

Darebin Parklands Association Newsletter

Park After Dark

Come along and find out what lurks in the park after dark, as head ranger Peter Wiltshire leads a fascinating nocturnal ramble around the Darebin Parklands. All are welcome at this special event, after the DPA's annual general meeting on **Tuesday, February 24**, at 8 pm, in the rangers' office at the end of Separation Street.

Every Member Matters

It's the start of another busy year for the DPA. As a member the most important thing you can do right now to help your park is to take a couple of moments to fill out the membership form inside this newsletter.

There's still much to be done to help the park recover from both the drought and flood. Every member matters.

Long-term members may notice some changes in our membership form. We've reviewed our fees structure for the first time in more than a decade, and made some important changes that we believe benefit you and the organisation.

Firstly, we've raised our standard fee to \$15, which is similar to or less than comparable environment groups. For people on low incomes and students, there is no increase. Also, we've waived the fee increase for all of those members who assist the DPA by doing invaluable voluntary work in the park. By signing up to our new Active Member category, individuals and families who

help out around the park will be rewarded with cheaper fees.

And last but not least, we're also making it easier for children to get involved in the DPA by creating new Junior Ranger memberships. These cost just \$2 (or are free as part of a family membership). A Junior Ranger membership is the ticket to heaps of fun activities in the park, including our kids night-time spotlighting walk with ranger Peter Wiltshire.

Please take a moment to read through the form and choose the membership that suits you best. If you have any questions, you can call Graeme on 9499 3849 or email

darebinparklandsassociation@yahoo.com
The DPA thanks all the members whose fantastic contribution made 2003 such a successful year for our organisation and our park. We look forward to your continued support in 2004.

– **Graeme Martin**
DPA vice-president

DPA events 2004

February 21: Park Care Day 1 pm–4 pm

February 24: Spotlighting walk and AGM

March 7: Clean Up Australia Day

May 25: DPA quarterly meeting

May 30: Park Care Day 1 pm–3 pm

August 31: DPA quarterly meeting

September 12: Park Care Day 1 pm–3pm

November 30: DPA quarterly meeting

November 21 Park Care Day 1 pm – 3 pm

Here 'Puss

'Twas a hot and sticky night, December 10 last year, especially in a pair of chest-high rubber wellingtons! I was helping Geoff Williams from the Australian Platypus Conservancy conduct a survey of the Darebin Creek looking for platypus. The conservancy is funded by Melbourne Water to conduct regular surveys of the rivers and streams of Melbourne for platypus. As Geoff says, the presence of platypus indicates that the streams and catchments are managed well. In the case of Darebin Creek, that also means making up for many years of dumping industrial waste in the creek.

The survey involved setting up nets across the creek in the late afternoon at four locations, then checking them throughout the night.

Wendy from the Friends of Darebin Creek and myself helped Geoff carry in the equipment and to set the nets. In one spot we had to keep one eye on a tiger snake that was determined to cross our path.

Unfortunately, we caught no platypus, although there were plenty of eels and freshly chewed holes in the nets indicated water rats. The catch total included three snake-necked turtles and four goldfish (pests that we disposed of). However, the notion of platypus in the creek gets plenty of attention. Whilst setting up the nets, Geoff was interviewed by a journalist from ABC Radio National for the AM program. The Sunday Age also recently ran an article on Geoff. As Geoff noted, although there were no platypus caught this time, water quality has vastly improved since the last survey five years ago. This means the creek is definitely improving and we can hope for a better result in the future.

– Graeme Martin Ready for Action

Have you ever wondered how the DPA was formed and what exactly it does? The DPA committee has written an action plan to explain the role of DPA, its history and its goals. The three-year plan for 2003 – 2005 sets out the priority actions that are currently being pursued by champions from the association. The priority actions were identified by a survey of members, conducted more than twelve months ago. The champions are members who have decided to take the running with an issue.

As set out in the plan, the objectives of the DPA are to improve the environmental and passive recreational amenity of the Darebin Parklands and to promote community awareness of the natural values of the park. The long-term goal is to reinstate native animal habitat so that animals, including platypus, return to live in the Darebin Creek and its environs.

The action plan will be useful for explaining to other community groups and funding bodies who we are and what we have achieved in transforming a tip site into parkland.

If you would also like to champion an issue to help achieve our goal, just come along to the next meeting. For a copy of the action plan, please contact Graeme Martin on 9499 3849 or email robyn_graeme@optusnet.com.au or go to the Darebin Creek Management Committee website at www.dcmc.org.au.

DPA on the Web

The Darebin Creek Management Committee now has more information about the creek and, including a brief section on the DPA. Check it out at www.dcmc.org.au

Lone Ranger Rides Again

Dear members,

I was under the misguided impression that the summer holidays would give us a chance to consolidate the park after the floods of December. How wrong I was! With Erin off on maternity leave we were behind the eight ball before we started but then it struck without warning – chicken pox! Yes chicken pox brought our plans unstuck with Rhys falling very ill having to take four weeks' sick leave to recover. He still doesn't look all that well. He has the complexion of a teenager battling the onslaught of acne. So being the "Lone Ranger" once more, it didn't take long for the park (and may I add the weather) to seek revenge. A cool January with solid rainfall returned the park to spring-like growth rates, throwing all our summer plans out the window.

So what's been happening at the park? Well for starters you might have noticed a section of the bike path has been ripped up due to burst water mains below, which reminds me that the stage one bike path works are due to commence early March. That is from Separation Street to the Hurstbridge railway bridge on the City of Darebin side.

We are currently attempting to renovate the education centre to allow it to service more visitors and provide better storage for our fish tanks and our education resource material. As builders, we make pretty good rangers! The spiritual healing trail is starting to take shape with the plaques now completed and renovations to Mt Puffalo finished, except for planting which will be done in late autumn. Works still need to be done on the brochure map and wording, although we are happy with how it's coming along at present. Finally

the floods destroyed various paths that we had planned to use on the trail. But with Melbourne Water's help in late February/March we expect the damage to be repaired.

The TreeProject material is stored here ready for the DPA members who are involved in the nursery project. We have a good supply of seed available and Keelbundora Nursery will supply us with any seed we haven't got.

Finally Erin had a baby daughter, Imogen Grace born February 2, at 6lbs 3oz.

Seeya in the park.

Peter Wiltshire

Let's Get Growing

Imagine showing your children or grandchildren the mature tree you grew from seed. DPA members will soon have that chance, with the launch of the DPA plant nursery on February 21. Part of the TreeProject scheme, the nursery will allow volunteers to help grow hundreds of plants from seeds collected by the rangers in the park. The seedlings, which will range from mighty river red gums to delicate wildflowers, will be then be planted around the park. This exciting project relies on assistance from volunteers, who will take home a styrene box of seedlings in tubes and care for them for six months until they are ready to plant.

At our first Park Care Day for 2004, project leader Eve Recht will show everyone how to plant the seeds and explain how easy it is to take home and nurture a box of these little treasures.

Details: DPA plant nursery launch, Saturday, February 21, between 1 pm and 4 pm. Meet at the rangers' office at the end of Separation Street.

Afternoon tea provided. Information: 0425 776 494.

Give Us Five!

So much work and so little time. It's a problem we all have. That's why the DPA is changing the way we do things to make it easier for our members to do their bit for the park.

If each of our members helped grow and plant five trees and picked up five pieces of rubbish, we'd have a pristine, flourishing park in no time.

So in 2004 we aim to make it as easy as possible for our members to "Give Us Five". This year we have scheduled four Park Care Days, when we will plant trees and shrubs and also clean up around the park. Generally, Park Care Days will run for two hours, and finish with afternoon tea or a sausage sizzle, to thank volunteers for their efforts.

As well as being fun and rewarding, Park Care Days are a vital part of the DPA's long-term plan to restore native habitat, so that animals, including the platypus, can live in and return to the park. To see what we can achieve when we all pitch in, take a look at Hidden Valley, upstream from the footbridge on the Ivanhoe side. The area around the Palm Tree is almost complete. It's now clear of rubbish, has heaps fewer weeds and new plantings are coming along well. DPA volunteers achieved all of this throughout last year.

The 2004 Park Care Day dates are below. Please enter them in your diary or calendar now or you can cut out the panel below and stick it on your fridge!

2004 Park Care Days

Cut out and keep!

Saturday, February 21, 1 pm – 4 pm

Sunday, May 30, 1 pm – 3 pm

Sunday, September 12, 1 pm – 3 pm

Sunday, November 21, 1 pm – 3 pm

In The News

"Venomous tiger snakes have bitten two dogs in the past week, prompting rangers at Darebin Parklands to warn people to keep their animals on leads."
Northcote Leader, December 12, 2003

"The Darebin Parklands Association launched a campaign last month urging local cat owners to keep their pets inside in a bid to halt the decimation of park wildlife, particularly birds, lizards, possums and frogs."
The Melbourne Times, November 26, 2003

"Cat owners are being urged to keep their pets inside or in backyard enclosures as part of a new push to protect wildlife. The Darebin Parklands Association has launched the Home Cats Safe Cats Safe Wildlife campaign to protect wildlife in the Darebin Parklands from predators, restore native animal habitat and encourage the return of the platypus."
Diamond Valley Leader, October 22, 2003

"The (DPA) campaign is being supported by the RSPCA and Cat Protection Society and jointly funded by Banyule and Darebin councils. As part of the campaign, every household around the park will receive a leaflet and fridge magnet."
Heidelberg Leader October 21, 2003

"Youths are throwing supermarket trolleys into Darebin Creek, angering conservationists and retailers. Darebin Creek Management Committee coordinator Adrian Infanti said a Green Corps team fished 62 trolleys from the creek in one day...and earlier a Darebin Creek Bush Crew pulled out 119 trolleys."
Northcote Leader, December 17, 2003