

Westgate Biodiversity: Bili Nursery & Landcare

Annual Report 2022-23

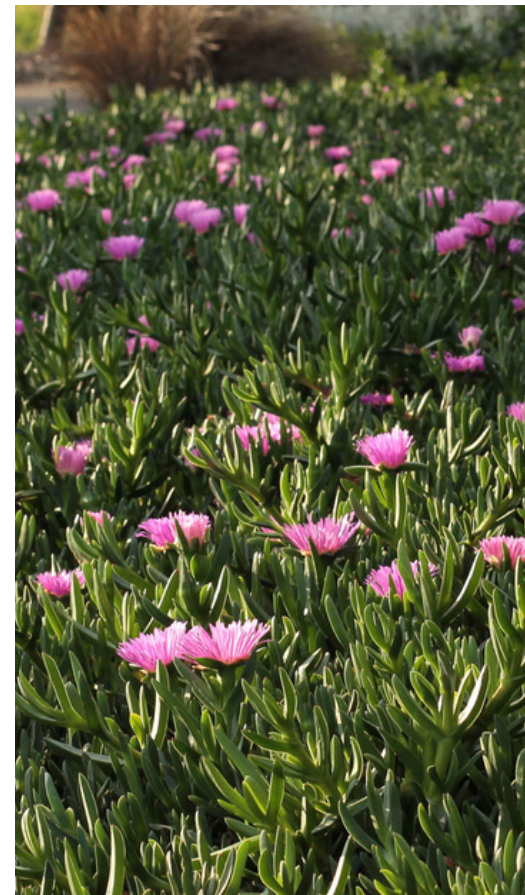


After years of advocacy on our part, the City of Melbourne announced it will take over the management of Westgate Park on 1 January 2026.

Over the next two years it will fund a master plan for the park. That plan will bring the Williamstown Road nursery and our compound on the northern boundary, to the south-eastern corner of the Wharf Road Triangle, close to the bridge.

This means Westgate Biodiversity: Bili Nursery & Landcare will operate on one, more central site. It means the nursery can expand to meet demand and we will have a compound with reasonable amenity, toilets and space for workshops and such.

\$100,000 will be spent by City of Melbourne over the next two years in planning for the change and we expect to be involved in that process.



We commenced planting along the eastern boundary of the Triangle and in due course most of that land will become public open space with a new entry from Wharf Road.

Weeds continue to dog us, taking over large areas of the Park, particularly in the Southern Wetlands – our most recent major project – and, whilst we have lost many plants, we did discover native species that do well to suppress weeds. We also produced an illustrated chart of weed species.

A truly enormous volunteer effort goes into pulling up, spraying, and slashing by our core group of volunteers. It is hard and relentless work and we are grateful to all involved. A special thanks to ACF Macnamara who volunteer so willingly.

Big thanks to those willing to collect the never-ending supply of plastic and other debris that comes down the river and lodge in the rocks. Thanks too to for the collection litter in the Park. Just imagine what the park would look like without our volunteers picking up rubbish.



Last year we lost some of our precious public open space to the Melbourne Water sewer duplication project, and this year, to Vic Roads' bridge reserve widening. Sad to see mature trees and shrubs cleared but both agencies were cooperative in making good.

Melbourne Water funded a water management plan and it is likely further research will be done on this by Victoria University post-grad students.

The need for more water in the lakes has diminished now that the park receives water from Westgate bridge fire service testing but with hotter summers forecast, better systems of reticulation will be a must.

In February we launched the app - 'A Guide to Plants & Fungi at Westgate Park' with photos and texts for over 300 plants and 80 species of fungi to assist with ID, generously funded by Lecki Ord and Ian Godfrey.



Parks Victoria funded some new tools for the Park and gave us permits for collecting seed from some of their properties.

We appointed a coordinator to promote and manage corporate group volunteering at Bili Nursery and the Park – an important source of funds, person-power, and new ideas!



We conducted two major grant-funded citizen science projects during the year.

The Saltmarsh Revegetation project was signed off in May although there is still some work to do in planting.

Hollows for Habitat – a significant Melbourne Water grant - is now into its monitoring phase with all 50 nest boxes in place. 40 were erected in March for hollows-nesting birds and microbats with 4 different designs and it was a very exciting event. 10 had been erected the previous year. A welcome extension of 12 months was granted and reporting will take place end November.

Hollows for Habitat monitoring and data collection will continue monthly for some time to come with our very enthusiastic monitoring team.

We are using echo-locators to identify species and ferret cameras to see inside boxes using tablets and wifi. Two of our walks in the dark detected microbat calls and we are fairly sure these were the Goulds Wattled Bat – one of the most common bat species.





We understand it may take some time for our flying mammals to take up the offer of accommodation so patience will be required.

A possum appeared from one box where a duck or a kingfisher should be.

Our work on this project, I am pleased to say, has generated a lot of interest and we have had a steady increase in new members as a result.

We were very sorry to learn that Pat Grainger died earlier this year. She was for many years a member and great supporter of Westgate Biodiversity.

Bili Nursery is running well-attended seed cleaning workshops at the weekend – which is good for both our growing seed bank and the knowledge acquired by participants. The word is spreading.

We restructured our nursery volunteer days to Tuesdays and Wednesdays and now focus on admin, organisation and deliveries on other days.

Retail received a boost with some quirky and colourful display furniture and a grant for new benches and trolleys have made a big difference in showcasing our plants.

New heat beds have meant more production and the resident cat is doing quite well in solving our nocturnal rat problem.

We expanded our range of aquatic plants, increased production of 140 mm pots and brought in new terracotta mini wildflower gardens – and they are selling well!



We give away the plants we can't sell to guerrilla gardening groups. We now have a beehive in the nursery, maintained by the Men's Shed, which is improving pollination during spring flowering.

Our work with Gardens for Wildlife, student internships, and Melbourne Polytechnic is extending our reach into the education sector.



Our field trips are up and running again with visits to Anglesea, Organ Pipes National Park, Mt Rothwell and the Botanic Gardens in Cranbourne.



On balance I think 2022-23 has been a good year and somewhat back to normal.

Huge thanks to my fellow committee members - Janet Bolitho, Angelo Indovino, Rosey Haas, Duncan Fitzpatrick, Hannah Carle, Ana Backstrom and Amy Denyer - our many loyal volunteers, our manager, Rhod Cunningham and our staff. We are a kind of family with a common desire to improve biodiversity and a will to make it happen.

Lyn Allison
President
Westgate Biodiversity: Bili Nursery & Landcare