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FRIENDS OF SKELETON CREEK

Volunteers restoring our local creek



October/November 2017 e-Newsletter

OUR AIMS

- Conserving, protecting and enhancing the creek and its catchment
- Educating the community and schools groups about the creek and the need to conserve it
- Enhancing the connection to our community with the environment

Friends of Skeleton Creek ELSEWHERE



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OUR YEAR THAT WAS

The last of our working bees for the year was held on Sunday 26th November.

Looking at our year that was, our group can celebrate a very productive and fun one!

We had 18 working bees, which included:

- Pre-working bee preparations
- Stake & guard removal
- Jute mat laying
- Sign rejuvenation/maintenance
- Mulching
- Plantings (qty 2000 put in)

Our sites for our working bees in 2017 were:

- Bromage Close, Hoppers Crossing
- Clarendon Court/Point Cook Rd, Seabrook
- Creek Waters Close, Altona Meadows

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Our community and school talks included:

- Seabrook Primary School field day
- Truganina South Primary School talk
- Tarneit Senior College
- Wyndham Council 'Green Series' talk, Point Cook
- 1st Point Cook Joeys
- Wyndham Seniors Week 'Talk & Walk'

Our community representations/promotions included:

- Hobsons Bay Australia Day, Logan Reserve, Altona
- Hobsons Bay Community Expo, Louis Joel Centre, Altona
- Wyndham Council's 'Suburbs to Sea' (Green Living Series), Wyndham Civic Centre
- Radio interview 88.9WynFM's 'Life & Style' program (Denice)

Our group excursions included:

- Mt Rothwell, Little River
- Lake Elizabeth, Great Otway National Park
- McClelland Sculpture Park, Langwarrin
- Werribee Gorge picnic & walk
- Anakie Gorge picnic & walk
- Australian Garden, Cranbourne

Our grant funding came from:

- Melbourne Water Environment Grant - \$10,042
- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) signage - \$8000
- Melbourne Water Group Support Grant - \$660
- Altona Lions Club - \$250 (Markham Way/Merton St plants)
- Hobsons Bay City Council - \$800 (Seabrook Primary School Field Day, plus promotional material)
- Wyndham City Council - \$150 (Seniors Festival)

To all our volunteers, Melbourne Water, Hobsons Bay and Wyndham council conservation staff, and HBCC Wetlands Ward councillors - a big 'thank you' for your efforts and support in helping our group to conserve, protect and enhance the creek and its catchment :)

The AGM PowerPoint presentation of our year's activities can be accessed from our [NatureWest page](#) (PDF is 7.8 Mb in size).

PAST ACTIVITIES

Volunteers brave a windy afternoon at Bromage Close

Sunday 24th September

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It was a challenging, windy afternoon at our activity at Bromage Close, Hoppers Crossing - but our intrepid bunch of 11 volunteers spread eight truckloads of mulch under the direction of Sal, our Wyndham Council conservation officer. Nice to see new volunteers, including young talent. The welcomed afternoon tea, provided by Denice Perryman was a reward for the effort :)

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Tuesday 17th October



It was a hand-weeding exercise on our sloping planting site between Clarendon Crt & Point Cook Rd

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for lunch by FOSC Secretary Denise Perryman were appreciated.

A mulch-moving and spreading afternoon at Altona Meadows

Sunday 22nd October



A small group of volunteers were on hand for a mulch moving and spreading afternoon at one of our established plantings, just off the Skeleton Creek Trail, Markham Way, Altona Meadows.

Jute mat laying at Bromage Close, Hoppers Crossing

Sunday 26th November

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A small gang of volunteers were at our last working bee for the year at our Bromage Close, Hoppers Crossing, site. The job was to lay down jute matting on the track (created through historical usage) opposite our recent plantings, in preparation for next year's plantings.

The jute matting replaces mulch, which we've found can get washed away by heavy rain and rising creek levels. Our work here, including the placement of boulders, is helping to improve the habitat of the local endangered Growling Grass Frog.

A story about our work at Bromage Close by journalist Alesha Capone was published in the Wyndham Star Weekly, which can be accessed from [here](#).



TREE VANDALISM

Over the AFL Grand Final weekend (30 Sep - 1 Oct) a wanton and disgraceful act of tree vandalism occurred at our plantings at Carinza Reserve, Altona Meadows, where the children's playground and Rotary picnic shelter and BBQ are located.

Since then the Hobsons Bay Council conservation team has removed the damaged trees and replaced them with new ones. Warning signage to potential tree vandals is also to be placed there.

The incident, along with graffiti vandalism to one of our new interpretive signs opposite the creek, was followed up in an article by journalist Goya Dmytryshchak at the Maribyrnong & Hobsons Bay Star Weekly, which can be accessed from [here](#).

CALL TO ACTION

Recording Skeleton Creek Frogs

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record frog species in the Skeleton Creek catchment area.



Enhancing Life and Liveability

#frogcensus

"More frog monitors on the ground will help build a better picture of frog distribution and population trends," James Frazer, Coordinator of Melbourne Water's Frog Census, told our group. He stressed that this data will help Melbourne Water to further target its waterway management to benefit frogs.

"Skeleton Creek remains highly significant as it continues to support our 'key-note' frog species - the endangered Growling Grass Frog."

Common species such as Eastern Common Froglet, Eastern Banjo Frog and Spotted Marsh Frog have remained within the Skeleton Creek catchment.

Two other common species were documented several years ago - the Striped Marsh Frog and Common Spadefoot Toad. More frog recordings are urgently needed to determine if these two species are still present. You can find out more about these species on the Melbourne Water Frog Census app (*see link below*).

Six frog species have been observed in the Skeleton Creek catchment over the past 10 years to 2016, however, species composition has changed slightly. James said a higher species diversity would have likely occurred historically in the Skeleton Creek catchment, pre-European colonisation and clearing.

"The reduced species diversity at present reflects a range of (interacting) factors contributing to the decline of frog populations such as habitat loss, pollution, disease and feral predators."

More data is still needed for Skeleton Creek, James Frazer told us - particularly upstream Skeleton Creek, near the source at Mt Cottrell, and downstream of Williams Landing (south of the freeway), either side of Boardwalk Blvd, Point Cook.

So we encourage you to download the Melbourne Water Frog Census app for your smartphone and record and report frogs calling near you. You might even 're-discover' our two missing common species! Download the app from [here](#).



SOCIAL OUTING

Tuesday 10th October

It was a perfect sunny day for our FoSC social excursion to the **Australian Garden, Cranbourne**.

The garden is set in a stunning landscape that showcases the beauty and diversity of Australian flora.

We completed our walkabout of the beautiful native garden, followed by a pleasant shared BYO picnic lunch under a pergola in the grounds.

FRIENDS DAY OUT

Hobsons Bay Council hosts a Friends' day out

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For the annual Hobsons Bay Council's 'Friends' Groups Day Out', we were treated to a talk and tour of the Werribee Treatment Plant, incl bird watching, followed by a catered lunch at Melbourne Water's visitor centre. HBCC's day out is a "thank you" to the friends' groups for their volunteering efforts in the municipality. Representatives were invited from Friends of Greenwich Bay, Friends of Lower Kororoit Creek, Friends of Williamstown Wetlands, Friends of Skeleton Creek, and Friends of Laverton Creek.

Thank you to HBCC and Ranger Libby Rigby for organising it all. Information about the Werribee Treatment Plant, including its Open Days, from [here](#).

GROUP BIRD WALK

Hobsons Bay Council's Spring Bird Walk

A stroll along Skeleton Creek

Tuesday 4th November

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We had a good turnout for Hobsons Bay Council's spring bird walk, led by Senior Conservation Ranger Andrew Webster. We started our walk from the playground and picnic area at Creek Waters Close, Altona Meadows, and followed the shared Skeleton Creek Trail down to the Sanctuary Lakes footbridge and estuary.



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members) among us who helped identify interesting birds. The sightings included the prominent Black Swans and cygnets, Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo, White Ibis (*pictured left*), Red Wattlebird, Australian Reed Warbler (*pictured below*), White-headed Stilt, White-plumed Honeyeater, Green Finch, and Welcome Swallow (*pictured bottom*).



One of our bird experts said, on average, you would expect to see 30-35 bird species along this section of the creek.

At the end of the walk, back at Creek Waters Close, we enjoyed a picnic lunch provided by FoSC Secretary Denice Perryman.

Thank you to Andrew and Denice for organising this bird watching event.



More information about the birds above can be accessed from:

<http://www.birdlife.org.au/>

** Photo credits: David Nice, who took the brilliant photos of the birds, shown here, on the walk (which he also posted to our Facebook page)*



PROJECT REPORT

Spiny Rush

Weeding out a scourge of Skeleton Creek

Spiny rush is a serious environmental weed and declared noxious weed for Victoria.

Gerard Morel, Waterways and Land Officer, Werribee Catchment, Melbourne Water, explains the spiny rush project being undertaken along Skeleton Creek and the challenges of eradicating it.

The Melbourne Water project is to control spiny rush, *Juncus acutus*, along Skeleton Creek between Sayers Rd and Palmers Rd. Spiny rush is a salt-tolerant rush from the northern hemisphere. It's fairly

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On most of the creek, there are just patches and isolated clumps of spiny rush.

However, in the Waterhaven Estate, just south of the Princes Freeway in Point Cook, there has been a huge patch that has bothered me for years, and I thought that it was time to stop nibbling away at it and to eradicate the lot.

The project started in 2015 and will finish in June 2018, having cost approximately \$250,000. The work has included the use of a drone to find all the individual spiny rush tussocks hidden in the reeds, which would have been incredibly time-consuming (and wet) to find on foot. (*Refer to the link below to see part of the aerial drone video footage.*)

Contractors have brushcut and sprayed each individual tussock, often from canoes, and returned a few times a year to spray any regrowth. They have had to be very careful and selective with their herbicide use as there is not only a lot of successful revegetation in Skeleton Creek these days but also a lot of remnant saltmarsh plants such as austral seablite, *Suaeda australis*, and rounded noon-flower, *Disphyma crassifolium*.

For the big stand of spiny rush south of the freeway, we used a different approach since it was impenetrable on foot and there was so much of it.

There was also another reason ...

Previous attempts at controlling the edges of it had resulted in dead plants but they simply refused to go away.

Plants sprayed in 2010 are still there. Although dead, they are almost the same size as they were when alive - stiff grey mounds of thatch, preventing the native plants in the area (such as sea club-rush *Bolboschoenus maritimus*) from recolonising the space.



Fire

We investigated the use of fire, which would have cleared the bulk of it (the "biomass") so we could then walk over the stubble and spray the regrowth. However, burning ended up being too complicated.

The residents of Emily Cres, Point Cook, would not have been thrilled, to begin with. By law we would have been required to install an electronic sign on the freeway weeks ahead of works advising of the possibility of smoke, there would have been a large crew of people supervising the burning including contractors who would have to camp out at the site overnight after the burning in case it reignited.

All worthwhile for managing the risk – but expensive.

End Solution

In the end, we simply used a "groomer"; it's like a big crude shaver, a two-metre wide rotating frame of little hammers that is attached to the arm of an excavator and, when it's spinning, simply smashes vegetation down to chaff.

Now I am pleased to report that the "groomer" method has been successful!

The acoustic walls now on the south side of the freeway have hidden the work (meaning I can't inspect it any more driving past at 100 kmh) but we should see this summer a huge sward of *Bolboschoenus* spreading over the site in the absence of the spiny rush.

Elsewhere on the creek, you'd hardly know it was ever there. Since we were in the area we also felled a few hundred weedy NSW swamp she-oaks, *Allocasuarina glauca*, that were invading the creek, and planted a few hundred red gums and tangled lignums to replace the lost habitat.

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'The Islands' Waterhaven Estate, Point Cook) was posted to our FoSC Facebook page last year. The footage is an edited version, courtesy of Melbourne Water. The video can be accessed by clicking on the thumbnail opposite.

TAKING ACTION

Dumping of domestic ducks in Skeleton Creek

Some irresponsible people are dumping domestic ducks into Skeleton Creek and unthinking people are encouraging them by feeding them.



The regular feeding of domestic ducks can cause problems to native ducks (eg, Black Ducks and Teal Ducks) (*pictured*), such as:

- poor nutrition
- water pollution
- unnatural behaviour
- spread of disease
- aggressive behaviour

Other problems associated with dumped domestic ducks:

- Introduced ducks feed on bank-side plants, causing bank erosion and muddied water
- Lots of faeces in and around the creek water - making it unhealthy
- Increased competition for resources between introduced and native ducks
- Cross-breeding with native ducks

Taking action

The Friends of Skeleton Creek are taking action on this as best we can. Our group has been working with the Hobsons Bay City Council conservation rangers to remove and find homes for these domestic ducks.

Recently, we captured a domestic white duck opposite the shared trail, near Selwood Place, Altona Meadows. However, we could not capture its mate (identified as a Muscovy duck, native to South America). Its mate was later attacked by a protective and aggressive black swan in the creek - fortunately, a thoughtful resident opposite the creek was able to capture the duck.

In both cases, arrangements were made to find homes for the ducks through our social network.

Unfortunately, there are more domestic ducks up the creek - some hang around under the footbridge, opposite Lan Ave, Altona Meadows, and Ravenswood Court, Seabrook, and under the Point Cook Rd bridge, Seabrook. At the footbridge, the council has a sign requesting people not to feed the ducks - but people still do.

** Photo of the Chestnut Teal, above, was taken in Skeleton Creek by FoSC member Bob Winters*

Friends of Skeleton Creek Membership

Friends,

The FoSC membership renewal for 2017/2018 is now open.

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

Members are on a mailing list to receive information on meetings and special invitations to fun FoSC excursions and social outings throughout the year.

The FoSC membership fee remains at a low \$10.00 for an individual and \$15.00 for a family member (if you already completed the membership form and paid at the AGM, thank you).

All the details to remit the membership fee is on the membership form, available from [here](#).

* Note, if submitting by the preferred method of direct deposit to our FoSC bank account, please add your full name as a reference.

Thank you

Ewen Cowie

Membership Secretary

Visited out Facebook Community Page?

Our events and photos are regularly posted on our Facebook page, as well as late changes and cancellations of activities.

To join the Friends of Skeleton Creek Facebook page, click [here](#) (or on the Facebook icon below). Once on our Facebook page, just 'like' our page to 'join'. It's that simple!

Visited our Web page?

We have more information about us and our conservation activities on the NatureWest web page, including back issues of our PDF and e-newsletters, click [here](#) (or on the Website icon below).



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

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