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**Westgate Park/Bili Landcare**

For the first half of the year, like most organisations, we were restricted in our activities by covid. Bili Nursery operated as usual, we improved our online communications and our reporting. Many more people visited Westgate Park but the Park was overcome by weeds. An enormous effort by our core group of volunteers, led by George Fotheringham, is being put into removing weeds but this remains a major problem, exacerbated by higher than usual rainfall and an inadequate schedule of mowing the very weedy 'lawns' which results in wide dispersal of their seeds.

By January, community groups like ACF Macnamara were coming back to volunteer and slowly the weeds were being tackled. Corporate groups and individuals are now showing more interest in volunteering in the Park although we are yet to return to pre-covid rates.

Our team did a spectacular job of tidying and clearing the compound of 20 years of accumulated stuff, a new roof over the compound now keeps off the rain, new stainless steel nursery benches have replaced the rickety hand-me-downs.

A new watering system and a new trailer were purchased – all this thanks to the generosity of Lecki and Ian Ord, Tony Isaacson and a Commonwealth grant courtesy of our local member and good supporter, Josh Burns.

Importantly, the birds, frogs, skinks et al appear to have thrived in our absence.

In December 2021 the City of Melbourne formally adopted its proposal to take over the management of Westgate Park but on condition that funding would be provided by the State Government for the first three years of operation in order to bring the park to standards equivalent to Royal Park. To date no agreement has been reached.

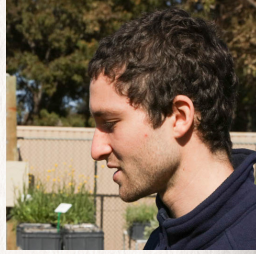
No progress has been made in commencing those priority projects for which agreement had been reached with Parks Victoria, funded by the \$2.5 million committed some years ago.

Good progress has been made on the app for the 320 species of indigenous flora and ~70 species of fungi in the Park, expected to be in operation before end of 2022. The app will also show weed species – a must in dealing with the weed problem.

A major grant from the Port Phillip & Westernport Catchment Management Authority was won for 'Hollows for Habitat' whereby 50 nest boxes will be erected throughout the Park for microbats – Little Forest Bat, Chocolate Wattleed Bat - and birds - the Powerful Owl, Boobook, Barn Owl, Sacred Kingfisher and Spotted Pardalote.







Gio Fitzpatrick has been leading the way on this important project, assisted by volunteers including trainees at the CFMEU and Harriet and Jack Spittle.

Another grant for propagating and planting saltmarsh species around the Salt Lake is well underway.

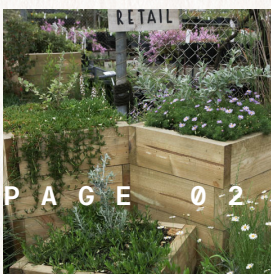
Melbourne Water commenced work on upgrading and duplicating Melbourne's main sewer under the Yarra River. This required a hardstand and large shafts to be built over a substantial area of the park adjacent to the odour-reducing plant in the river section of the park.

The work will be completed in 2024 and some of the area returned to parkland. Melbourne Water has commissioned a water management plan by way of compensating for this loss of parkland.

### **Bili Nursery**

Our main business is supplying local government with plants – Cities of Port Phillip, Melbourne, Maribyrnong and Hobsons Bay - and over the year plant sales (and giveaways) totalled 143,000. Our retail trade increased to over 7,000 plants as more stock was made available.

Over 11,600 plants were supplied to the Park and 3,800 given away to organisations such as Emma Cutting's Heart Gardening project to support the pollinator corridor from Westgate Park to the Botanic Gardens and there was a big increase in plant orders for citizenship ceremonies.



The City of Port Phillip provided a new kitchen, greatly improving amenity. Frequent clean-ups, weed control measures, pot cleaning systems and sprinkler maintenance have improved quality and propagation success rates.

Our arrangement to supply non-locally indigenous plants to Melbourne BushFoods was controversial, however, it did provide us with a useful source of income at a time when corporate group volunteering declined but Melbourne BushFoods has now substantially reduced its demand.

### **Governance**

We have struggled to fill the positions on the Committee of Management and Lecki Ord and Andy Webster have now resigned so there is an urgent need to recruit new committee members. Offers and suggestions welcome!

Sub committees were largely suspended during the year as we dealt with other issues.

A complaint was made to the Committee of Management by staff and volunteers at Bili Nursery in August 2021. The manager resigned to take up another position and other staff and several volunteers departed. We conducted a thorough internal investigation, a root cause analysis and a review of our complaints handling procedures. The matter was considered resolved following apologies, commitments to improving communications and adoption of a bullying policy.

Mars Reid and Holden Sayers were appointed co-managers but decided to step down from the role in June. (Rhod Cunningham was appointed Manager in early July 2022.)







### Volunteering and new members

The volunteer effort added up to more than 500 days across Bili Nursery and Bili Landcare and we had an excellent response to our call for volunteers.

A special thank you to Jackie Kerr, Bruce McMahon, Van Nguyen, Barb Allison, Ruth and Malcolm Cook who helped immensely – organising, guiding.

Thanks to all our many volunteers who have helped with pricking out, weeding, seed-cleaning, sweeping the floor, sorting, chucking out rubbish, picking up litter, planting, weeding, cleaning pots, organising workdays and so much more.

Anne Gugger, Dave Knott, David Long, David Milburn, Graeme Cutler, Jane Freeman, Kate Cleaves, Kathy Payne, Tiger Durie, Yolanda McKindlay, Marilyne Crestias, Natasha Orel, Paul Scrace, Shane Brown, Suzie Milburn, Vanessa Webster, Will Nalis, Zoe Hogg, Chris Stephen and Isobel Booksmythe. Where would we be without you?

Thanks to the diligent work of the bird survey group. The survey at the beginning of July recorded 56 Superb Fairy-wren, 58 Red Wattlebirds, 63 New Holland Honeyeaters, 32 Rainbow Lorikeets, 30 Welcome Swallows and many more – 41 species in all.



### Donors

We were granted Deductible Gift Recipient status earlier in the year meaning donations to us are now tax deductible.

A big thank you to those who added donations to their membership payments and those who made very generous donations. You can be certain they have been put to good use, improving amenity and productivity.

### Thanks to the Committee and staff

Thanks everyone for your careful deliberations, your ideas and enthusiasm. Rosey Haas for taking care of finances, Janet Bolitho as diligent secretary and wise counsel, Angelo Indovino for getting reporting and systems in shape, Lecki Ord for her advocacy and for so many years of work on the Committee and in the park, Duncan Fitzpatrick (a new member) for taking on grants oversight, Hannah Carle for her advice and interest in citizen science and Andy Webster for our communications. It has been a pleasure to work with you all.

A big thanks to our staff for their enthusiasm for biodiversity, their plant production at Bili Nursery and their interest and efforts in the Park – supporting volunteers, organising and steering our grant projects. A special mention to Mars who stayed focussed and worked hard – a rock through some difficult times. Holden Sayers returned to the fold for which we were very grateful. Always cheerful and hardworking, Lilli Johnston was a great find and Ian Robertson has done a great job in retail.

It is wonderful to have staff always looking for better ways of propagating, promoting indigenous plants and encouraging people to plant native.

