



FriendsNET

Number 55 May 2006

From your Network Committee Convener ...



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Valley) Network
Committee Convener
9374 1902 (h)

A couple of years ago I had the idea of saving water by washing the dishes in a bowl rather than in the sink. The water could then be thrown on the garden and not wasted. However, I didn't think the whole thing through and still used the sink for draining vegetables. The inevitable happened and the drain clogged up.

The same thing happens to our waterways. We extract water for our uses and dam them up so water is not wasted, but natural and man-made pollution continues to enter and is not flushed away.

In August the Friends Network is running a seminar in conjunction with Melbourne Water under the title 'Unmuddying the waters'. You will find more detail on page 3, and in the accompanying flyer. It promises to be an excellent day and I heartily recommend it to you.

On another matter, have a look at the Friends Network web site at home.vicnet.net.au/~friends

Is your group there? If not, it is because your group is not formally affiliated with the Network and we are not authorised to provide contact information. In this case, download an Affiliation Form and please let us have it.

There is no fee for affiliation.

If your group is listed, check the details. If you have a web page, is that listed and linked to your site? Let us know if any change is required.

FriendsNET is on the Network site and can be downloaded and distributed to whomever you wish. And remember, items from *FriendsNET* may be reproduced in your newsletter with acknowledgement.

Groups in action

It might seem odd for Friends to be planting blackberries, but that's what the Friends of Dandenong Valley Parkland have done. President Bryan Loft (9561 2381) explains.

Friends Wendy Lumb and Bryan Loft, with Peter Scalso (Environmental Manager for Boral Clay Products) planting the rust-infected plants. Bryan says there has been some recent evidence for transfer to the wild population.

Nurturing blackberries to control blackberries

The Friends of Dandenong Valley Parklands, in partnership with Boral and the Department of Primary Industries, are engaged in a program to control blackberries. In a briefing session at the Keith Turnbull Plant Research Institute (now DPI) in Frankston, Friends learned there are over 40 biotypes of European blackberry in Australia. A biological control program was initiated in 1976 and a fresh strain of blackberry rust is being introduced. The rust will not kill blackberries but it should over a five year period reduce total biomass by 50% and reduce

spread by daughter plants through arching canes by 95%.

On 17 March a group of Friends with the environmental manager for Boral planted 12 rust infected blackberry plants in two areas which had a heavy infestation of blackberries. Friends are monitoring the plantings and when necessary to keep the plants moist are watering them every 3-4 days with a watering system of 20 litre buckets equipped with drippers needing to be refilled. The rust can be spread rapidly by the wind and monitoring will take place for many months.



INSIDE

Something a bit different...

Some members of our Friends groups see standing for office in Local Government as being another means of working to have environmental values recognised in political decision-making. We asked three such Friends to briefly recount their experiences, and possibly to pass on some advice to other Friends. Read what they say on page 2.

Friends in High Places ... see introduction on page one



Rosemary West OAM was elected to Kingston Council in 2003 and re-elected in 2005. She has contributed this account entitled 'A Friend between a rock and a hard place'

After leaving full-time work in 1997 (as an *Age* journalist) I decided to get involved in a local environment group: to get my hands in the dirt, to get close to my community and to express a deeply-held conviction.

However, before we could put our gardening gloves on, the Friends group I joined had to fight for our patch of remnant coastal manna gum heathy woodland (of high local significance).

First we fought (unsuccessfully) to stop the Federal Government from selling the 1.5 ha Chicquita Reserve in Mentone which Kingston Council had leased as parkland for 25 years. With a planning panel about to consider the rezoning application, we decided to contest the council election, and I was elected. Council eventually resolved to accept a rezoning, subject to 45 per cent of the site, including the

best of the remnant vegetation, coming back for public open space and conservation.

Despite the torrid times and half-good-half-bad outcome, it has been satisfying to try to make local democracy work; to represent residents; to improve the system; to protect what people value about our suburbs, green wedges and open space and to see one's efforts rewarded by re-election. I have been glad of my generalist background in journalism and degree in political science, which I had thought of as my spectator sport and had never thought to practise.

Any Friends who have the stomach for this, please work as a team to elect like-minded councillors BEFORE the developers get their hands on your local treasures. As for me, I am hoping that soon, at last, it will be time to get those gloves on – that weeding is long overdue.



Janet Bolitho was well known for her involvement with the Friends of Port Melbourne Foreshore. She was elected to the Port Phillip Council in 2004 and is now Mayor.

I've found that life on Council can be bewilderingly busy. The wider strategic focus is not readily compatible with the dedicated attention to a particular reserve that I had been used to. However, I have been incredibly lucky to have been in the right place at the right time to have significant involvement in some major open space projects in Port Melbourne

Certain aspects of being in a Friends group and being on Council are similar. 'What do we want to achieve and how will we work together to achieve it' are questions that are as relevant on Council as in a Friends group.

In an inner urban municipality like Port Phillip, with pressing demands for social services, it can be hard to keep parks and open space on the top of the agenda. Paradoxically, Melbourne 2030 gives an opportunity for renewed attention on our network of open spaces as the shared space for a growing population.

Port Phillip councillors have developed principles to underpin our draft open space strategy to give open space the detailed and sophisticated consideration as the built environment.

Early in my term, I learnt that the only power attributed to the mayor in the Local Government Act is to chair Council meetings. I was advised that influence, rather than power, is the terrain of the mayor. My experience as a 'Friend' has taught me the importance of relationships and networks in getting things done, and the ethic of care which I aim to guide my practice as a councillor. I have learnt that I am one of seven, and to get my issues supported by other councillors requires skill and sensitivity.

Members of community groups have more power than they sometimes realise. They can make sure that an issue gains the attention of the council organisation, and support the elected representative in their stance on an issue.



For ten years, **Michael Norris** has been a writer and advocate on Melbourne environmental issues, and a leader of Friends groups. He was elected to Bayside Council last November.

August 2005 Should I stand? I'd be a good general Councillor but would I achieve more for our natural heritage on the outside? I asked officers, councillors, pressure groups, friends and Friends.

September 2005 OK, go for it! Losing the ability to lead campaigns should be outweighed by being an insider. I won't have to give up organising Friends groups but may have to declare an interest in that from time to time.

November 2005 My 900-word pamphlet includes 'I will resist destruction of any of the little remaining native vegetation, continue the fight against weeds, and urge restoration where feasible.' The paper labels me an "environmental activist".

1st December 2005 Sworn in and appointed as the Council's representative on five committees

with an environmental focus, including our 'Friends of Bayside Support Group'.

March 2006 I want my life back!?! It's a conveyor belt of items you have to process; a kaleidoscope of people and groups; an avalanche of paper; a roller-coaster of agendas, briefing, ceremonies, events and meetings. I hate it and love it.

April 2006 Messages for Friends Groups: **OK it's true: I am neglecting you but officers and councillors are overloaded so please don't get angry or paranoid.**

Help me to help you: read our agendas – especially the vital draft Council plan – and comment at least 6 hours before meetings

Never assume that I've read any document, read it the same way as you wrote it, or remembered what you said.

Saving a swamp

The Friends of Westona Wetlands was formed in 1993. Its focus is Truganina Swamp, 148 hectares of wetland within Hobsons Bay and owned by Melbourne Water.

Prior to 1993, local residents were concerned, frustrated and extremely angry about the 30 to 40 motor bikes that used the area for pleasure (or should I say just hooning around) most days of the week.

Melbourne Water were approached on many occasions to address the issue but we were repeatedly told it is just a drainage basin. We also approached our local council for assistance but once again no help was given. Due to the lack of assistance seven members of the community banded together to make a difference, and make a difference we certainly did.

Within 12 months we had cleared numerous truck loads of rubbish, car parts and remains of stolen cars from the site, we had also learnt about the flora and fauna (which we knew little about in the beginning), we seed collected, and with the assistance of a local retirement village we propagated our seeds and planted them

back into the swamp. We had also grown as a group from 7 tired residents to 130 family members and 11 corporate members, and our bird life had also grown from 20 species to 113 species as well as improved habitat for the rare Altona Skipper Butterfly.

Melbourne Water, the local council, the surrounding chemical industries and Koorringal Golf Club were now very keen to be part of this magnificent wetland and assist in the preservation and restoration of Truganina Swamp. Creating this significant wetland was only achievable by all parties working together.



Groups in action

Judy Hindle OAM (9395 8565) is the President of the Friends of Westona Wetlands (Altona area). Thirteen years ago, she saw the possibility of turning a severely degraded swamp into a quality wetland, and through dogged determination, she succeeded.

Experience Exchange (your space)

Exotic suckers

Dennis Cox of DSE has responded to the Friends of the Red-gum Triangle's request for help with suckers. He says damaged roots of Elms and Poplars will sucker if there is any light. He recommends chopping out the section of root that has suckered, cover the remaining root with a thickness of newspaper, and bury it.

Future Friends

One of our Friends has proposed the question 'Where does the future of Friends groups lie?', and offered some thoughts in answer:

Not in the Y generation. They may be with you for a while, possibly to get you on their CV, but with their 'must move-on' philosophy they are unlikely to be a long-term solution.

Not families—not the seemingly affluent ones with both parents working and struggling with a mortgage to pay for a house, two cars and private school fees, or the hard-pressed low-paid families of the outer suburbs, or the migrant and single parent families struggling to make a go of it.

There are exceptions, but none of the above are a secure solution.

The Baby Boomers of the 1950s are now coming on-stream in their many thousands.

No longer working for whatever reason, the kids have left home, they have time to fill, and they have many years ahead of them. The big challenge for Friends Groups is to attract them. How best to do this?

What do YOU think? We would really like to hear from you.

Share your questions, experiences or ideas – contact a Committee member (see page 4)

Make a note in your diary – 19 August!

This year's seminar ...

'Unmuddying the Waters'

What is a Green Algae Bloom and what to do about it? Who is responsible for removing supermarket trollies from your creek? Frogs, platypus and rakali in your park. Water quality indicators. Wet weeds and their replacement. And the 2006 Best Friend Awards. These are a just few of the things to be covered in our one-day Seminar on Saturday 19 August at the wonderful Melbourne Water Discovery Centre at Werribee. Spread the word. Booking is essential, but booking arrangements have been streamlined. See the accompanying flyer for details.



Geoff Durham is one of the Network's Group Liaison Officers

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Geoff's Group Grapevine

Moves are afoot to form a Friends of Wingan. Wingan Inlet, in Croajingolong National Park, is a favoured camping place for many people. Ranger-in-Charge Darryl Burns is keen to see a group operating along the lines of Friends of the Little Desert and Friends of Wyperfeld with a camping weekend once or twice a year. Expressions of interest to Leigh and Angela Stafford phone: 5154 2211 email: ocfg@bigpond.net.au.

The Friends of the Little Desert held their 2006 Working Bee in the park on the 27-28 May, camping at the Kiata camp ground. The program included planting. Les Smith 9874 2641

The Friends of Wyperfeld are celebrating their 30th Anniversary on the Queens Birthday weekend (10-12 June) with horehound beer at the traditional BBQ on Saturday night. All copies of their book *Wyperfeld - Victoria's First Mallee National Park* have been distributed except for one which has been signed by all six surviving Rangers-in-charge of the park - to be auctioned on the night. Everyone invited. Contact Jim Noelker 9890 4126.

And later in the year, the Friends of Terrick Terrick weekend will be on 7-8 October. Details in our next issue.

The Invasive Species Council has a CD-ROM on invasive species available free to Friends Groups. Contact Jason Doyle 9341 6508 email: director@invasives.org.au

And we welcome...

Friends of Ocean Grove Nature Reserve

Formed in 1995, this group staffs and maintains the reserve's Visitor Centre as well as being engaged in the usual Friends activities. Barry Lingham 5255 4291

Friends of Red Hill South Community Reserve

Also formed in 1995, the objectives of the group are 'To maintain Red Hill South Community Reserve with regard to fire safety and conservation of indigenous flora and fauna'. Glenys Greenwood 5989 3005

Vale Meinhard Holtz

The President of the Friends of Kurth Kiln, Meinhard Holtz, died on 31 March, a few days before the Kurth Kiln Festival. Meinhard, President of the group for seven years, was also the President of the Cardinia Hills Ragwort and Landcare Group and a founding member of Friends of Gembrook Park.

Litter research

Peter Cook is doing some research into litter in a private capacity as part of his advocacy for the introduction in Victoria of refunds on cans and bottles as in South Australia. He is seeking input from Friends groups. Interested groups can email their responses to the following questions to him at pcook@wildcoast.net.au

1. From your involvement in litter clean ups would you describe drink containers as a very small, small, medium, large or very large proportion of the litter collected?
2. If medium, large or very large, which of the following types of drink containers is most common? Glass bottles, plastic bottles, aluminium cans, flavoured milk cartons or plastic or polystyrene cups.
3. Please add any specific comments or observations you would like to make.

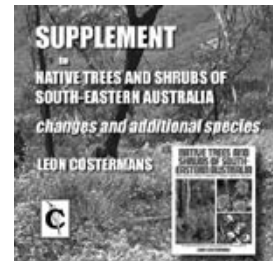
Correction

The area of the Brisbane Ranges National Park burnt in the January fire was 37.5%, not 87% as reported in our last issue. The error was an editorial miscalculation.

Update and expand your 'Native Trees & Shrubs'

Friends who work with the indigenous plants in their reserves will be familiar with Leon Costermans' *Native Trees and Shrubs of South-eastern Australia*. Leon has now produced a CD-ROM which updates this book and also describes and illustrates (with detailed photos) hundreds of other species - including many smaller shrubs.

Available through the VNPA with a discount for VNPA members. See information in *Update*. Ring the VNPA on 9347 5188, or go to the VNPA website www.vnpa.org.au (select 'Resources>View our catalogue')



Deadline for August issue: 15 July 2006

If undelivered, return to: Friends Network Committee c/- VNPA, 60 Leicester Street CARLTON 3053

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Print Post Approved
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