

*Royal Park Australian Native Garden  
Photo by David Tatnall*



## **Royal Park Protection Group News Bulletin – September 2006**

### ***THE ROYAL PARK PROTECTION GROUP CELEBRATES A SIGNIFICANT TENTH BIRTHDAY***

In September 1996 a small group of Parkville residents met in College Church Hall to discuss emerging threats to Royal Park, chiefly the proposal by the then City of Melbourne Chief Commissioner, Kevan Gosper, to clear-fell ten hectares of parkland round the Zoo, including historic Marconi Crescent and its avenue of Morton Bay fig trees, for construction of vast super market-style concrete car parks. We then adopted objectives for the Royal Park Protection Group (RPPG): *to protect, regenerate and conserve the Royal Park as a unique, indigenous, central city park for present and future generations, consistent with principles of the 1987 Royal Park Master Plan; and to oppose alienation of parkland by government, commercial, sporting and other bodies to ensure public access consistent with the terms of the establishment of the Royal Park*. We often remind the world that Queen Victoria established Royal Park for *“the pleasure and recreation of the people of Melbourne.”* (i.e. not for private/commercial and sectional interests.)

At this time, we did not fully realise that this was the beginning of wholesale land grabs by Government and insidious, piecemeal alienation and destruction by stealth by the Melbourne City Council (the “responsible” authority) of parkland. The Big Steal list for Royal Park includes: car and bus parks (10 hectares for Zoo visitor/city commuter car parks + 2 hectares for the new Zoo North entrance car park + the new Urban Camp bus park on Brens Drive); a mega sports stadium (8.1 hectares for the State Netball and Hockey Centre); private real estate development (20 hectares of government land of the former Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital site for the “Parkville Gardens” used as the Commonwealth Games Village for 2 weeks); and coming up soon – expansion of the Royal Children’s Hospital (10 hectares in South Royal Park on Flemington Road) and the proposed extension of the Eastern freeway through the Park. Space will not permit us to include the entire list.

On the positive side RPPG is represented on the City of Melbourne’s standing Committee on Royal Park (the Royal Park Master Plan Implementation Advisory Committee and its sub-committee, the Vegetation Management Working Group). Here excellent work by Council staff and contractors and community representatives, including RPPG, is being done, despite lack of Council funding, on the planting and revegetation of Royal Park - our major objective. RPPG is also represented on the SNHC Advisory Committee and was on the Commonwealth Games Village Committee.

While thanks go to all our members and the current RPPG Committee, gold Royal Park Logie awards should be presented to special RPPG friends. These include Brian Stafford, landscape architect, for his vision of Royal Park as a bushland inner city park (expressed in his original 1987 Master Plan); Angela Munro for her work as the first RPPG Convenor; Rod Quantock for his leadership on the field of Royal Park battles and blockades; Brian Walters SC eminent lawyer and senior Green for his advice; Paul Mees for his contribution to RPPG on traffic and objections to the extension of the Eastern Freeway; Kevin Chamberlin, former City Councillor and Lord Mayor for his backing for Royal Park causes; Mary Kehoe and Michele Summerton for their work on heritage sites in Royal Park including the former Royal Park Psychiatric Hospital; Barry Clark for his brilliant scientific insights into the detrimental effects of outdoor sports lighting and his long term advice and assistance on light pollution and the environment plus Games Village security; Kenneth Davidson, Age financial writer, for his exposé of the Commonwealth Games and the Games Village debacle, and Tom Pikusa, barrister, for his excellent advice. We could name MPs and Melbourne City Councillors for wooden spoon awards but will omit in case they are judged as defamatory.

Julianne Bell, Convenor, Royal Park Protection Group Inc 30 September 2006



## ***New Royal Park Wetlands: Spot The Bellbird!***

***Article by Julianne Bell, North & West Melbourne News, September 2006***

Melbourne Council's September Green Leaflet says "Bellbird Waterhole" in Royal Park is a great place to see wildlife. Sure, there are flocks of sea gulls - "wildlife" in plague proportions, which have taken over the western storage pond of the wetlands (see David Tatnall's photo); and sure, it is habitat for the many foxes, which roam Royal Park nightly. But a ready-made native bird sanctuary it is not. And so we have been misled.

The original Wetlands design, first presented some eight years ago, included a safe island retreat, like the Royal Botanic Gardens, for nesting birds and then for ducklings and cygnets learning to swim. No such isolated retreat has been included here and we predict that water birds attracted to the wetlands will soon fall prey to foxes and domestic dogs running wild. Although "Dogs Prohibited" signs were supposed to have been erected by Council in the Wetlands, none have appeared. Unfortunately Council staff doesn't seem to care and have already made public statements to the effect that birds should not be allowed to nest in the wetlands as they foul the water!

The Ross Straw Field Pavilion, located right on the Wetlands, has now been designated the Public Information and Interpretation Centre and is already used by school excursions led by a friends of Moonee Ponds Creek group. Unfortunately, the Melbourne University Baseball Club also uses it as changing rooms. Alarm bells rang when we heard that the club had applied for a liquor license. Although we contested the suitability of allowing alcohol consumption at a venue used by the public, including children, and close to an environmentally sensitive site, the Liquor Licensing Commission approved the application. The only concession to the concerns of community groups - the Royal Park Protection Group and the North and West Melbourne Association - was that the permit was only granted until 10 pm, in line with lease conditions. All night drinking sessions are now out – we hope. Experience, however, with other sports clubs accommodated in other park pavilions makes us fear an adverse impact on the Park.

And by the way, don't be disappointed if you don't spot a Bellbird on your visit to the Wetlands. While an imported exhibit at the nearby Zoo they have never been seen or heard in Royal Park West, their habitat being sclerophyll gullies not open woodlands and grasslands. Bellbirds are, it appears, a figment of Lord Mayor John So's imagination.

### **What's On In October 2006**

#### **City of Melbourne Community Planting Day in Royal Park Sunday 1 October 2006**

**Time:** 10 am to 1 pm. **BBQ:** Provided. **Date:** Sunday 1 October 2006. **Venue:** Wetlands in West Royal Park on Oak Street (Melways 29 C 12). **Transport:** Train to Royal Park Station then walk down Poplar Road to Oak Street or take a short cut through MacPherson Field. **Trams:** Along Flemington Road then walk. **Cycle:** Capital City Bike track. **Parking:** Oak Street Wetlands car park if early.

#### **Royal Park Protection Group Members Meeting Saturday 7 October 2006**

**Time:** 11:30 am to 12:30 pm **Date:** Saturday 7 October 2006 **Venue:** The Centre (formerly the North and West Melbourne Community Centre), 38 Errol Street, North Melbourne. **After:** Join us for lunch or coffee at a restaurant in Errol Street to celebrate the Royal Park Protection Groups' tenth birthday. **Enquiries:** Julianne Bell 98184114 or 0408022408.

### **Membership Renewals Due**

The Royal Park Protection Group cares for Royal Park. If our Group is gone who will curb the Melbourne Council and State Government ambitions to carve up, subdivide and alienate the Park for more residential developments, office blocks, sports fields, car parks, commuter cycle paths and dog paddling pools? We need your support so please renew or rejoin if lapsed. Annual fees are \$15 for members and \$10 concession. (See attached membership form.)

**Quotable quote:** "They took all the trees. Put 'em in a tree museum. And they charged the people a dollar and a half just to see 'em. Don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you've got till it's gone. They paved Paradise and put up a parking lot." From the Joni Mitchell song "Big Yellow Taxi"