

FRIENDS OF BRAESIDE PARK NEWSLETTER

September 2010, no. 4



BRAESIDE PARK

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The opinions expressed in this
newsletter are the authors' and
do not necessarily reflect those
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Springtime activities—mark your diaries please

Heathland Walk—Sunday 26 September

Join us as we marvel at the Wedding Bush blooming (hopefully) in the Park's Heathland, which is normally closed to public access. Our guide will be Norm Cornwall; what Norm doesn't know about our Heathland isn't worth knowing! The walk will last about 2 hours.

**Meet at the Visitors' Centre at 2:00pm
Sunday 26th September
Afternoon tea following the walk**

Early Morning Bird walk—Saturday 16 October

The early watcher catches the birds! We meet at the Visitors' Centre at 7:30am and head to the Heathland in search of bush birds and raptors. Morning tea/brunch following our walk of about 2 hours. Ambitious participants could include a wetland stroll after tea.

**Meet at the Visitors' Centre at 7:30am
Saturday 16th October
Morning tea following the walk**

History Walk with Ranger Des Lucas— Sunday 31 October

Back by popular demand: Des's perambulations through the Park. We explore little-known corners while learning all about the history and development of Braeside Park. **Meet at the Park Office at 10am. Light refreshments at the end of the walk at 1.00pm.**



Des showing termite damage before last year's walk.

LAST COMMUNITY PLANTING DAY
Sunday 12th of September
9.00am to noon
Follow the arrow signs to planting site

Wednesdays with Ernie's A Team

Our group has been very busy.

Grasslands Have been weeded and mowed. Over 1760 grasses have been planted out.

Car parks The guards & frames were collected for the community planting on the 29th of August. Over 900 plants & grasses were planted out on the day.

Heathland The group has spent two Wednesdays removing weeds & ring barking Coastal Wattles, etc. Some 150 Plants were put in this area where Burgan has been removed. This was followed by a lovely walk in the rain across to the Caterpillar Dam where some more planting was done.

Wednesday afternoons Afternoon work continues in the Community Garden Area. If interested please join us

at 1pm. Extra help is needed as hot beds will be sown with seed for the coming season.

Boxes of plants have been consolidated for the September planting. Liz continues to monitor the watering system. Mentone Grammar Girls have completed their picnic table/stool area which looks great. They continue to maintain their area in the garden and have helped out also with pricking out plants, pot washing etc.

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)

Thanks To The Helpers
Those who helped produce the newsletter:

Elsie Anderson
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Park Rangers

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Friends of Braeside Park

ACTIVITIES CALENDAR

Activity	Time/Day	Sep	Oct	Nov
Committee Meeting	4th Monday , 1.00pm at the Visitor Centre	27	25	22
Community Projects Weekday	9:00 - 12:00 noon Wednesday at the Park Office	1 8 15 22 29	6 13 20 27	3 10 17 24
Plant Propagation Nursery Facility	10:00 - 12:00 noon 1st Sat & Mon 3rd Sun	4 6 19	2 4 17	6 8 21
Seed & Cutting Collection Meet at Robin Car park	10:00 - 12:00 noon The Fri. before the 1st Sat. of the month	3	1	5
Water Quality Monitoring Meet at the Park Office	9:00 - 12:00 noon 3rd Tues	21	19	16
Community Projects Weekends	9:00 - 12:00 noon, follow the signs	Sun. 12th Sept Spring Planting		
Bird Group	Visitors' Centre 7:30—9:30		Early Morning Bird Walk Sat. 16th Oct.	
Special Activities		Heathland Walk 2 pm—4 pm Sun. 26 Sept Visitors' Centre	History Tour 10am—1pm Sun. 31 Oct Park Office	

Birds in Backyards: home-grown research

It's simple to make a contribution to our knowledge of local bird populations. In a program jointly managed by Birds Australia and the Australian Museum, *Birds in Backyards* gathers data on birds and their habitat use from volunteers around Australia.

Participants undertake regular surveys of bird populations at home, e.g. in the garden or a nearby reserve. A well-designed web site (<http://www.birdsinbackyards.net>) guides you through the registration process and also provides facilities to interact with other participants.

The site includes bird identification guides, helpful for inexperienced birdos. Surveys can be done as a daily 20 minute count of all birds using the habitat or can be a weekly or annual list. Data that participants input online includes an initial description of the habitat: its precise location, any artificial food sources, distance from natural bush areas and identification of plants in the habitat, as well as the regular entry of bird data reports.

A major benefit of the program is the ability to gather data from the site summarising the information collected so far.

Annual General Meeting report, 22nd August 2010

The Visitors' Centre was filled with enthusiastic attendees at a very successful AGM this year.

The year's highlights

Plant propagation

Over 9000 plants grown during the year, from seed and cuttings selected in the Park.

Improved watering system which saves a substantial amount of water and allows flexibility in amount of watering for different plants. Nearly all water used in the Nursery is now sourced from the rain water tanks.

Five Community Plantings held, with the most winter rain in 14 years giving the plants a boost.

Community Garden

The feature garden of indigenous plants near the Nursery is taking shape. The frog hollow is receiving plentiful runoff, with more plantings and logs to encourage frogs to take up residence.

A family recreation area near the Federation Trail now includes the giant chess board, seating, and more shade trees. More giant games will be built in the coming year.



Part of the crowd listening to Melanie Smith, Waterwatch Coordinator-Dandenong Catchment

Fire management

Fire breaks have been built on the north, east and southern boundaries of the Heathland Reserve. Also fire truck access to the area has been improved.

Park staff

With the resignation of one ranger during the year, and no replacement appointed, staff numbers are down to four only. Resources are very stretched, considering that our rangers also manage Karkarook Park.

Grants

Thanks to hard work by the Rangers and our Treasurer, Bev Bancroft, the Friends received over \$22,000 during the 09/10 financial year. The grants fund major works and maintenance in the Park.



Enjoying the Waterwatch Trailer at the AGM

How good is our water at Braeside Park?

From Melanie Smith's talk

Our Waterwatch Program is one of Melbourne's longest-running; staff and a small group of Friends have been checking our water for fifteen years.

Six parameters are tested at three sites: the Dingley Waterway at the north end of the Park, Bent Bridge and the main Wetland. When there is runoff from the Southern Golf Course, Cherry Bridge is monitored.

The parameters measured and how our water compared in 2009 to the State Environmental Protection Policy guidelines are as follows:

- *Electrical conductivity* (measures salinity): average results meet guidelines, Bent Bridge is excellent and Dingley Waterway may be high in summer.
- *Turbidity* (cloudiness): only the Wetlands sometimes fail to meet guidelines, probably due to the shallow water levels. Cloudy water can limit plant photosynthesis.
- *Phosphorus* (phosphate): all areas fail to meet guidelines; levels fall in winter but rise from August as rain washes pollutants into water.
- *Dissolved Oxygen*: all areas are slightly below guidelines, but possibly because measurements are taken in the morning before much plant photosynthesis has occurred.
- *Temperature*: only the Wetland often exceeds the recommended level of 21°, probably because of its shallow water levels.
- *pH* (measures level of acidity): all areas are within the recommended range of around 7.

Our precious water, from Des Lucas' talk

'Drought' may be normal for Australia; the Park's annual average rainfall has dropped from 700ml in 1990 to 550ml currently. The last rain event (3 to 5 days of rain yielding more than 40ml) was in 2004.

We are combating dryness with our 67,500 litres in rain water tanks and a saving of 67% of water use with nursery irrigation improvements. Plans include tanks on all Park building roofs and new wetlands.

Plant life is such a yawn

By Kaye Proudley

Did you know that some plants sleep? Well – it's not quite clear if they sleep as such but plants surely do have a circadian rhythm. Circadian is the 24-hour cycle of life that any organism may experience, as indeed we humans do too.

We do know for sure that many plants have a system of shutting down for the night just as we know that some plants have a nightlife to be proud of!

Sleep movements, where plant leaves may fold and/or droop are known as "nyctinasty" in the botanical world. Some members of the bean family (Fabaceae) are known to do this. There is a small structure at the base of the bean plant's leaves where the cells are filled with water and as the sun goes down, the water drains from the structure, allowing the plant leaf to droop; correspondingly, at dawn, the structure's cells swell with water making the leaves erect again. It is not known what evolutionary or functional significance this action has for the plant, but certainly looks like the plant is "going to sleep" and "awakening!"

Nyctinasty also includes *flowers* closing when the sun goes off them, as plants such as *Tribulus cistoides* (Goat's Head Burr or Caltrop) do. *Tribulus*' yellow flower heads actually track the sun and move with it to keep the sun on their faces and close up when the sun is gone. Some species of day-flowering plants can open and close for several days in succession. Do you know of any others?

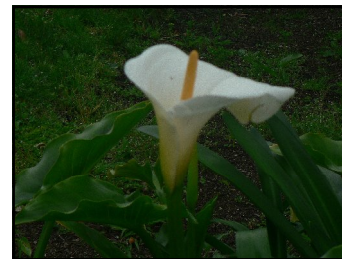


A giant native Caltrop in Arnhem Land, note flowers all pointing in the same direction. Photo: VL

Mirabilis jalapa (Four O'Clocks) are in the category of plants that have a nightlife to be proud of and the pink/mauve and white flowers actually open at four o'clock or thereabouts and stay open for the night. They depend on night-flying moths, attracted by the sweet perfume, for pollination. Flowers only open for the purpose of reproduction (as much as we'd like to think they stay open for our human pleasure). From memory, flowers of our indigenous *Microseris* (Yam Daisy) species close up at night (or partially so. Tiny flower wasps can be found curled up and asleep at night in these flowers.)

The tropical American *Pachira aquatica* (Shaving Brush Tree or Guiana Chestnut) has flowers that are more spectacular at night than they are at daytime, looking in torchlight like exploding fireworks with their long protruding, red-tipped stamens. By day, this tree is only known to be in flower by the discarded and withered old brown flowers strewn on the ground beneath it. Along with *Adansonia digitata*, the African Baobab tree, which has spectacular shining white flowers opening at night and best seen then by torchlight, these two trees are both visited by bats for flower pollination, by lapping at the flowers the bats become dusted with pollen which is then transferred from flower to flower, just like bees, other insects, mammals and birds do.

There is one last strange phenomenon in the night-flowering world of plants and that can be found in the tropical Araceae family - including anthuriums and philodendrons which have tiny flowers arranged on a fleshy spike called a spadix (and glues this family together as cronies) and is surrounded by a leafy blade called a spathe.



Arum Lily showing the spathe and spadix. Photo: VL

Anyone familiar with these plants will say they've seen flowers in the daytime, and that is true, but for the peak of flowering, we have to visit at night to observe that its peak is highlighted by the generation of *heat* in the spadix!

Most unusual is this generation of heat, believed by biologists to volatilize the perfume and keep warm the beetles, which pollinate this family of plants. It is believed that the hydrolyzing of stored starch generates the warmth in most plants that use this process.

However there is one famous plant that does it differently: *Philodendron bipinnatifidum* (Tree Philodendron) uses heat by metabolizing stored lipids. If only we could learn how to do that so well...in other words, it burns fat! Lipids store about twice as much energy as carbohydrates and enable this plant to attain its record high temperatures of 45 or 46 degrees – or about 30 degrees above the ambient temperature at its peak temperature at around 7pm.

So the night-time world of plants, insects, and mammals is a hot-bed of interest and intrigue!

Nursery News

By Bill Jackson

Day to day

Pricking out seedlings is always with us but only for a few late species like Patersonia (Purple Flag). Old cuttings are being tubed and new ones put on the heat beds. Boxes of Dichondra (Kidney Weed) and similar plants are being divided to produce about six plants from each original.



Purple Flag in the Nursery in 2006.
Photo: M. Seaton

Wildlife

While the battle with rabbits and foxes rages in the main Park we have smaller problems in the Nursery. Ants have discovered our heat beds as a nice place to nest and are being very stubborn. Pity we are not allowed to use real sprays. Another little critter is the Looper caterpillar which attacks eucalypts, acacias, etc. These insects leave once healthy leafy plants as bare sticks. In a way they are quite cute, they sense you coming

and grasp a stalk, pretending to be an even smaller twig.

Change of season

With the planting season nearly finished for this year it is now time to have a stock-take and consolidation. Marj has been moving plants from the igloos to the shade house and hardening-off areas. It is rather nice to see similar plants coming together, even though it does not matter.

Hopefully we are entering a double change in the weather. The usual increase in day length is now happening. Secondly the sun is appearing a little more—often through that dreary blanket of cloud. It is time to look at lists of plants for next year's programmes.

Next year

At first glance the emphasis is to be more larger trees and shrubs with fewer grasses and understorey plants. Large numbers are required for some species. Requests for some of our regulars have decreased while a few unusual varieties are listed, e.g. Epacris and Pimelia.

A new venture for an outside organisation to plant large numbers of large trees as a carbon sink will involve us. The time for planting seeds is near.

(Marj will be back soon from her trip; thanks to Bill for writing the report)

Park Report—

From Ranger in Charge Des Lucas' monthly reports

Revegetation Program

The carbon-offset organisation Climate Positive will do a large planting in the park next year, south of Federation Drive. As noted in the Nursery Report above, Friends will be integral to the activity by propagating plants and helping to plant them.

The last two community plantings were very successful. In July for National Tree Day about 30 people put in over 1500 plants along Federation Drive. Mark Dreyfus, the MHR for Isaacs attended, as well as the Liberal candidate. On August 29th a local Scout troop participated, again planting along Federation Drive.

Grants

Parks Vic has confirmed a grant for a hopscotch game in the Community Garden. Ongoing Burgan control and planting in the Salinity area were also supported, as well as a small equipment grant for AV equipment.

**The last community planting is on
Sunday 12th of September,
from 9am to noon.**

Follow the arrow signs to planting site.

Pest Animal Program—Rabbits

Rabbit control is ongoing; current wet conditions may also slow down rabbit breeding.

VNPA visit

On November 21st the Victorian National Parks Association will hold their annual picnic in the Park, with about 150 members expected. Friends of Braeside Park will help out with guided walks.

Fire Management

Preparation has started for spring and summer fire management especially around the Heathland.

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