



MELTON ENVIRONMENT GROUP

No. AOO4OO49F

A.B.N 47 411575097

PO BOX 481 MELTON 3337

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER MARCH 2013

Winner of Melton Shire's 2009 Community Achievement Award for Community Project of the Year:
Arnolds Creek Biolink: creating a wildlife corridor through Melton

CORPORATE MEMBERS

Western Land Services



"Western Land Services are specialists in environmental management techniques, weed & vermin control."

Champion Agribusiness at the Victorian Small Business Champion Awards for 2007 & 2008 & 2007 Melton Business Excellence award, 2009 Powercor Melton Business Excellence Awards & 2009 Apprentice of the Year award.

MEG Facebook

Check for coming MEG events on Melton Environment Group Facebook page:
<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/pages/Melton-Australia/Melton-Environment-Group/139259387879>;

NEXT MEG MEETING

MEG's next meeting will be Wednesday 20th March at 7.30 in Don Nardella's office in Alexandra Street (beside old Fire Station)

2013: YEAR OF THE SNAKE

February 10th marked the Chinese New Year, & the beginning of the Year of the Snake, according to the Chinese horoscope. The Year of the Snake in 2013 is also the Year of the Water Snake. Perhaps the Year of the Water Snake could be seen as an auspicious year for environmental restoration of our local creeks, as most local environmental activity is focussed on our waterways.

ANOTHER WEATHER RECORD

Another heat record broken for Melbourne:
15 days over 30°C !

MEG EVENTS IN FEBRUARY

Watering at Brookfield,



Doug & Geraldine watering at Brookfield

On Saturday 2nd February Geraldine, Jenny, Doug & Daryl met at Brookfield beside Arnolds Creek to water plants. Since September 2012 there has been hardly any rain & the soil was hard & dry, even after recent rain at the end of January. Several heat wave days in December & January have taken a heavy toll of plants in Melton. Despite some watering in January some plants are already withered, although some of these could recover. Heavy rains at the very end of February were very welcome, & may save some plants!

The recent heat waves have taken a visible toll on native plants that have been planted locally, not just ours. Around Melton & even along the Western Highway between Melton & Deer Park many plants that have been planted along the wide medium strip appear withered & brown. However, many more are surviving, proving the overall resilience of native plants, especially those indigenous to this region. This graphically illustrates that we should be planting locally indigenous plants, from local provenance, as they are adapted to local weather extremes.

President
Treasurer/Secretary
Meetings:

Daryl Akers Phone: 0438 277 252
Doug Godsil Environmental Consultant: Peter Sell
3rd Wednesday of the month, at 7:30, at Don Nardella's office in Alexandra St (beside old Fire Station)

email: daryljakers@gmail.com
Facebook: Melton Environment Group

Bird walk at Arnolds Creek



On Sunday 24th February MEG hosted a bird walk in South Melton, along lower Arnolds Creek volcanic gorge. A group of 7 people braved the 30°C heat, walking along the footpath that runs along the top of the valley, looking into the canopies of the creekside trees. These included bird experts Nora Peters & Iain Denham. We walked from the Jimmy Melrose Reserve to Brooklyn Road, then back again.

A lone Pobblebonk was heard calling from the creek far below the track, while several Common Froglets were calling from a little further upstream. Pobblebonks are seldom heard this late in summer. About 60 bird species have been recorded from Arnolds Creek, however, bird sightings were disappointing, no doubt due to the heat. Iain counted 15 bird species for the morning.

<i>These included:</i>	Crested Pigeon
Spotted Dove	Magpie-lark
Rock Dove	Little Raven
Common Blackbird	Australian Magpie
Musk Lorikeet	Rainbow Lorikeet
Red Wattlebird	New Holland Honeyeater
Superb Fairywren	Willie Wagtail
Common Myna	Red-browed Finch

However, Nora's sharp eyes saved the day by spotting & photographing several spectacular insects. These were in the trees planted in the 1980's, which are now providing food & habitat for wildlife. These included a pair of Twisted-wing Moths mating, an Acacia Horned Treehopper as well as a Crusader Bug.



Twisted-Moths (M&F) (*Circopetes obtusata*)



Twisted Moth closeup (*Circopetes obtusata*)



Crusader Bug (*Mictis profana*)

The Acacia-Horned Treehoppers are seen being attended by ants. Several ants 'farm' sap-sucking bugs by protecting them from predators, being

rewarded by 'milking' the honeydew secreted by the bugs. Details on this behaviour on [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honeydew %28secretion%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honeydew_%28secretion%29);



Acacia Horned Treehopper (*Sextius virescens*)

BIRDWATCHING IN MELTON

The next bird walk will be along Toolern Creek in Melton South, on Sunday 24th March.

This will be followed by a walk at Eynesbury on Saturday 27th April.

Other bird walks may be:

Long Forest Mallee
Melton Botanic Garden
Brookfield
Melton Gilgai Woodland
Organ Pipes National Park

MEG EVENTS IN MARCH

Clean Up Australia Day Brookfield Sunday 3rd March

Ian Kiernan of Clean Up Australia Day writes:
'As most of you are gearing up for the oncoming year, team Clean Up is busy working to make Clean Up Australia Day 2013 the biggest ever. While many of us are making New Year's

resolutions to fix up our bodies, why not fix up our prized environment by choosing a site in your local community to clean up this year on Clean Up Australia Day. We know the spirit of volunteering is strong in Australia, with nearly 900 sites already registered but there's still a long way to go to reach our target of over 8000 sites. So be a good sport and join the winning team on Sunday 3rd March 2013 for this iconic event.

MEG will once more be participating in Clean Up Australia Day this year. This year we will be cleaning up at our planting site at Brookfield. We will meet at Arnolds Creek in Black Dog Drive (near the Black Dog Drive bridge) just west of the roundabout at the corner of Coburns Road & Black Dog Drive. There is a small kindergarten carpark here & access is very easy. The site is very child friendly. Melways Map 336 Ref G11.

Details on: <http://www.cleanupaustraliaday.org.au/>

Birdwalk at Toolern Creek

'Big Red' Sunday 24th March 9.00 – 11.00

There will be a bird walk in South Melton, along Toolern Creek. There is a footpath that runs along the creek. The creek forms a corridor for birds & other wildlife through Melton, from Toolern Vale in the north to the Toolern Regional Park in the south, thence to the Werribee River. Toolern Creek has been restored over several years, with many thousands of indigenous plants having been planted by Friends of Toolern Creek. Easy walking along a paved footpath & child friendly! Wear hats, walking shoes & suncream.

Meet at 'Big Red' beside the Western Freeway. Corner of Tamar Drive and Raymond Street, Melton South. Melway 337 Ref A12

MEG EVENTS IN APRIL

Birdwalk at Eynesbury

Saturday 27th April 9.00 – 11.00

There will be a birdwalk at Eynesbury, around the ornamental lake to the historic shearing shed & back, along the gravel walking track (no bushwalking required). Possibly finish at the bluestone cafe for snacks. we should see a variety of both wetland & woodland birds. Wear hats, walking shoes & suncream.

Meet in the carpark beside the ornamental lake. Melway 226 Ref H2 (or just follow the large roadside signs to Eynesbury)

President: Daryl Akers
Secretary: Doug Godsil
Meetings:

Phone: 0438 277 252
Environmental Advisor: Peter Sell
3rd Wednesday of the month at Don Nardella's office in Alex&ra St (beside old Fire Station) at 7:30

email: darylakers@gmail.com
Facebook: Melton Environment Group

PLANET ARK NATIONAL TREE DAY

MEG will again be participating in 2013 Planet Ark National Treeplanting Day on Sunday July 28th.

WATTLE DAY

September 1st is Wattle Day, the first day of Spring. Noted ornithologist & early Field Naturalists Club of Victoria member Archibald James Campbell, founded the 'Wattle Club' & advocated the creation of a 'Wattle Day' to commemorate these most well known of Australian flowers & as a celebration of Australia. Wattle Day is a fitting day for environmentalists to celebrate.

MEG will be participating Wattle Day by planting wattles at Brookfield on Sunday 1st September.

DAME PHYLLIS FROST PROJECT

MEG have just received another 1500 plants grown by women of the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, under the direction of Helen Scott & horticulture teacher Judy Allen. These are: 500 Kangaroo Grass, 500 Poa lab & 500 Wallaby Grass.

Many thanks to Judy Allen of Kangan Institute, Helen Scott of the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre & the women of the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre for growing these plants for both MEG & Friends of Toolern Creek. Thanks also to Lyn Holdsworth for picking them up with her plants!

When these are added to the 2300 plants from Melbourne Water late last year & the plants from City of Melton, MEG has several thousand plants ready for planting this winter.

Kangaroo Grass	Wallaby Grass	Poa lab
Varnish Wattle	Prickly Moses	Blackwood
Acacia provincialis	Black Wattle	Lightwood
Gold-dust Wattle	Golden Wattle	Indigofera
Eutaxia (Bush Pea)	Running Postman	Linum
River Bottlebrush	Woolly Teatree	Melicytis
Bursaria	Red Gum	Blue Box
Yellow Box	Grey Box	Lignum
Fragrant Saltbush	Berry Saltbush	Elderberry
Bulbine Lily	Turkey Bush	Plantago
Dianella longifolia	Buloke	

MEG CALENDER OF EVENTS

Clean Up Australia Day	Sunday 3 rd March
Birdwalk at Toolern Creek	Sunday 24 th March
Birdwalk at Eynesbury	Saturday 27 th April

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Treeplanting Day

Sunday 28th July

Wattle Day

Sunday 1st September

All events are at Brookfield unless stated

OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL EVENTS

Birding at Pinkerton & Eynesbury Forest



Birding in Eynesbury Forest

On Sunday 17th February Dave Torr of Birdlife Australia led a group of birdwatchers in Pinkerton Forest, Bush's Paddock & Eynesbury Forest. These areas not usually open to the public & are home to a large variety of woodland birds. Despite the 36°C heat the group still saw an impressive total of 74 bird species.



Boobook Owl at Eynesbury

Dave Torr summarised the day as follows: *'For a hot and dry day quite a good result. Some nice summer migrants - White-browed Woodswallow, White-winged Triller and Rufous Songlark. Good numbers of Diamond Firetails. One of the two Jacky Winters seen was a juvenile which is good, showing breeding. Biggest surprise was flushing two Boobook in Eynesbury, and biggest disappointment was not finding the Speckled Warblers this quarter.'*

email: darylakers@gmail.com

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A kangaroo was a surprising sight in Pinkerton Forest while 7 kangaroos were in Bush's Paddock. The kangaroos seem to have made themselves permanently at home in Bush' Paddock as 5 were seen here on the previous survey in November 2012. There is a mob of 30 kangaroos surviving on nearby Mt Cottrell so they probably moved from here. In a climate of rapid urban expansion where habitat for native wildlife is being bulldozed at an ever increasing & alarming pace, it is good to see a large iconic native mammal extending its range.

A surprising sight was a very large number of White-browed Woodswallows in Pinkerton Forest. These birds are not commonly seen in Pinkerton although they are regular summer visitors & they do sometimes breed here. They are more commonly seen in Melton Gilgai Woodland in Harkness Road. They are here for a short time only, arriving in October-November then leave again in about February, after breeding. Perhaps the birds were gathering here before flying back north?



Diamond Firetails at Eynesbury

At the very end of the walk the group was treated to the sight of a variety of birds coming in to drink. As well as watching Red-rumped Parrots & White-plumed Honeyeaters a special treat was watching groups of Diamond Firetails dropping in among the basalt rocks to bathe & drink. These magnificent small birds are quite vulnerable & are only seen now in a few equally vulnerable woodland remnants.

Birds observed were:

Stubble Quail	Australian Shelduck
Pink-eared Duck	Wood Duck
Pacific Black Duck	Grey Teal
Chestnut Teal	Hardhead

Musk Duck	Australasian Grebe
White Ibis	Straw-necked Ibis
White-necked Heron	White-faced Heron
Little Pied Cormorant	Pied Cormorant
Great Cormorant	Darter
Kestrel	Brown Falcon
Whistling Kite	Wedge-tailed Eagle
Little Eagle	Australian Crake
Purple Swamphen	Dusky Moorhen
Eurasian Coot	Masked Lapwing
Red-kneed Dotterel	Black-fronted Dotterel
Common Pigeon	Spotted Dove
Crested Pigeon	Galah
Long-billed Corella	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
Crimson Rosella	Eastern Rosella
Red-rumped Parrot	Southern Boobook
Kookaburra	Brown Treecreeper
Superb Fairywren	White-plumed Honeyeater
Red Wattlebird	New Holland Honeyeater
Striated Pardalote	Yellow-rumped Thornbill
Weebill	Magpie
Dusky Woodswallow	White-browed Woodswallow
White-winged Triller	Black-faced Cuckooshrike
Rufous Whistler	Grey Shrikethrush
Willie Wagtail	Grey Fantail
Magpielark	Little Raven
Jacky Winter	Welcome Swallow
Tree Martin	Golden-headed Cisticola
Little Grassbird	Rufous Songlark
Common Myna	Common Starling
House Sparrow	Australian Reed Warbler
Diamond Firetail	Red-browed Finch
Zebra Finch	European Goldfinch

COMING ENVIRONMENTAL EVENTS

Botanical Art Meetup – Melton & Brimbank

Melton: Willows Historic Park 7th March

Brimbank: Cairnlea Community Hub 21st March

Amanda Dodd writes:

- Do you want to know more about the local plants in your neighbourhood?
- Do you love to draw or wish you had the confidence to give it a go?
- This exciting new group is open to anyone from beginners to professional artists.
- Come and relax, share your talents and learn some new ones.
- Most of all have a bit of fun while falling in love the plants of the West.
- Free

For more info contact Amanda Dodd,

amanda_dodd@live.com.au;

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Secretary: Doug Godsil
Meetings:

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Environmental Advisor: Peter Sell

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The Botanical Illustration group aims to bring people together from the arts and ecology fields to help each other learn new skills. There is no 'teacher' we just help each other.

I will bring starter equipment. However, if you are already involved in art and have a preferred media please bring it along. Supported by the Friends of Iramoo. No skills required, just a good attitude!

Cheers, Amanda

- Melton - Mac Cottage, Willows Historic Park, Reserve Rd, Melton Thursday 7th March -8 pm
- Brimbank - Cairnlea Community Hub, Carmody Drive, Cairnlea, Thursday 21st March 6pm - 8pm+

Rural Property Planning Workshop Bacchus Marsh Saturday 23rd March

Will Hogg of Port Philip & Westernport CMA writes: 'Do you own 5 to 100 acres??

Are you looking for assistance and advice on how to produce a plan for your property?

Come to your local introductory property planning workshop to learn about biodiversity, pest plant and animal management, water sensitive farm design and a lot more...

Topics will include

Pest plant and animal management:

- Preventing and controlling pest animals
- Monitoring and removal of weed infestations
- Approaches for integrated weed and vermin control on your property.

Water sensitive farm design:

- Set up your farm for improved water quality and better animal health
- Identify and manage erosion
- Correct management of dams, creeks and gullies
- Funding opportunities to help you better manage your waterways

Biodiversity:

- How to manage remnant grasslands and bushland
- Identifying priority areas for revegetation
- Learn how biodiversity can improve your whole farming system.
- Funding opportunities to improve biodiversity on your block

10am till 4pm, Saturday 23rd March, The Laurels Community College, 229 Main St, Bacchus Marsh

Admission free with refreshments & tasty lunch provided. Registrations essential, as numbers are limited. Register online at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/BY7L5SF>

OR for more information please contact

William Hogg: Mobile 0418 596 179, Email:

william.hogg@ppwcm.vic.gov.au;

RSVP by 20th of March

VNPA Naturewatch

Grassland Monitoring Season

Plains Yam Daisy monitoring – April 2013

If counting frogs and moths isn't enough, you'll have a chance to survey the culturally significant Plains Yam Daisy in April 2013. The survey, to be led by Merri Creek Management Committee, will open to registration early next year. Stay tuned.

This project is supported by funding from the Australian Governments Caring for our Country Community Action Grants. NatureWatch is the Victorian National Parks Association's community monitoring program. The VNPA is dedicated to the protection of Victoria's unique natural environment and biodiversity'

Western Water: Landcare & Environment Walk Sunday 26th May 9.00 – 1.00

Western Water will celebrate the biodiversity work conducted along the Werribee River & grassland patches within Surbiton Park. River walk & environmental displays. Details TBA

OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

Anti-Predator Behaviour in Zebra Finches: request for information on Zebra Finches

Nicole Butler, a PhD candidate at Zoology Dept at La Trobe University is conducting a study into Zebra Finches: 'Anti-Predator Behaviour in Zebra Finches'. Nicole recently spoke to PLEG at their last meeting, discussing her study project. Zebra Finches are found in mainly warm temperature zones in Australia, around waterholes and open grasslands. She will be studying their markings, behaviour, food requirements (she is going to find out which species of grass seeds they favour). Breeding is dependent on availability of suitable food, adequate shelter, shrubs and taller trees are preferred.

Information sheets were handed out to the group and a request was made for group members to

assist with recording of information of sightings of birds, as well as time of day, nests, weather conditions and other nearby bird species. Nicole is requesting information on Zebra Finch activity, such as: date, time of day, weather conditions, location (as exact as possible), count, male/female/juvenile, nests, other nearby bird species. Contact details: n.butler@latrobe.edu.au; 0401 677 105 or Eremaea: www.eremaea.com; Information on these beautiful little birds can be seen on: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zebra_Finch; & <http://www.birdsinbackyards.net/species/Taeniopygia-guttata>;

Study sites include:

- Pinkerton Forest and Bush's Paddock
- Western Treatment Plant, Werribee
- Mount Rothwell Biodiversity Interpretation Centre
- You Yangs Regional Park
- Brisbane Ranges National Park
- Kinnairds Wetland, Numurkah
- Winton Wetland, Winton South
- Murray-Sunset National Park
- Wyperfeld National Park

The project will include:

- Presentation of a gliding model of a predator to analyse the anti-predator behaviour of zebra finches
- Particularly interested in the response of parents with active nests
- Playback experiments using the alarm calls of other, nearby bird species
- Analyse the response of zebra finches to these calls to see if they recognise them as alarm calls



Zebra Finches in Pinkerton Link

The Pinkerton Link Paddock is a 12 ha paddock that is the subject to a long term environmental restoration project by Western Water, in partnership with Greening Australia & PLEG. A Grey Box Grassy Woodland will be recreated here, creating a biolink between Pinkerton Forest & Bush's Paddock Grey Box Woodland. This is expected to take many decades! Many hundreds of trees, grasses & understory plants have already been planted here.

About half a metre of topsoil has been removed to reduce nutrients, left here after 25 years of depositing biosolids. A large area has been direct-seeded with *Stipa glabra*. The seeded site is now a sea of waving speargrass. Zebra Finches are now taking advantage of this lush growth of speargrass, with small groups flying into the new grassland to feed. These vulnerable birds are expanding their range from Bush's Paddock & Pinkerton Forest into the newly created grassland in the Link Paddock, illustrating that it is becoming a biolink already.



Speargrass in Pinkerton Link Paddock

NATURE OUT WEST

Nature out West is new blog that has been created to highlight the beauty & diversity of Melton's flora & fauna, as well as its more spectacular landscape. Everyone is invited to contribute or add photos of our native wildlife & vegetation.

MELTON WILDLIFE

Wallabies in Melton

This Swamp Wallaby (*Wallabia bicolor*) was one of 2 seen in Wallaby Gully at Exford recently.

Wallabies are regular residents here, hence the name Wallaby Gully. One took refuge on among

planted vegetation on the hilltop site at Exford (owned by Western Water).



Two Wallabies (a mother with juvenile following) were also seen in lower Arnolds Creek volcanic gorge in January. They took refuge beneath a Peppercorn Tree at the top of the steep, rocky escarpment. Wallabies are sometimes, but not regularly, seen here, beside the houses. Wallabies are more regularly seen in Toolern Regional Park south of Melton & along the Werribee River.



Lower Arnolds Creek volcanic gorge

Jewel Beetle at Brookfield

This large, 4 cm long crimson-coloured Variable Jewel Beetle, (*Temognatha variabilis*) was found at our restoration site at Brookfield recently. It was found among the wildflowers we planted in the mulch last year under the Grey Box patch near the village. It may have fallen from the Grey Box tree above after the morning's rain. Small blue & gold Jewels Beetles, about 1 cm long, can be found in Long Forest Mallee, on Teatree blossoms; but this beetle is spectacular, to say the least. Discovery of this magnificent beetle is something of a surprise & indicative of the diversity of Melton wildlife.

According to 'The Insects of Australia' (CSIRO) Jewel Beetles 'include some of the most brilliantly coloured of all insects'.

Details of Variable Jewel Beetle on:

http://www.brisbaneinsects.com/brisbane_jewelbeetles/VariableJewel.htm; & other info on Jewel Beetles in general (Buprestidae) can be seen on: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buprestidae>; & <http://www.ces.csiro.au/aicn/system/bupresti.htm>;



Variable Jewel Beetle at Brookfield

Departure of White-browed Woodswallows

On the last day of October 2012 a large flock of Whitebrowed Woodswallows was seen in Bush's Paddock. At least 300+ were milling about over the grass, hawking for insects. Some were on the fence, some on the track, some in the grass; all very noisy. Other large similarly size flocks of these birds were recorded in other areas on Birdline, at about that time.

On 17th February 2013 the quarterly Birdlife Australia survey led by Dave Torr observed large numbers of White-browed Woodswallows in the adjacent Pinkerton Forest. They were very noisy & very conspicuous. They were still there a week later.

However on the 27th February they were noticeably absent. Perhaps they have departed for their return north. Perhaps the rain the day before may even have spurred their departure? Perhaps they gather together in large flocks before migrating both north & south?

We await their return on the approach of summer 2013.