



Werribee River Association (WRIVA) Newsletter No.7, Oct. 2012

The Plight of Platypus In the Werribee

In the first surveys of platypus in the Werribee River in 1998, sixteen individuals were found in the Werribee township section of the river. Even then Werribee's human population was half that of what it is today, but litter was recorded as causing harm, injury and death to platypus.



Recent platypus numbers in the Werribee River have been low due to drought, removal of vegetation and increasing amounts of litter. WRIVA is very concerned about the future of the platypus in the Werribee River. In a netting survey in September 2012 no platypuses were caught. Our photo above shows netting which was used at one site in Werribee Township.



But we did catch ducks, tupong and long necked turtles, see photo bottom left and had evidence of rakali being present by the holes bitten in the nets! WRIVA will continue to work for the platypus.

UB CLM Students Visit the Werribee

Students from the University of Ballarat Conservation and Land Management Course were introduced by WRIVA to the lower Werribee River in late October. In a two day tour which took them into the Werribee Catchment, the students visited the You Yangs, Grow West, the lower Werribee and spoke with land managers in a range of places. In Werribee they spoke with WRIVA, visiting the diversion weir and revegetation sites, viewed specimens of the Werribee Blue Box, and saw urban development encroaching on the river and some litter problems. Our photo (Thanks to UB) shows WRIVA's mounted platypus being inspected by CLM students from Ballarat University. The platypus was weakened by litter and then suffered attack by a domestic pet in 2005. Its carcass was recovered and mounted under a wildlife permit for educational purposes.



**WRIVA are the Friends of Werribee River Park.
Join us, sponsor us or volunteer!**

WRIVA's Bird Week 2012

Birdlife Australia conducted its Bird Week this year from Monday 22nd – Sunday 28th October. In keeping with WRIVA's policy of conducting citizen science activity, WRIVA carried out surveys of birds seen in urban areas in the City of Wyndham for Bird Week. Full results will be submitted to Birdlife Australia and kept for comparison over time by WRIVA.

Birds in Backyards

As part of our Bird Week surveys, five of our members did surveys in their own backyards. Sites were located in Werribee and Hoppers Crossing, and only one had a river view. The data was gathered in a number of half hour sessions carried out during the week, and results tallied for all sites.

Blackbirds	12	12
Dove, spotted	7	7
Duck	1	
Egret	2	
Galah	5	
Gull, silver	1	
Honeyeater, white-plumed	5	
Honeyeater, New Holland	28	
Magpie	2	
Mudlark	2	
Myna, common	21	21
Lorikeet, musk	2	
Lorikeet, rainbow	3	
Raven	8	
Sparrow	18	18
Starling	17	17
Swallow, welcome	17	
Wagtail, Willie	3	
Wattle bird	17	
Thrush, song	1	1
Total	172	76

While actual numbers seen may be counting the same bird as it moved around at any one site, it can be concluded that a number of species were more noticeable than others. Six exotic species, highlighted in the second column above in our backyards survey, were seen 76 times or 44% of all sightings.

The native New Holland Honeyeater, a bird which is quite aggressive towards other honeyeaters, was also noticeable in data.

Birds in Riparian Habitat

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Below is data gathered over three 30 minute survey sessions during Bird Week in one of the two riparian habitats surveyed. Habitat was in fair condition, with some recent weed tree removal.

NAME	No.1	No.2	No.3	
Blackbird	0	2	1	3
Cockatoo, Sulphur-crested	0	2	0	2
Dove, Spotted	2	1	2	5
Duck, Chestnut teal	1	0	2	3
Duck, Pacific black	2	3	1	6
Duck, Wood	2	1	0	3
Gull, Silver	0	0	2	2
Honeyeater, New Holland	1	4	6	11
Honeyeater, White plumed	6	8	6	20
Ibis, Australian White	0	1	0	1
Lapwings, Masked	0	0	1	1
Lorikeet, Rainbow	6	7	6	19
Moorhen, Dusky	2	1	0	3
Mudlark	0	1	2	3
Myna, Common	2	12	8	22
Parrot, Red-rumped	1	0	0	1
Pigeon, Crested	0	2	0	2
Raven, Little	2	4	3	9
Shrike-tit, Crested	0	1	0	1
Sparrow	0	1	1	2
Starling	2	4	4	10
Swallow, Welcome	6	4	8	18
Wattle Bird, Little	0	1	0	1
Wattle Bird, Red	8	12	10	30
Willie Wagtail	2	2	4	8
	45	74	67	186

A most important observation of this data at that site is that the list does not have a number of small native birds expected in riparian habitat, and that some species are very dominant. Particularly noticeable are the numbers of exotic species which are 23% of all sightings. Common mynas – 12% of total - were observed during this time. One group of three or four Mynas were seen actively denying access to, and harassing Rainbow lorikeets near gums which the lorikeets had been inspecting for hollows, (see photo) near trees and hollows in which the Mynas had nested themselves!



Why must we lose the beautiful things which make us uniquely Australian?

At WRIVA's recent Annual General Meeting, the president's report posed questions about the continuing lack of care for our natural environment: "In Australia Governments have been slowly shedding responsibility for natural resource management for decades, reducing program resources and staffing, overturning policy and allowing excessive exploitation of our land for urban development and disregard for natural places and resources. Farmers can tell you of many pest plant and animal programs which worked well, but no longer exist. Many people note the excessive regulation of rivers and the overuse of water for many marginal enterprises in unsuitable country. People in our cities see almost daily reports in the media of dangerously low numbers of our iconic species in some part of Australia – koalas, platypus, wallabies and alarming decreases in number of Australia's beautiful birds to name a few, and yet, what happens?"

Very little is seems. Discussions on the state of the environment are reduced to a bun-fight between politicians, cost shifting arguments between levels of government and populist policies in order to retain power become the order of the day. We subsidize those things which keep the economic wheels turning, ignoring those things which will bankrupt our health and environment.

The Federal Government is considering the cutting of 'green tape' which would give State Governments more responsibility for environmental assessments and approvals. State governments currently do not have a great track record of protecting the precious things we want to keep for our grandchildren. For example, by remaining silent on coal mining in the west of Melbourne, the Vic Government will have to answer for the impact on our waterways, the disruption to local communities and harm to human health. We have been given wonderful things by this beautiful country which make us uniquely Australian in the eyes of the world. Our clean environment, tourism and agriculture have a big part to play. But what are State and Commonwealth governments doing to keep us distinctively Australian in this "Asian Century"?

Biolink Plan for the Werribee

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In an excellent example of forward thinking, a joint initiative of western suburbs councils called Leadwest, including Melton, Moorabool and Wyndham, has just released a major report called 'Werribee River Biolink Action Plan.' WRIVA sat with the councils and Melbourne Water on the project management team for the project which took two years to complete, and it was funded by the Vision for Werribee Plains. WRIVA believes the process and the plan are to be highly commended. The plan provides positive directions for protection and enhancement of the river's environs in years to come. Not only that, but the action plan will, quote: *"deliver substantial social and economic benefits to our region"* (Preface vi)

The report, entitled 'Werribee River Biolink Action Plan- Volume 1 and 2', is available at:

http://www.leadwest.com.au/files/files/301_MEN107-TD-EV-REP-0002_1_Part_1.pdf

A New Story of the Werribee

WRIVA has recently prepared a PowerPoint presentation of the formation of the Werribee River, complete with an acknowledgement of and information about our original inhabitants, the formation of the river, images showing the river's journey to the sea, water usage, and through recent research, how the Werribee is linked into the history of Port Phillip Bay.



Our photo shows WRIVA carrying out geological research on bed rock in the Werribee River. After first being shown to members at the recent WRIVA AGM, the presentation was shown recently to the Wyndham VIEW club and was received well.

Wyndham City Council has let a tender for the construction of a new and vastly improved passageway underneath the main rail lines where they cross the Werribee River in the Werribee Township. For many years there has only a crude pathway under the bridges. Now, work has commenced on constructing a new footbridge at the ten year flood level.

In the view shown below taken from the Comben Dr Footbridge, the cofferdam being constructed in the river will be used to provide a foothold for machinery to drive piles into the river close to the western pier of the bridge carrying the Geelong-Melbourne railway line.



The new bridge will be at the ten year flood level or about three metres above water on normal flows in that area. It will be a timber deck bridge supported by steel framework and piles. Once construction has finished the cofferdam will be removed.

Wyndham Park has long been isolated by heavy rail and vehicular traffic, as well as a lack of safe and pleasant pedestrian access into Chirnside Park and the CBD of Werribee, and from and into the housing area to the north of the river. This bridge will solve part of that problem, but needs to be backed up with other modern, safe and accessible pedestrian access across the Cottrell St Ford and across and under the Werribee St Bridge. Only then will the town benefit from the river in this area, gaining the full social, economic and environmental benefits that can come from people being at ease with the park.

WRIVA will focus on the following in 2013

- Communicating with the community using a range of media
- Continuing to initiate educational programs in partnership with others
- Strategically engaging with as many organizations as possible to meet our aims
- Conducting regular activities which have appeal to other interested persons in the community
- Making it easy for people to join as members, or getting involved

Amongst other things, such as more citizen science activity, WRIVA will take part in a new initiative on litter in the City of Wyndham, involving initiatives with schools and community.

**Coming in 2013,
The LitterWatch Program**

LitterWatch is a combined group's initiative with Melbourne Water and Wyndham City Council, featuring an internationally famous speaker on a vital topic for our local Australian environment.

WRIVA will finalize their activities for 2013 at their meeting on Thursday 15th November, 7.30pm in the Eco-Living Centre 28 Ridge Dr Wyndhamvale.



This newsletter is published by the Werribee River Association Inc. (aka WRIVA)

Contact:

President,
WRIVA PO Box 74 Werribee Vic. 3030

OR

Email: werribeeriver@gmail.com

Website: www.werribeeriver.org.au

OR

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