



Earthcare News

October
November
2006

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Gardens

Thursday October 19
Joanne Greenwood
Improving our
waterways for flora
and fauna
7.30pm Ecocentre

**JOIN
FRIENDS
OF ELSTER
CREEK**

THURSDAY 19 OCTOBER , 7.30 FOR 8.00 PM
Ecocentre, Cnr Blessington and Herbert Streets, St Kilda
(St Kilda Botanic Gardens)

**JOANNE GREENWOOD
WATERWAYS PLANNER
MELBOURNE WATER**

IMPROVING OUR WATERWAYS FOR FLORA AND FAUNA

Habitat for Rakali and Birdlife above the flood line
Refuges for breeding waterfowl,
Vegetation management in the Golf Course

FRIENDS OF ELSTER CREEK

Friends of Elster Creek is a subgroup of Earthcare and is interested in re-establishing broader biodiversity and improving the aesthetics of areas along Elster Creek/Elwood Canal. Suggested improvements leading to potential projects of common interest within the group are:

Remove impediment to fish migration - possibly with a siphon just inside the Golf Course at St Kilda Street

***Rehabilitate parts of the Canalised sections
(Golf Course to the Highway)***

***Habitat for Rakalis - up to New Street.
(How do you get a Rakali-friendly drain ?)***

Litter reduction.

Revegetation.

Better Water Quality

Identification of illegal discharges to 'underground' sections.

The group meets at 6.30 on the 1st Thursday of every month
at the Port Phillip Eco Centre.

Following the Melbourne Water presentation at the Earthcare meeting
we will focus our activities and create action plans.

New members are most welcome.

For more details phone 0411 132 394 or email crafters@anz.com

WATER TESTING ELSTER CREEK

Elster Creek, also known in its lower parts as the Elwood Canal is one of the few remaining creeks in Melbourne's inner southeast. It drains approximately 40km², with its catchment extending from Caulfield in the north to Highett in the south and Bentleigh in the east to Elwood in the west, where it drains into Port Philip Bay near Point Ormond.

Earthcare St Kilda together with Waterwatch Victoria, have been involved in monitoring the water quality of Elster Creek since October 2005. The preliminary results of water testing seem to indicate that the instream vegetation in the Elsternwick Golf Course is having a positive effect on some indices of water quality.

The water quality is currently being tested at two sites, the first of which is upstream of the golf course at the end of Brickwood Street in Brighton. The second testing site is downstream of the golf course next to the St Kilda Street Bridge in Elwood. Some testing was also completed further upstream near Milroy Street in Brighton, although this site is no longer being tested as the two water testing sites above the golf course showed little difference in water quality.

In comparison the St Kilda Street site shows significant differences in some indices (i.e. pH) compared to the other sites, which may be due to the instream vegetation in the golf course.

The creek also has significant litter problems, which are likely to negatively impact on the water quality and could potentially harm the creeks fauna.

The water testing and its results are important for any future plans to refurbish or revegetate Elster Creek as the golf course is the only section, which currently has instream vegetation.

All of the testing sites along the creek rate as either fair or poor for water quality and even worse for instream and riparian vegetation. This suggests that Elster Creek has significant potential for improvement in terms of both water quality and instream and riparian habitat.

As a result of the problems identified and the recent amalgamation of the Friends of ElsterCreek and Earthcare, Elster Creek is one of the new focus areas for Earthcare. Paul Rees

WATER TESTING RESULTS OF ELSTER CREEK 10/05 - 10/06 (AVERAGE VALUES)

	Milroy Street, Brighton	Brickwood Street, Brighton	St Kilda Street, Elwood
pH	9.1	8.9	8.0
Conductivity (uS/cm)	567	820	720
Phosphate (mg/L)	0.09	0.11	0.09
Turbidity (NTU)	7	<5	<5
Dissolved Oxygen (mg/L)	9.0	8.4	4.0
Ammonia (mg/L)	0.00	0.07	0.01

FROG CENSUS

With the arrival of spring there are many frog calls in the air, and this is your chance to increase our knowledge of the frog species in our area. Frogs are a very important environmental indicator, their presence indicates a healthy environment - both for them and us. You can participate in the Melbourne Water Frog Census by recording the frog calls that you hear and sending them in to the Spring 2006 census.

So far St Kilda has failed to make it onto the 'census map', so let's show them that frogs do exist here! All details can be found at <http://frogs.melbournewater.com.au/>

PENGUIN RESEARCH

Research into breeding and diet of the little penguins is going well. So far it has revealed that many of the early attempts to breed are unsuccessful in fledging chicks, but many pairs have returned to try again. There are several pairs on eggs, guard stage chicks, and even some very fat post-guard chicks (up to 1300 g).



one week old downy chicks

This years breeding attempt is reflective of what we have recorded over the past few years. Once again the St Kilda colony started breeding much earlier than the Phillip Island colony (July vs September).

Chicks can be chipped at six weeks of age, when they are at the end of the P1 stage (over 1000 g).

The diet study has begun with stomach flushing and blood sampling being conducted monthly. It will be some time until the results of this study are known, but from our observations of the stomach contents, anchovy still seem to be on the menu.

Stomach flushing is being conducted on a week night at the end of the month, but it will eventually be moved to a Sunday evening. Blood sampling will be conducted on the third Sunday of the month, in conjunction with the penguin survey. 'Penguin couriers' will copy the information recorded for each penguin (location, ID, sex and weight), bring them to the blood sampling station, then return them to their original position. A total of 20 penguins (10 male, 10 female) are needed each month.

The foraging study has started. Four birds have been satellite tracked and shown to be moving to the mouth of the Yarra and Hobsons Bay area. They are nesting adults fitted with satellite trackers and time depth recorders. This information will be very important in telling us exactly where and how they're foraging.

A big thankyou to everyone for their co-operation and help in all facets of the study.

Tiana Preston



To place your order for a set of the limited edition 12th FINA World Swimming Championships Little Penguin Number Plates, call the Department of Sustainability and Environment's Customer Service Centre on 136 186. Little Penguin number plates will cost \$285. Proceeds from sales of the number plates will go to the Penguin Foundation, the St Kilda Penguin Study Group and Sea Search.

PRETTY PENNY MAKES A SPLASH ON VICTORIAN NUMBER PLATES

A number plate featuring 'Penny, the Penguin' - the 12th FINA World Swimming Championships mascot had been launched. Money raised will go to organisations working to protect the Little Penguin and its habitat, as well as commemorate the 12th FINA World Swimming Championships.

"Last year, the Karak Commonwealth Games Number Plates were an outstanding success. The plates sold like hot-cakes, raising \$180,000 for conservation groups dedicated to saving the South-Eastern Red-tailed Black Cockatoo from extinction.

Mr Thwaites said "We are following the same formula with the Little Penguin number plates, selling only 1,000 limited edition number plates at \$285 each to help protect the species."

"The Little Penguin is very special to Victoria - that fact, along with the Little Penguin's extraordinary ability to swim and dive, is the reason we chose 'Penny' the Penguin as a mascot for the 12th FINA World Swimming Championships.

The 12th FINA World Swimming Championships will be the biggest aquatics program ever held in Australia and the biggest aquatics event in the lead-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

RAKALI

I have had a couple of questions about Rakali recently - answers below.

So how much do Rakali weigh?

Someone was asking about Rakali weights after seeing our 'big fat male' photo in last month's newsletter - well he weighed in at around 1000 grams. A contact at the aquarium kept a record of Rakali weights before their animals were relocated to Healsville. The female tipped the scales at around 500 grams with the male slightly heavier.

Rikki (see photo) Rakali is just a little heavier (being a gentleman I won't reveal how much!). Here (s)he is making a promotional visit to St Kilda during our Rakali Symposium, October 2005.

Where is the best place to see Rakali?

The best place to see them in action is from the St Kilda breakwater - particularly the Lower Jetty - best time is just around sunset. If you are very patient then you can watch them come up onto the rocks to eat. At the breakwater they are extremely active for many hours after dark.



SUE PENNICUICK has been an active member of Earthcare for many years and has been copresident for the last two years. Sue is the lead candidate in the Greens for the Upper House in the Southern Metropolitan Region



Earthcare have sponsored a Super Cane Toad Trap for use in WA

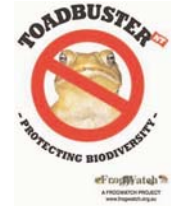
The FrogWatch SuperTrap is a large cage trap set up as a semi permanent installation in the bush.

It has a solar based power supply and a switch system to turn the light on and off. Trials by FrogWatch have

shown that small cage traps can catch all the toads in an area around a house or block in a few weeks and that once the toads are gone any new toads moving into the area seem to be quickly caught in the traps. Test sites have been kept relatively toad free by a single cage trap.

The Supertrap trial is to see what happens on a billaboing out in the bush. The first SuperTrap has caught 27 toads in the first three nights. This indicates the traps are going to be effective during the wet season as well as the dry season which is a significant boost to our confidence that the strategy we have developed to stop toads overwhelming Darwin and Palmerston will be successful. .

Graeme Sawyer



If you wish to sponsor a trap go to this website
www.frogwatch.org.au/canetoads/index.cfm

PORT PHILLIP NATURE WATCH August - September 2006

Reports from Earthcare members and others over the last two months have provided most of the interesting sightings for this Newsletter. I would like to thank those people who immediately contacted me while the bird or animal is still present, giving me the opportunity to see it and possibly photograph it. This provided me with the opportunity to take two of the bird images included in this newsletter.

Sightings reported include:

· Jo Samuel-King saw a pair of **Tawny Frogmouths** flying North in Longmore street, West St Kilda at dusk (around 630pm) on Tuesday, August 29. They later flew towards Canterbury Road Urban Forest and Albert Park. This interested me as I have been watching the birds in St Kilda Botanic Gardens and was wondering whether we have some new tawny frogmouths in CoPP or the gardens birds are moving about. I suspect it is the latter case, because immediately after notification of this sighting the number birds in the gardens dropped from 3 -4 to just a pair. Currently as I write the pair in the gardens appears to be nesting.

· Neil Blake called me while a **Laughing Kookaburra** was in St Kilda Botanical Gardens on 30 August. I responded immediately to find the bird on a low branch, which enabled me to obtain this photograph. Kookaburras are very occasional visitors to CoPP.

· Tiana Preston saw an **Australian Fur Seal** frolicking just off St Kilda Breakwater on the morning of 4 September, near the race starting box end. She reported seeing it again four days later. Seals are common in the bay with small colonies on the navigation structures at the southern end, but are not so frequently seen in Hobson's Bay.

· Tony Flude, George Fotheringham and Richard Novotney reported seeing a number of interesting if not unusual bird species at Westgate Park including a **Pallid Cuckoo**, a **pair of Australian Hobbies**, **Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo**, **Dusky Woodswallow** and a **Baillon's Crake**, a very secretive and hard to observe bird. George called me immediately on discovering the crake on Tuesday 19 September and I responded by getting there half an hour later to see it for myself and to obtain some images. This is the first time I have seen this species.

Sharon Giblett sighted a group (at least 20) of **Yellow Tail Black Cockatoos** in the afternoon of 25th September feeding in the pines of Albert Park near Hockey Drive.

And now to my sightings:

On a late night walk along Elwood foreshore on 17 August I found a **Boobook Owl** resting on top of one of the lights (one closest to the canal) over the path. I suspect the bird was using the lights as a hunting perch, as I watched it swoop from one light to the next intercepting what appeared to be a flying insect in between. Before it disappeared it swooped down to something on the grass stopped for a few seconds then flew off into the night. I wonder if this is the same owl which was roosting in the backyard of a St Kilda residence reported in the June-July Earthcare News? While working on one of Earthcare's planting days at Westbeach on Sunday 20 August. I managed to flush a single **Golden-headed Cisticola** out of some dense vegetation. Normally found in tall grasses in close proximity to wetlands I was surprised to find it in St Kilda and is the first and only time I have seen one of these birds in CoPP.

If you see any interesting wildlife no matter how insignificant they may appear to you, and it may well be in your backyard please send me a report. I can be contacted on 9531 2270, or email amccutcheon@aapt.net.au

Andrew McCutcheon



Boobook Owl



Kookaburra



Baillon's Crake

CATANI GARDENS POSSUMS

Most people would no doubt be aware after reading the dramatic front page article in last weeks (Tuesday 3 October) Port Phillip Leader, that City of Port Phillip are about to embark on a program to cull a large proportion of the Brushtail Possum population from Catani Gardens.

Reasons given are:

- To save the palm trees from fusarium wilt, for which the possums are considered a carrier.
- To prevent possums chewing off new shoots and therefore slowing/stopping growth of the palms.
- To reach a more sustainable and healthier possum population of 30 from an estimated 70-80 animals (Meyer Eidelson and Neil Blake estimate the population at 100 or more).
- To prevent ransacking of rubbish bins by hungry possums, considered as unhygienic.

Although I find killing of animals by euthanasia unpleasant and should only be used as a last resort, I have endorsed City of Port Phillips position on management of the possum population in Catani Gardens. This is as much for the welfare of the animals which are in poor health as it is for protecting vegetation in the gardens. Translocation to alternative habitats is not an option for the possums as studies have shown that the majority of animals die within the first week of release due to starvation, stress and predation. Translocation can also introduce new diseases and parasites to other possum populations.

After receiving a request from Meyer Eidelson for Earthcare's position on the issue I emailed a response to Meyer and a copy to Janet Bolitho, Mayor of CoPP. Although Meyer is against culling as an answer to the possum problem, I reluctantly accept that it is the only method available to deal with the immediate crisis, but I fully agree with Meyer on most of his recommendations on managing possums for the future in CoPP.

The position I put was that we endorse CoPP's proposed actions and the process used to reach that position, but with some conditions:

- Consider Brushtail Possums as an asset to City Of Port Phillip in the same context as the Little Penguins and Rakali in St Kilda Harbour, Tawney Frogmouths in St Kilda Botanic Gardens and Superb Fairy-wrens along Elwood and Port Melbourne Foreshores. This important point was first made by Meyer.
- CoPP immediately prepare a landscape masterplan for Catani Gardens, which would include among many things additional trees other than palms, an increased area of indigenous coastal vegetation (to replace the Mirror Bush, an environmental weed) along the western boundary and alternative refuge habitat for the remaining possums (provision of nest boxes?) once access to the palms is closed off.
- As a long term measure, CoPP should prepare a management plan on 'Managing our parklands, waterways and Natural Heritage Areas as wildlife habitat' with a special emphasis on resident species such as Brushtail Possums, Ringtail Possums, Rakali, Tawney Frogmouths, Superb Fairy-wrens and a number of duck species. Such a plan would provide guidance to CoPP, contractors and volunteers to manage our parklands with due consideration to habitat values for wildlife.

I hope this position, unpleasant as it is, is acceptable to all members of Earthcare. If you have any further concerns with this issue please contact me on 9531 2270 or email amccutcheon@aapt.net.au .