



Werribee River Association Newsletter

WERRIBEE
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Working for the Werribee River since 1981
WRivA Newsletter No.15 February 2014

Friends of
Werribee River
Park

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Holcim Australia & BirdLife Australia

Holcim Australia and BirdLife Australia have signed a three year Australia-wide agreement to work together on improving awareness of threats to wetland birds. Holcim are quarry operators across Australia, including the bluestone quarry in West's Rd Werribee.

Photo: (Below) Entrance to Holcim's Werribee site.



Werribee has been chosen as a trial project under the agreement for all Holcim sites across Australia as a result of the WRivA 2013 Business Planting Day, (WRivA newsletter No.12 Aug 2013) and WRivA's close relationship with Holcim and the City of Wyndham.

Urban wetland birds will be the focus of the trial project in Werribee as they are close to people, they can be easily identified, and data gathered will add to BirdLife Australia's knowledge about newly created wetlands and the habitat they are providing. The project is to highlight the threats to birds, enabling the community to become involved and encourage on-ground actions. Holcim quarry staff will take part in bird identification workshops, visit sites of importance, and assist in a planting day in urban wetlands on Cheetham Creek, Point Cook in mid-year 2014. The wider community will also be provided with opportunities to take part in initiatives which support the agreement.

WRivA congratulates these two visionary organisations for this exciting project, and is pleased to be involved.

Photo: (Below) Holcim at WRivA Business Planting Day.



Yarra Riverkeeper Visiting the Werribee



The Yarra Riverkeeper Ian Penrose is speaking at the Ecoliving Centre 28 Ridge Dr Wyndhamvale, home of the Werribee Riverkeeper Thursday 20 Feb 2014, at 7.30pm.

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The Yarra Riverkeeper Association (the "Riverkeepers") is a member of the successful world-wide Waterkeeper Alliance, a movement of community groups caring for their local waterways. Formed in 2005 the Riverkeepers have had success in raising awareness about, and getting better protection for a wonderful part of our local environment, the Yarra River. Many lessons have been learned along the way – both failures and successes.

Qualified in science, operations research and commercial management, Ian worked for Shell in the coal mining, natural gas and shipping industries, based locally and overseas. Later he headed the Victorian Government's



program to restore the Snowy River. He now works for the Yarra Riverkeeper Association in the role of "Riverkeeper" and is an acknowledged spokesperson for the Yarra River. Ian received the City of Melbourne's "2010 Melbourne Award" for contribution to the environment, and is a Commissioner with the Victorian Environmental Water Holder.

RSVP is required if you wish to hear Ian speak: werribeeriver@gmail.com or on 0401854560

Photo: (Right) Courtesy YRKA Bulletin - Victorian State Environment Minister Ryan Smith in Yarra Riverkeeper boat, Nov 2013



On Friday 13 Dec 2013 WRivA took part in discussions about future land uses for the Western Treatment Plant to assist Melbourne Water develop their long term vision for the site. Discussion was based around:

- Site values to preserve or develop?
- New services or facilities based there?
- Options to build on the current uses of the site?
- New economic activity and employment?
- Innovative ideas for new or different activities?

The discussion took place in the Discovery Centre New Farm Rd Werribee, with thirty-five representatives from municipalities, state government, businesses and the community. Agricultural managers who lease the site see a good future for their business, and the Werribee Mansion Hotel appreciate the vista and tourism qualities of the site. Innovative ideas included creation of a Natural History Centre or listing the WTP with World Heritage Status. WRivA appreciates the proximity of the plant to the Werribee River, and how bird and fish life are enhanced by functioning of the WTP. WRivA believes that functions and values of the site including its value as a "green break" between major cities, odour buffer requirements and RAMSAR wetland criteria and associated existing international relationships, must be preserved. **Photo:** (Below) Visitor from Seattle Joel Merriman and local identity Peter Gibbons enjoy birding at WTP with WRivA 18 Jan 2013.



WRivA does not wish to see wonderful views of the bay or the You Yangs obstructed by buildings or

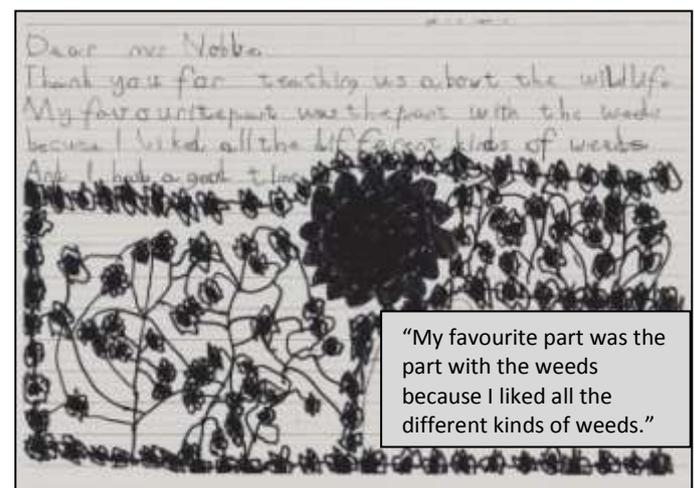
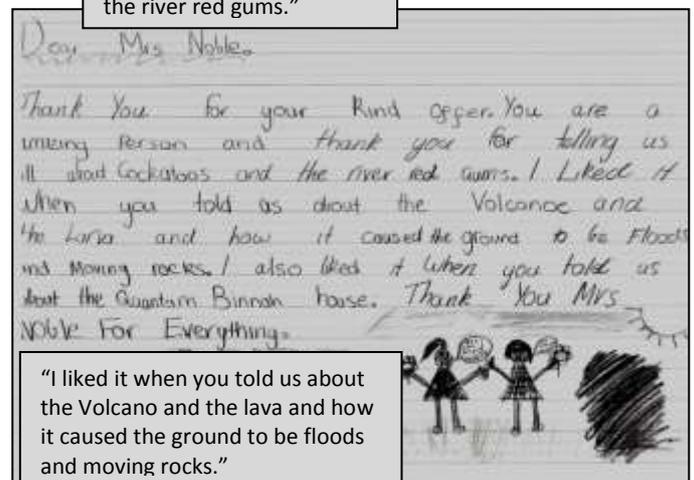
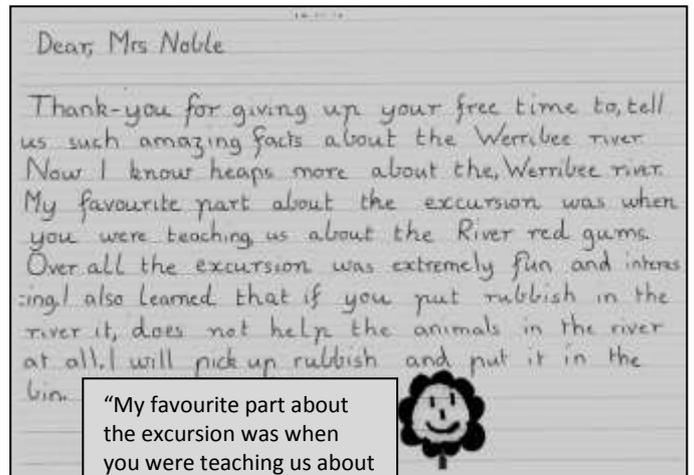
elevated infrastructure, or the boundaries along bay or road taken over for development. **Photo:** (Below) A view to the You Yangs over Lake Borrie in the WTP.



Thanks to Melbourne Water for inviting us to take part in discussion on the future of this internationally iconic, historic and treasured site.

Join WRivA werribeeriver@gmail.com 0401854560

As part of their studies, Year 3&4 students from Manorvale Primary School invited WRivA member Heather Noble to lead them on a walking tour of their local area on Tuesday 12 Nov 2013. The walk and talk looked at wildlife, native vegetation, weeds, geology and the lives of the original aboriginal inhabitants in the area, passed the Old Ford where exposed volcanic basalt allowed the first crossings of the river by early settlers, plus a look at Riverbend Park where the Chaffey irrigation system in Werribee began. Some samples of student writing tell of their recall and enjoyment. Thanks to Heather for her valuable contribution to WRivA's educational work.



ANGFA Fish Survey in Werribee

On Saturday 10th January WRivA members met with ANGFA (Australia New Guinea Fishes Association) on site in Werribee, where surveying of native fish species was carried out at two sites under clear skies and 19-21 degree temperatures.



The first survey was carried in the morning out above and below the small weirs which hold back water for Bungey's Hole at Chirnside Park. Water testing revealed a water temperature of 23.8 degrees C, and pH of 7.9., salinity low and turbidity moderate. There were small worms seen living in tubes on the bottom of shallow pools, invertebrates such as mudeyes, caddis fly larvae and damsel fly larvae, mussels, glass shrimp in reed beds along with crabs and a variety of native fish; ten Flat-headed Gudgeon 40-75mm in length, three *Galaxia maculatus* 50-60mm and five *G. truttaceus* 50-80mm, four Smelt 35mm and forty exotic *Gambusia* <20mm. *Gambusia* out-competes native fish for food and by higher breeding rates. With the exception of the introduced fish, a healthy assemblage of species was surveyed. **Photo:** (Below) ANGFA members at Bungey's.



Then a second survey was carried out in the afternoon further upstream, immediately below the Werribee diversion weir wall. Water testing revealed a warm water temperature of 26.3 degrees C, and pH of 7.6., salinity not recorded and turbidity low. Surveying was mainly in rocky pools and the only invertebrates found were small crabs and glass shrimp. Surprisingly some freshwater sponges were seen too. Fish seen: four juvenile to adult Flat-headed Gudgeon 40-60mm, many adult *Galaxia maculatus* and *G. truttaceus* 40-60mm, three juvenile Smelt 20-30mm, more than twenty immature to adult Tupong 50-100mm, one young Southern Short-finned eel 300mm and twenty juvenile to adult *Gambusia* 20-30mm. This was also considered a healthy number of species. WRivA members and Melbourne Water's Richard Akers thoroughly enjoyed the day and learnt much from the activity. Thanks to ANGFA members and their President Kwai Changkum for making the day a lot of fun, sharing their passion and knowledge.

ANGFA continued...

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Our photos show various species netted on the day, all photographed in ANGFA's viewing tank.

Photo: (Below) Spotted Galaxia *Galaxia maculatus*



Photo: (Below) Freshwater crabs with Flat-headed Gudgeon *Philypnodon grandiceps*. Photo courtesy Richard Akers.



Photo: (Below) Tupong *Pseudaphritis urvilli*



The Tupong likes low water flows and is often found amongst debris on the bottom of quiet pools or under snags and banks. It can bury itself leaving the eyes and dorsal fin just visible as it waits in ambush. Tupong need light tackle and small earth worms as bait, and can put up a good fight for a fish of their size.

<http://www.nativefish.asn.au/tupong.html>

They can grow up to 30cm or so and make good eating, and are sometimes caught when fishing for Blackfish.

<http://www.fishnet.com.au/forums/viewtopic.php?p=120782&sid=4ca3249a9b8bef1ba00a90626e7959d6>

Photo: (Below) WRivA member Suelin Haynes and Richard Akers inspecting tube worms in a shallow pool at Bungey's Hole.



Environmental Flows Target Fish

Melbourne Water (MW), in conjunction with Southern Rural Water (SRW), is continuing their program of environmental flows down the Werribee River. In February, from the 9th to the 16th, water will be released from Merrimu Reservoir into the Werribee River lifting water levels by up to 20 cm in Coimadai Creek in the Long Forest Nature Reserve and in the river through the town of Werribee. Water levels between Melton and Werribee will be within the normal variation for this time of year.

The main purpose of the release is to provide nursery habitat for juvenile Black Bream in the estuary. Monitoring by the Department of Environment and Primary Industries in January found many juvenile fish in the upper reaches of the estuary near the golf club. This release aims to push the fish downstream to seagrass beds near the river mouth which provide food and protection from predators. MW will monitor this release and others in the future to increase their understanding of the Black Bream's life cycle and what can be done to improve it.

Photo (Below): Juvenile fish from an Arthur Rylah Institute survey in the Werribee River Estuary.



Photo (Below) Mixture of juvenile fish and mature Black Bream from the same survey in Werribee River Estuary.



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Car in River Requires Major Effort

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For some weeks in November 2013 WRivA and locals had concerns about a car deliberately driven over K Road cliffs in Werribee South, and left in the river. Oil was contained but eventually the car began to settle and some pollution was noted. Thankfully Melbourne Water pulled the abandoned car from its cliff-lined resting place in the Werribee River in a challenging operation on Wednesday 11th Dec 2013. **Photos:** (Below) Contractors Fulton Hogan Ecodynamics used a 25-tonne crane to remove the dumped Holden Commodore from the river. The operation was complicated by instability of the 12-metre high cliffs along that part of the river.



Waterways Manager (West region) Cameron Howie said the river was highly valued by local residents and the potential for contaminants to be released from the car had posed significant risks to water quality in the estuary which is a haven for black bream. "It is disappointing to see this type of pollution as these operations divert funds from other river health priorities," he said. Werribee Riverkeeper John Forrester said the river was home to a lot of wildlife including birds, frogs, fish and mammals. "We need to protect the river from this sort of vandalism to ensure a safe habitat for the local wildlife."



The crane was placed on blocks to distribute its weight, and the site was continually monitored for fissures or cracks which would signal a collapse. The operation involved traffic management on the busy adjacent road, safety on site, ground stability monitoring, crane management and a boat crew to attach the car to the crane. WRivA thanks Melbourne Water and contractors.

Members of WRivA looked at various sites in the upper river on Tue 31 Dec 2013. **Photo:** (Below) We started walking the Werribee Track to see the headwaters of the river, and inspected long-term fire research sites.



We were surprised to see a flow in the creek which is the river at that stage. **Photo:** (Below) The River with a small flow at Werribee Picnic Area, just south of Kurweinguboorra and the Werribee track.



Photo: (Below) The beautiful pool at the end of the aquaduct track in Werribee Gorge State Park.



Photo: (Below) Our final visit was to Cobbledick's Ford, where a good flow was crossing the historic ford.



This trip was an excellent summer's outing which enriched our understandings of the Werribee River.

On Saturday 4 Jan 2014 WRivA explored the eastern banks of the Werribee River, upstream from Graham's Wetland Reserve in Werribee South. **Photo:** (Below) The banks show signs of being used as transit zones in days when the land was used by irrigation farmers.



The dominant vegetation is salt-marsh and by being fenced off is now slowly recovering from former usage.

Photo: (Below) An interesting discovery was this section of river eroded bank which revealed a layer of quartz and other stones which possibly were washed down by the river from the Victorian Uplands eons ago.



The walking was easy if a little damp, on ground and glassworts which could be damaged if the way becomes too popular. **Photo:** (Below) We could walk no further than this pine tree as it was growing beside a channel draining irrigated farm land to the right.



With previous downstream explorations from K Road Cliffs by WRivA in this area, it is evident that before public access is encouraged; a deal of preparation must be undertaken. To be considered are the precious natural attributes of the area, litter control, access and safety concerns of walkers amongst others.

Hawkweed Survey Falls Creek

WRivA's John Forrester took part in a Parks Vic Hawkweed Eradication Project Mon 6 Fri to 10 Jan 2014, in the Alpine National Park in Falls Creek area. A good number of willing volunteers, some experienced, some new took part. For example, local Judy Douglas of FO Werribee Gorge State Park and Long Forest Mallee was there and all were led by very competent Parks Vic staff. There is plenty of habitat for Hawkweed in Australia's High Plains, with the plants dispersed by wind, animals or humans. Hawkweed species are native to Europe, the Americas and South Africa, and have become invasive in pastures, gardens and parks in a number of countries including New Zealand and Japan. The plants, *Hieracium*



aurantiacum, *H. praealtum* and *H. pilosella*, are found in grassland, wetland and shrubland. In the alpine areas the weeds out-compete for spaces and disturbing eco-systems which native species need for survival. This can lead to less regeneration and even survival of Australia's own species. **Photo:** (Above left)



Western Port Biosphere's David Nicholls (L) assists John Forrester (R) at boot cleaning time. **Photo:** (Below) Teams walked a 10 metre wide rope down flagged pathways to cover three to four hectares a day searching for Hawkweed in targeted habitat.



John said, "There are a lot of parallels here with the story of Serrated Tussock in the Werribee, with the need to get on to this thing early. But the whole week was a lot of fun in some beautiful country. Some very passionate volunteers and Parks Vic staff took part – a great week!"

Weedspotters may recognize Hawkweed on the Jan. and Dec. pages of the wonderful DEPI State Prohibited Weeds 2014 Calendar.

Further information on Hawkweed at:

http://vro.dpi.vic.gov.au/dpi/vro/vrosite.nsf/pages/weeds_herbs_perennial_hawkweed

Wyndham Biodiversity Quiz

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Over summer 2013-2014 the City of Wyndham has been using a simple quiz and survey to involve residents of Wyndham in the development of a Biodiversity Policy. The quiz is a short one comprising a choice for participants of two photos of trees, plants, birds and rodents, with participants having to say which one of each is a native to Wyndham. Participants are then asked to rate a benefits on native biodiversity as the most important to them. If you're a resident, try it at: https://www.wyndham.vic.gov.au/environment/landbiodiversity/biodiversity_quiz

Great Sightings

Photo: (Below) Striated Pardalote, *Pardalotus striatus* Hawkweed Survey Falls Ck Thur. 9 Jan 2014.



Photo: (Below) Gasping in the heat, Honeyeater, White-plumed fledgling Werribee River Park Tue 14 Jan 2014



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- You become a member of WRivA
- We become stronger



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