't know it was Fawkner!'



It can come as a surprise to long-term locals that over the last twenty years, the parklands lining Fawkner's eastern boundary have become a bushland haven.

However, many hundreds of people have discovered this, and played an active part at planting days, litter collections, mulch-a-thons, school science days and Fawkner 'Safaris' arranged by Merri Creek Management Committee. Helping make this happen have been Friends of Merri Creek, Moreland Council, schools, businesses and Community Houses.

MERRI CREEK



MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE

Ecological history of Moomba Park

The ancestors of today’s Wurundjeri people would have known this area as a broad plain with few trees and a narrow creek lined by River Redgums and small cliffs.

From the late 1830’s the vegetation would have been affected by sheep grazing in the Port Phillip colony; along with the ending of traditional Wurundjeri practices such as burning. Sensitive wildflowers and wildlife disappeared while weeds, rabbits and foxes took hold. Heavy grazing reduced Native Grasslands to dust.



By the late 1990’s, plantings had spreading tree canopies and shaggy bark, fallen branches and leaf litter were attracting woodland fauna to the area.

More habitat, but no hollows... yet

Past removal of virtually all old-growth trees mean that hollow-dependant species such as Red-rumped parrots, owls and small bats must leave the reserve to breed



Blue-winged Parrots visit Moomba Park en-route between breeding grounds in Tasmania and wintering grounds north of the Dividing Range. Reptiles including Eastern Brown Snakes and Eastern Blue-tongues survive among the rocky Escarpment areas. Streambank Shrubland supports Australian Reed-warblers and Little Grassbird.

Revegetation has led to an influx of woodland bird species including uncommon species like Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos, Spiny Cheeked Honeyeaters and Crested Shrike-tits.

In 1955 development of the ‘Moomba Park’ estate began. Flood prone land beside the Merri Creek was retained as open space where cattle grazing persisted until the early 1990’s. Little original vegetation remained, largely restricted to rocky escarpments. Some hardy wildlife persisted. Slashing reduced fuel loads but wildfires lit by vandals were common. Anecdotal evidence suggests that local wildlife extinctions accompanied the intensification of urbanization.

Cunningham’s Skink and the Growling Grass Frog had almost disappeared in the 1970s, presumably due to pollution, landscape changes, domestic animal predation and the spread of exotic predators and competitors such as Mosquito Fish and European Carp.

In 1988, a large scale planting was carried out by Merri Creek Coordinating Committee. Site visits to upper Merri remnant vegetation had been made to inform plant selections. Departure from natural plant compositions reflected resource constraints, and knowledge gaps; for example, virtually no groundstorey species were planted. Trial plantings of grasses were made elsewhere at this time as a means of developing this expertise. Ongoing revegetation augmented the original plantings to achieve a more faithful recreation of Plains Grassy Woodland and Streambank Shrubland vegetation. Other large plantings occurred in;

- 1995: a line of plots along the rear of houses along the southern boundary
- 1998: Scattered Redgum plantings west of the tennis courts
- 2000: Hundreds of Redgums planted at the western end of the site and elsewhere in Moomba Park.

Increased pollution controls led to water quality improvements in the creek and the potential for a healthier aquatic biota.

Negative trends have included the ‘tidying up’ of surrounding parklands and vacant land and intensified human recreation pressures including illegal trailbike use. The site is increasingly isolated from shrinking habitat areas upstream.



Freeways, industrial and housing developments to the north increased Moomba Park’s isolation from habitat strongholds and probably contributed to local extinctions such as Yellow-rumped Thornbill in the late 1990’s.



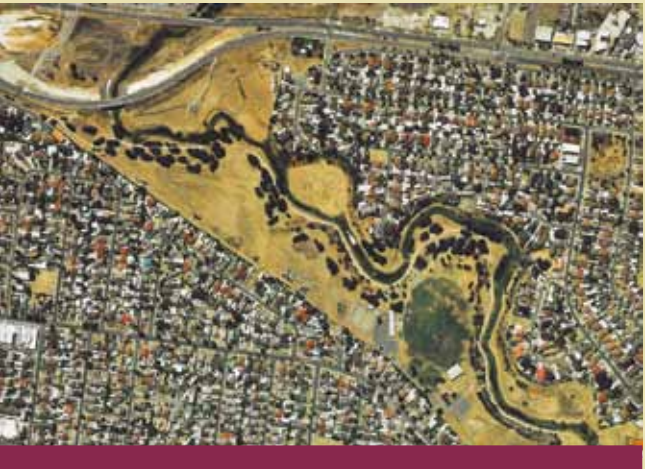
Taken in approximately 1950. The unmade Mahoney’s Rd is near the top, crossing the Merri Creek via a ford. Few trees appear to remain along the Merri Creek. A resident in the early years of the twentieth century recalled Fawcner as a harsh, windy place with hardly a tree for miles. Dairy cattle grazing was the main land use in this area up to the mid-twentieth century. Market gardens are seen on the Reservoir side of Merri Creek.



In March 1989, a few months after the first 1988 plantings. The black plastic weed-mat makes the ‘pie-dish’ plots of plantings stand out.



From Mahoney’s Rd, May 1988



January 1998. The plantings appear as dark green ovals. Removal of the plastic weed mat was a time-consuming task. Construction of the Western Ring Rd and Mahoneys Rd is underway.



From Mahoneys Rd, November 1992



By 2007, many of the original plots are merging This was hastened by ‘join up’ plantings of groundstorey. Mown gaps have been retained as firebreaks, which are reinforced by the concrete paths built in 2008.



View from Mahoneys Rd, January 2009



Moomba Park occupies the Fawkner side of the Merri Creek. The over storey plantings (hatched) tend to promote indigenous colonizing grasses by drying and shading the ground. This has led to vegetation quality improvement via passive means.

'Recreate some semblance of natural vegetation associations...'

The quotes in the titles on this page come from the design rationale for Moomba Park written in 1987.

The plantings modelled on reference sites from the following Ecological Vegetation Classes:

Plains Grassy Woodland EVC 55_61

open Eucalypt woodland on poorly drained, open flats with species-rich grassy and herbaceous ground layer. Dominated by River Red-gum with Kangaroo Grass and Wallaby Grasses below.

EVC 851 — Stream Bank Shrubland

dense shrubby vegetation. Typical species include River Redgum, River Bottlebrush, Silver Wattle and Blackwood.

EVC 895 — Escarpment Shrubland

dense shrubby vegetation, on drier slopes and cliff faces. Lightwood, Sweet Bursaria and Tree Violet are typical.

'To replace what has been destroyed will take hundreds of years'

Twenty years may seem like a long time, but the vision of this project spans centuries. Future developments may include;

- Expanding the Moomba Park plantings to reduce weed-prone edges and increase habitat for sensitive wildlife.
- A large wetland in the floodplain to help treat stormwater.
- Further development of reliable and economical ways to sustain indigenous vegetation and the fauna it supports within urban surroundings
- Developing and refining effective community engagement approaches. Fawkner and Reservoir have rapidly changing cultural makeups and community engagement programs need to be equally dynamic.

Approximately 12ha (63%) of the 19 ha of public open space between Mahoney's Road and the McBryde Street entrance is occupied by revegetation and remnant vegetation. The urbanised reach of the Merri corridor extends 13 kilometres from here to the confluence with the Yarra River at Dight's Falls

HOW TO GET THERE

Access from the end of Birchwood Street Melway Map 7 J11, or the main entrance off McBryde Street at Map 8 K12.

Gowrie Station on the Upfield line is nearby. The number 530 bus from Coburg passes near the McBryde St entrance reserve.

ECOLOGICAL VEGETATION CLASSES

are widely used in Victoria to categorise different kinds of vegetation

Benchmarks describing EVC's can be found at the Conservation and Environment page of the Department of Sustainability and Environment's website

<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/dse/index.htm>

Opportunities to be involved in this site and information about MCMC's other work can be found at www.mcmc.org.au

Merri Creek Management Committee

Merri Creek Management Committee Incorporated (MCMC) is an environmental coordination and management agency formed in 1989 to achieve a shared vision for the waterway corridors of the Merri Creek Catchment. Its members include all the municipalities in the catchment: the Darebin, Hume, Moreland, Whittlesea and Yarra City Councils plus Mitchell Shire Council, the Friends of Merri Creek and the Friends of Wallan Creek.

Representatives of these member groups form a Committee of Management which develops policy and guides the activities of MCMC's approximately 20 staff. The primary purpose of MCMC is to ensure the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, and the ecologically sensitive restoration, development and maintenance of the Merri Creek and tributaries, their corridors and associated ecological communities.



2 Lee Street
East Brunswick VIC 3057
Phone (03) 9380 8199
Fax (03) 9380 6989
Email admin@mcmc.org.au