



1973 – 2008  
Celebrating 35  
years of caring  
for Darebin  
Parklands

May 2008

DPA News

## Wasteland to wildlife haven – what a difference a DPA makes



### Happy birthday to us!

This year is a special one for the DPA as we celebrate our 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary. When the DPA was formed in 1973, the Alphington side of the park was a rubbish dump and the Ivanhoe floodplain was a weed-choked wasteland. It took vision, determination and lots of hard work to create the beautiful wildlife haven that we all love today. Join us at our AGM, at 8 pm on Tuesday 27 May, in the environment centre, at the end of Separation Street, Alphington, to celebrate and view *From Wasteland to Wildlife Haven*. Find out how it all began and relive some highlights from the last 35 years. All welcome.

### DPA events 2008

**May 18** Park Care Day

**May 27** Annual general meeting

**May 31** Hidden Valley planting day

**June 29** Creek excursion and planting day

**August 26** Information evening

**September 14** Park Care Day

**November 16** Park Care Day

**November 25** Information evening





### **Bushland built on vision**

Thirty five years ago this month a group of Ivanhoe residents became enraged when the MMBW began bulldozing trees along the Darebin Creek. They not only stopped the 'dozers, but started a community environmental group that is now one of Australia's largest and oldest.

Whether we visit the park to walk, play, picnic, take photographs, paint, draw, observe birds and wildlife or just take a breather and reconnect with nature, we all have cause to thank the early founders of the DPA for their vision and tenacity.

Without their determination, none of us would be enjoying the park we so love today.

The DPA's constitution commits it to preserving the park as a "nature reserve". After member consultation the association six years ago expanded on this and adopted the official goals of maintaining the parklands as a wildlife haven and a place to appreciate nature, and recreating more habitat so that native animals, including platypus, return.

It is a magnificent achievement and a great legacy to have played a leading role in creating, virtually from scratch, bushland that now supports echidnas, flying foxes, kangaroos, possums, reptiles, native fish and frogs and abundant birdlife. With an official platypus sighting just north of the parklands early last year and predictions that koalas will soon return, the park's role as a home for wildlife will become even more important in the future.

The DPA is fortunate to have many of its founding members still actively involved, including the "mother of the parklands" Sue Course and others.

At our Annual General Meeting on 27 May we'll be recognising some other significant people from the association's history with life memberships. We'll also be viewing the presentation *From Wasteland to Wildlife Haven* where those of us who weren't there

can find out how it all began.

I hope you enjoy this special edition of DPA News, which contains recollections from founding member Sue Course and Peter Wiltshire, who has worked at the park for almost 25 years. There will be a number of other activities to mark our 35<sup>th</sup> birthday, including a celebration at our September Park Care Day, so watch the newsletter and website for details.

Our AGM is also your opportunity to step up and play a more active role in the DPA by joining our committee. No special qualifications are required. The most important prerequisite is support for the DPA's objectives and a willingness to work collaboratively on our projects and activities.

We look forward to seeing you at the AGM and at our next Park Care Day on 18 May.

**Ingrid Svendsen**  
**President**



### **Clean Up Australia Day**

More than 40 people, including DPA members and a big contingent from the SGI Buddhism organisation (pictured above), rounded up a huge junk haul on Clean Up Australia Day in March. We collected 44 bags of rubbish, as well as shopping trolleys, tyres and a couch. A big thanks to rangers Matt and Pete for helping organise the day, and to everyone who came to help.





### Picnic races go splat, cackle and hop

With events including egg throwing, boot toss, King and Queen of the Mountain, sack races, magnetic catch-a-carp and pin the beak on the magpie, the fourth annual Darebin Parklands Picnic Races, held last month, offered something for everyone.

Congratulations to Junior King and Queen of the Mountain winners Oliver D and Rebecca R and adult monarchs Julie Smith and Andrew Turpin (pictured above).

The DPA would like to thank ranger Peter Wiltshire and all of the volunteers who worked hard to make the day possible, including Kinder Corner coordinators Teresa and Antonio Alfonso, event coordinator Allison Turpin and volunteers David Craven, Sue Lyons and Fiona Jones.



Thanks to our photographers: Anthony Jones, Steve Rogers, Carina Watson and Richard Alder.





## News in brief

### Tax deductibility for DPA donations

Thanks to a partnership with LandCare Australia, the DPA is now able to offer tax deductibility for donations of more than \$20. As well as making it easier for members and other supporters to help our work, having tax deductibility for donations will be a huge benefit in attracting funding for major undertakings, such as our history project. To make a tax deductible donation to the DPA, make your cheque out to "LandCare Australia Ltd", and forward it to the DPA. We will pass it on to LandCare Australia, who will mail you a receipt.

### Up the creek planting excursion

Help revegetate the headwaters of the Darebin Creek at a special creek excursion to Woodstock, 30 kilometres north of the city, on Sunday 29 June, from 10.30am – 1pm. More than 1,000 trees, shrubs, grasses and groundcovers, many grown by DPA members as part of our plant nursery project, will be planted.

The Darebin Creek Management Committee is coordinating the planting day, with funds from the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust through the Northern Nature Project. The site is at 1185 Merriang Road, Woodstock (extension of Epping Road) Melways: Key map 9.  
Info: Therese Grinter, 9499 4454 or [thereseg@dcmc.org.au](mailto:thereseg@dcmc.org.au)

### New Ivanhoe creek reveg project

A major creekside revegetation project, between the Clifton Bridge and the Ivanhoe wetlands, will soon start after the DPA successfully applied for two environmental grants. Melbourne Water will fund the major part of the work, providing \$9,200, while Banyule Council will also contribute \$1,100. Head ranger Peter Wiltshire will oversee the scheme,

which will see weeds eradicated and riparian woodland vegetation restored along the 220 metre section of creek bank. DPA members will play an important role, working on the site at our Park Care Days and growing plants for it as part of the plant nursery project.

### May Park Care Day

Work on our new major project, the restoration of riparian woodland vegetation along the creek, between the Clifton Bridge and the Ivanhoe wetlands, will kick off at our next Park Care Day, on Sunday 18 May, between 1-3 pm. We'll be preparing the site, including weeding and laying jute weed matting as we get ready to start planting later in the year. We'll be concentrating on "the island" area, which is just downstream of the Clifton Bridge. Afternoon tea is provided and everyone is welcome. Info: 0409 007 530.

### Hidden Valley planting day

Our showpiece revegetation project, the Hidden Valley restoration, is almost finished and we will hold an official opening later in the year. In preparation, we are holding a special planting day on the site, which is upstream of the Clifton Bridge on the Ivanhoe side of the park, on Saturday 31 May, between 9 am – 12 noon. We have also been fortunate in securing the help of around 30 Global Club members, who come to the park every year to help out. All welcome.

**Snap!** The DPA will soon be calling for entries to our members' photographic competition. We'll be looking for images that capture the beauty of our parklands and the ways people use them. The best photos will be used in our 2009 DPA calendar and also displayed publicly. The competition will be open to Junior Rangers and adult DPA members. More details and an entry form at [www.dpa.org.au](http://www.dpa.org.au)





## Boxthorn and other prickly types

Hello members,

The DPA is turning 35 this year so it is only fitting that I respond with a collection of my memories of the parklands and the DPA since June 1985 when, as a young fellow, I stumbled into a different landscape to what we now see as the Darebin Parklands.

The first time I came to the parklands was to meet its then ranger Craig Whitford. The first thing I noticed was a barren, flat landscape covered with bricks, tyres, large concrete pieces, and bitumen chunks poking up through the surface. Two newly constructed bluestone structures along with one old river red gum were all that broke this disastrous landscape.



It's not true that they hired me for my dress sense

As I walked across what is now the picnic area I remember looking across the duckpond to the railway bridge and the acres of fennel and other weeds. I thought to myself, "What a hole, who'd want to be a ranger here?" Then I walked around the corner and the charm of the Darebin Parklands hit me as I looked over the floodplain and Darebin Creek with the Clifton Bridge arching over the creek to the Pine Ridge. Over the next few weeks I took a great interest in the Darebin Parklands and befriended the ranger, helping him as a volunteer with various duties such as controlled burns, taking schools and planting. I eventually was asked to become a ranger at the park.

My first run in with the DPA was horrific. Craig asked me to attend a DPA meeting and give the ranger's report. How many were there is hard to recall, but it felt like over 30 and I was very nervous and not a great public speaker as this my debut.

As I gave the report a grey haired man with a venomous tongue was constantly heckling me. My public speaking nightmare was complete. In particular he attacked me about the timing of

blackberry spraying and called me an uneducated inbreed. I was gutted and shattered by this bitter man whose had made me look like such a clown in front of all these people.

Then I was approached by a well spoken man, who told me to ignore the attacks and introduced himself as Laurie Course. To my horror he then took me over towards the grey-headed man who at this stage had a wry smile on his face and introduced me to him as Sidney Clifton. Laurie explained that Sidney enjoyed the sport of cutting people down to size, while Sidney looked on grinning.

When I found out where Sidney lived (the house on the cliff above the reflection pool) I decided to get him back by hammering in over 300 stakes below his house on the floodplain. He stood looking out cursing me as I yelled out to him to say goodbye to his view. Then and there started the feud with Sidney. I then named his bridge Troll Bridge on the children's map, which became its colloquial name much to his disgust. It was not until his passing that in respect we renamed it back to the Clifton Bridge.

The next day I met Sue Course in the park, below the second pine tree on pine ridge, as I waited for Westgarth Primary School who visited every Wednesday. Sue mentioned some boxthorn and blackberry patches that needed attention and was very warm and friendly. Over the years nothing has changed, even about the boxthorn, no doubt my biggest failing in Sue's eyes.

The park on the other hand has changed dramatically, with the DPA firmly behind it and protecting it from all nature of things including a freeway, various awful development proposals, funding cutbacks – the list goes on. But it's the DPA's works in the park that for me are the real gems, Hidden Valley, the Olive Festivals, the Snake Grass, Junior Rangers, riparian plantings. Just about anywhere you look in the park the DPA has had a hand in it.

It's easy being the ranger at Darebin Parklands because of the DPA and the DPA are the nicest of people.

Happy 35th birthday.

**Peter Wiltshire**  
Ranger in charge





### A million dollar dream

It is 35 years ago now that Anthea Fleming and I, each with two young children in tow, visited Rockbears Park, now part of the Darebin Parklands. No one used the park much in those days. It was neglected and forgotten used only by the horses from a riding school in Alphington which had permission to graze there. My daughter Diana often helped to catch and bridle the horses so that she could ride them back to Sparkes Street where the riders were waiting to take them out.

We came down on this occasion on May 3, 1973, to catch tadpoles in the wetlands which we would nurture in fishtanks until they matured and then return them to the wetlands.



I got all the glamour jobs – including hand removal of caterpillars

The creek banks were denuded of all native vegetation, only a few willows, some exotic trees and a huge hawthorn bush remained. There were plenty of noxious weeds though, both on the slopes and the flood plain, weeds that the selective horses didn't eat. Across the creek on the Alphington side it was even worse with prickly artichoke thistles and blackberries and many other weeds. As this side was still privately owned land at that time nobody seemed to care.

On this day however Anthea Fleming and I were confronted with a lot of activity that we had never seen before. Huge bulldozers

were tearing down the remaining trees along the creek banks and pushing their way through the wetlands. What could we do? We phoned the council, the State Government and Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works. State and local politicians were soon on site as it was just before the elections. The devastating work stopped.

Within days people streamed into the park for a protest meeting resulting in the Darebin Parklands Association being formed. A petition with 376 signatures was taken to the office of the Premier, Sir Rupert Hamer, requesting that Rockbears Park be rehabilitated and that the area of parkland be extended to include the privately owned industrially zoned land in Alphington, another 72 acres. Within five years it was. Even in those days it was worth a million dollars but with support from State and Federal governments and Banyule and Darebin councils the dream became reality.

There was no ranger but the DPA weeded area after area and planted. We enlisted the help of schools, scout groups and unemployed people. We worked relentlessly, begging the councils to provide plants and later materials to build the concrete arched bridge in the parklands. This still stands as a monument to Sidney Clifton, our treasurer, who designed and built this structure with DPA members.

Now the DPA has an ambitious plan to produce a professionally written book to cover the many facets of this unique parkland. This vision will need funding, it will not be cheap but it will only cost a tiny fraction of the million dollars that the land for the park cost to purchase. I hope the members of the DPA will continue the tradition and participate to make this happen. For further information email [info@dpa.org.au](mailto:info@dpa.org.au).

**Sue Course**  
**DPA founding member**





# The Junior Ranger Page!

## 'The Best Night of my Life'

In February a group of six lucky Junior Rangers went to the Junior Ranger Camp Out in Darebin Parklands. Bryn T, Alex R, Connor M, Dane PS, Nelson A and Max A won the prize in our end of year competition. (The lucky camp out kids are pictured here getting the fire ready.) We all had a ball and we are grateful to rangers Pete and Matt who helped us to run the event.

Bryn wrote the following story for us, entitled "The Best Night of my Life"

*On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February I went camping at Darebin Park. On the camp we went spot lighting, we saw loads of bats. We cooked marshmallows on the fire. My favourite part was seeing a kangaroo and I saw two foxes. I also saw a giant caterpillar. I won a raffle ticket so that I could go on the camp.*

To be in the running for this fantastic prize just bring your Junior Ranger card along when you come to Park Care Days and get it stamped. You can then use it to enter competitions, including the end of year prize draw.

– Carina Watson



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## Our new royals

Congratulations to our new parklands monarchs, Queen Rebecca and King Oliver, pictured here at their coronation at the Darebin Parklands Picnic Races last month. Rebecca, 3, and Oliver, 7, gave the big kids a run for their money and won the Junior King and Queen of the mountain events.



## Park after Dark spotlighting walk

The weather was mild, the moon was up but the animals were hard to find. Ranger Peter Wiltshire led around 30 Junior Rangers and their families on a very enjoyable spotlighting walk through the park on 18 April. We saw spiders with their eyes glowing red, native galaxid fish in the creek and a cute family of ringtail possums high in a tree. Pete was disappointed not to find more animals and on returning to the office showed us some photos of wildlife in the park and kept the kids entertained with stories. Thanks Pete! We all had a great time.





## Happy birthday DPA!

On behalf of the Darebin Council and community, I'd like to congratulate the Darebin Parklands Association on its 35th anniversary and thank its members for their commitment to protecting, improving and maintaining the Darebin Parklands and making them a haven for wildlife and a magnificent place for the community to experience nature.

**Cr Peter Stephenson**  
**Darebin Mayor**

I warmly congratulate the Darebin Parklands Association on 35 years of successful conservation work. The association has been instrumental in rejuvenating and protecting the Darebin Parklands. It's great that the organisation continues to grow and prosper, and has taken a leading role in educating the next generation of nature conservationists.

Congratulations.

**Jenny Macklin MP**  
**Federal Member for Jaga Jaga**  
**Minister for Families**

Congratulations to the Darebin Parklands Association on celebrating its 35th anniversary this year. The association has transformed a barren and degraded area into one of Melbourne's best known and loved urban bushland reserves, covering 33 hectares. Due to the work of the association's volunteers in recreating native habitat, the area is now home to an abundance of wildlife. This organisation is a great example of what can be achieved through hard work and commitment to a cause.

**Cr Wayne Philips**  
**Banyule Mayor**

Congratulations Darebin Parklands Association! Managing to maintain an

effective community group for 35 years is a significant achievement. Your contribution to the natural environment, the local community and the Landcare movement is exemplary and something you should be very proud of. The DPA is a fine example of how a community group can move with the times to successfully achieve both on ground outcomes and contribute to the social fabric of a community.

**Sam Bayley**  
**Yarra Catchment Landcare Coordinator**

On behalf of the Friends of Darebin Creek I'd like to congratulate DPA on 35 years of great work. The Darebin Creek south of the parklands has benefited from all the litter removal, planting, and weeding done by members. I'd also like to say what an impressive range of community engagement programs have been put together by DPA. Keep up the great work.

**Sean Walsh**  
**President, Friends of Darebin Creek**

On Sunday 20 April I had the privilege of crowning the 'Kings and Queens of the Mountain' as part of the DPA's Darebin Parklands Picnic Races. This event, like so many others, illustrates how the Darebin Parklands and the DPA are the heart of our community. On behalf all the families, including my own, who have enjoyed the parklands over the years, thank you for your care and concern and congratulations on achieving this milestone.

**Fiona Richardson, MP**  
**State Member for Northcote**

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