

# Friends of Skeleton Creek & Altona Bay Wetlands Inc.



## April 2016 Newsletter

### NEXT ACTIVITY:

#### **Mulching & Watering Day**

**Sunday 17th April, 1 pm - 3 pm**

**Markham Way/Merton St, Altona Meadows**

**[MELWAY MAP 208, D3]**

This activity had to be moved from the previously advertised Clarendon Crt, Seabrook, site, due to little to do there this month.

Meet at sign-in table at Markham Way gate to shared path. Though we may not have enough mulch for the day's activity, Andrew Webster, Senior Conservation Ranger, Hobsons Bay Council, came up with the sensible suggestion of having a watering team as well, especially as the council has a new water tank trailer with a 'super-duper' pump. Thanks Andrew.

Conservation Ranger Libby Rigby, who will be with us on the day, is bringing rakes, buckets - and the new water trailer! Further information about this activity from FoSC Secretary, Denise Perryman, 0429 167 013.



**Seabrook Primary School**



#### **'School Extravaganza' at Carinza Ave**

Our president Angela Whiffin is again organising her 'School Extravaganza' for Seabrook Primary School visit to Carinza Ave, Altona Meadows (just off Point Cook Rd) on Wednesday 20th April.

Some 150 students will visit the creek between 9:30 am and 2 pm.

We will have three student groups: 'A' Group - bug table, staffed by Greg, John Hogg, and a Hobsons Bay Council officer; 'B' Group - a 'walk and talk' with Angela, focussing on litter issues and the natural habitat; and 'C' Group - planting instruction by Denise.

Angela is organising council staff, tools, tables, and prizes.

### PAST ACTIVITIES

#### **Jute Matting Down Day**

##### **Bromage Close, Hoppers Crossing**

We had a site preparation activity at Bromage Close, Hoppers Crossing, on Thursday, 31st March, when we put jute weed mats down. John Stirk, Greg Orr, Angela Whiffin, Denise Perryman, and Darren Wright, Wyndham City Council's Open Space Community Engagement Officer, spread out three long jute mats and hammered in pins to keep it down. Excitement came with the sighting of a tiger snake, which we kept well clear of! Thanks all for your efforts.

#### **Mulching Day, Sunday 3rd April**

##### **Bromage Close, Hoppers Crossing**



This was our first big activity for the year where we went it alone without the usual assistance of our friends from the Dera Sacha Sauda group.

We have been 'collecting' locals residents to help us recently and, with others from outside Hoppers Crossing - 13 turned up to help, as well as Darren Wright from Wyndham Council. Somehow the literal 'mountain of mulch' had been dumped some 70 metres away and we had to find a practical solution to transfer all the mulch by wheelbarrow and council trailer.

Not to be deterred, we ploughed on wheeling, forking, raking and spreading the mulch - on what

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turned out to be a 'feel good day' with good weather, company, and some brain activity.

This report is not complete without special mention of Kristine's artistic efforts – with rake in hand, she was able to create a very thick and neat linear mulch line all along the dirt track!

Since the working bee (as part of the project organised by Denice) basalt boulders were delivered and placed along the mulch by a contractor at the Bromage Close site. (Shown in photo below.)



*With rake in hand, Kristine Konings showed her artistic efforts with the mulch along the dirt track, ably assisted by John Stirk on wheelbarrow.*

*[Note the long jute matting in place, along the slope of Skeleton Creek. The matting will protect against weeds, protect the topsoil, and promote new growth when we plant there later this year.]*

### **Bayside College Activity Dates Set**

We have decided on the following dates for the student activities for our community partner Bayside College (Kororoit Creek Rd, Williamstown):

Tue 3rd May – bike ride (Andrew Webster has sent Denice the appropriate brochures)

Tue 17th May – weeding, rubbish and bird watching day

Tue 24th May – planting with 200 plants

Tue 31st May – backup day, in case of inclement weather

Tue 14th June – backup day, in case of inclement weather



*The beautiful gum tree was chosen by Denice as a backdrop for the volunteers' group photo (with cups in hand) during the mulch (sic) earned afternoon tea.*



*The last of the literal 'mountain of mulch' we transferred by wheelbarrow and council trailer.*

### **Boneseed Saga Continues**

If you have been reading our newsletter lately about the invasive Boneseed in the Cheetham Wetlands - the saga continues.

Peter Kennedy from DELWP (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning) accepts that the boneseed is on their land.

The best time for removal is June to October.

Denice will contact Peter Kennedy in June about this.

*Boneseed is a South African plant, first introduced to Australia as an ornamental in the 1850s. Boneseed impacts adversely on native vegetation.*

*It's prevalent in the You Yangs, where it was introduced to control soil erosion. Parks Victoria has a program for eradicating it.*



## The Cheetham Wetlands

**‘An internationally recognised marine habitat right on our doorstep’**

*Parks Victoria Ranger Bernie McCarrick took a Friends of Skeleton Creek group on a tour of the Cheetham Wetlands on Tuesday 15th March. Bernie has a wealth of knowledge about the birds and the history of the old Cheetham Saltworks, which became the Ramsar-protected Cheetham Wetlands. Friends of Skeleton Creek’s Elizabeth Simpson arranged the tour with Bernie McCarrick.*

By Elizabeth Simpson

**T**he Cheetham Wetlands is a fascinating 420 hectares of significant salt marsh and grassy woodland located between the new development of Saltwater Coast and Point Cook Coastal Park, and where Skeleton Creek empties into Port Phillip Bay. It had always been an important hunting area for the indigenous people and was, until quite recently, a productive commercial saltworks.

In 1996 Cheetham Wetlands was set aside to protect this fragile ecosystem and the over 200 species of migratory and indigenous birds using the artificial and natural lagoons. Since Parks Victoria took over management of the area, there has been ongoing removal of weed species and a push to regenerate the salt marshes and grassy woodlands. Parks Victoria has been pretty successful in the removal and control of box thorn and boneseed and there has already been significant re-growth of indigenous flora.

Unfortunately, like most of the open spaces around Melbourne, there is pressure from urban development and feral animals. When we visited Cheetham, we saw a contractor setting out traps for foxes, which, along with feral cats, are a tremendous problem for the visiting birds. But at least something is being done!

The Wetlands are protected as internationally important habitats for migratory birds and are not open to the public. The mix of fresh and saltwater environments has created valuable feeding grounds for large numbers of migratory birds from the Northern Hemisphere which visit the area each year between September and March.

We were a little late to get to the Wetlands as most of the adult birds had already left when we visited mid-March. However, there were still a number of adolescent stints visible on the marshes so we were not completely disappointed, but normally there would be a much greater variety of wading birds.

In any event, the bird count was still pretty good: white fronted chats, white faced herons (in impressive numbers!), a most magnificent great egret, large numbers of cormorants, both little black and little pied, black winged stilt, pacific gull, and royal spoonbill.

Bernie said that he had previously seen quite a number of



*The white faced herons were seen in impressive numbers.*



*Pictured at the Friends of Skeleton Creek Cheetham Wetlands tour were, from left: Angela Whiffin, Elizabeth Simpson, Bernie McCarrick, John Stirk, Greg Orr, Ann Barclay (photo by Denice Perryman).*



*In 1996 Cheetham Wetlands was set aside to protect this fragile ecosystem and the over 200 species of migratory and indigenous birds using the artificial and natural lagoons.*

eastern golden plovers, but our luck simply wasn't in that morning! Naturally such a quantity of small birds creates good feeding potential for the raptors and, as we headed back to the parking area, there was a flurry beside the track and a magnificent black falcon took flight with something in its claws. A lot of speculation as to what was prey - could have been a small rabbit or possibly a lizard of some kind. Very exciting!

On behalf of those of us from the Friends of Skeleton Creek – Angela, Denice, Ann, John, Greg and myself – I would like to extend sincere thanks to Bernie McCarrick. He is a wonderful guide as he has a real ‘hands on’ approach to the Cheetham Wetlands and is very passionate about the management and protection of this fragile and truly interesting area.

We are so lucky in Victoria to have such diverse habitats available to us and I for one am extremely grateful that we can access this marvelous and internationally recognised marine habitat right on our doorstep.

I am looking forward to visiting again in November. Bernie says this should be a really good time to see the migratory birds in large numbers. So ‘watch this space’!

## Removal of Sheoaks Clarified

Gerard Morel, Waterways and Land Officer, Werribee Catchment, Melbourne Water, updated us to clarify Melbourne Water's and Wyndham Council's long-term strategy of removing sheoak in stages along Skeleton Creek from Waterhaven Estate to Boardwalk Blvd, Point Cook.

The sheoak in question is Swamp Sheoak (*Casuarina glauca*) (pictured here).



It's originally from NSW and spreads by suckering, and forms huge dense, dark stands of hundreds of trees.

In time, if left untouched, the creek's banks would become a tunnel of sheoaks, devoid of other bank vegetation.

However, as nankeen night herons are using them, and the Swamp sheoaks are a source of shade, they are not going to remove all of them at once.

When other trees have been planted such as red gums and the indigenous Drooping sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*) (pictured here) and have grown sufficiently to provide alternative shade and habitat for the nankeen night herons will all the Swamp sheoaks be replaced.



Melbourne Water is also removing a lot of spiny rush along the creek.

Gerard said Melbourne Water has even had a drone fly up the creek to map it all (that would be great viewing on our Facebook page).

A printed colour photo Gerard sent us of the removal sites was shared at our April meeting.

## Melbourne Water 'Media Stars'

Denice Perryman, John Dawes and Kristine Konings met with Gerard Morel from Melbourne Water, and a media assistant, at the creek near the 'Denice Perryman Seat', Altona Meadows on Tue 5<sup>th</sup> April.

We were videoed in an interview with Gerard about the grants process with Melbourne Water.

Denice was able to say very flattering - but truthful comments about Gerard and Melbourne Water, and how appreciative we were with the current arrangements.

## Educational/Interpretative Signage Progress

Our environmental expert friend Bob Winters is happy for his local flora and fauna descriptions to be used on the Hobsons Bay Council approved signage.

We are currently filling out the grant application and getting details of signage costs.

Cathy Miles is our council contact.

## Data mapping Skeleton Creek



At our April meeting Greg Orr brought up the idea of data mapping Skeleton Creek with GPS co-ordinate references, pinpointing where our conservation activities have been as an historical record, including local fauna and flora habitat information.

John Dawes said Colleen Miller, Co-ordinator NatureWest, had shown him at NatureWest's Werribee Park Homestead her conservation data mapping project using the Esri ArcGIS software. [GIS (Geographic Information System) is a computer system for capturing, storing, checking, and displaying data related to positions on Earth's surface.]

Colleen has spent many hours in data mapping creeks and grasslands in Melbourne's west, including Skeleton Creek. This has included identifying stormwater outlets along the creek, which is often richer in biodiversity.

Colleen also has her own website with thousands of quality images of flora and fauna, mainly from Southern Victoria, that help to identify Australian plants, grasslands and bush. Her website is worth a visit:

<http://www.victorianflora.com/>

John, a NatureWest volunteer, is now working with Colleen on migrating her stand-alone GIS data to another platform for public access and viewing via the Internet, including mobile for referencing when out in the field.

It would be a bonus, too, if Colleen's ArcGIS data is integrated or cross-referenced with her photos from her Victorian Flora website.

## Lions Club 100 years – donating \$100,000

Lions Clubs around Australia will be donating more than \$100,000 to over 100 local projects as part of its 'Community 100' program.

We will investigate possible grants for our educational/interpretative signage for along Hobsons Bay Council's side of the creek. Denice will get prices for the grant we are applying for with Hobsons Bay. She will send this information on to former councillor John Hogg, who has offered to complete the grant application.

Thanks to FoSC member Catherine Curtain for telling us at the April meeting about the Lions Club 'Community 100' program.

## Vale Bernie Fox

Bernie Fox was a great friend to the Friends conservation groups of Victoria. He was a key member of the Victorian Environment Friends Network from 1999 to 2009, but retained the task of the email distribution of the Friends Network Newsletter. He is a past Councillor and President of the Victorian National Parks Association. Perhaps Bernie's most well-known contribution was that he campaigned tirelessly to have more than 1200 hectares of land added to the Brisbane Ranges National Park in Victoria.



## Morning Tea for Wyndham Volunteers

FoSC member Wrenford Brown sent us details of Wyndham Council's Volunteers Morning Tea, Tuesday 10th May at 10 am.

This is in recognition of the efforts and commitment of Wyndham's volunteers, as part of the National Volunteer Week 'Morning Tea'.

Interested FoSC volunteers should register at

<https://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/residents/community/volunteeringinwyndham/morningtea>

## Membership 2015/2016

### Friends of Skeleton Creek & Altona Bay Wetlands Inc.

Your volunteering at our activities is highly valued, even if you can only find time to contribute a few hours during the year.

Membership is not compulsory, but it can help you feel more connected with our group.

Cost is:

- Individual FoSC Membership/Mailing List - \$10.00
- Family FoSC Membership/Mailing List - \$15.00

Membership is effective from the AGM date of 4<sup>th</sup> November 2015 through to the next AGM and renewal date of 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2016.

Payment details are on the FoSC Membership Form.

You can request the membership form any time by emailing: [friendsofskeletoncrk@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofskeletoncrk@gmail.com)

**F**riends of Skeleton Creek meetings are held the first Wednesday in the month, starting at 7:30 pm, Old Laverton School, Altona Meadows (corner Kiora St and Cameron Ave).

All are welcome!

The next FoSC meeting is on Wednesday 4th May.



*The Friends of Skeleton Creek & Altona Bay Wetlands Inc. gratefully acknowledge the support of Melbourne Water*

## FRIENDS OF SKELETON CREEK

### 2016 CALENDAR

*\*\* Starting and finishing time of activities are 1 pm to 3 pm, unless otherwise advised.*

**Sun 17 Apr** - Markham Way, Altona Meadows

**Sun 22 May** - Clarendon Court, Seabrook

**Tue 14 June** - Midweek planting, 10 am to 12 pm, Clarendon Court, Seabrook

**Sun 26 Jun** - Bromage Close, Hoppers Crossing

**Sun 24 Jul** - National Tree Day (alternative day), Creek Water Close, Altona Meadows

**Sun 14 Aug** - Bromage Close, Hoppers Crossing

**Sun 25 Sep** - Bromage Close, Hoppers Crossing

**Sun 23 Oct** - Merton St/Markham Way, Altona Meadows

**Sun 27 Nov** - Bromage Close, Hoppers Crossing

*Note: sometimes we may need to adjust our plans close to the time of each activity.*

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- Edited and produced by John Dawes, using Serif PagePlus DTP software
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Contributions to the newsletter are welcome.

Please send to: [friendsofskeletoncrk@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofskeletoncrk@gmail.com)

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