

The Life of the Yarra Audio Tour: MacRobertson St Bridge Transcript

Narration - Sarah: Take a look up at MacRobertson Bridge. This bridge was opened in 1934, the same year as the last great flood in Melbourne, when the water reached 12 meters above normal levels. The MacRobertson Bridge marked the start of a popular annual swimming race called the 'Race to Princes Bridge'. A race that once had spectators lining both banks of the Yarra as people raced from here, to Princes bridge near Federation Square, just under 5km's downstream. The race was first held in 1913 when there was a ferry platform here. It became very popular with 623 people competing in 1929. In March 1930 The Australian newspaper reported that the race had "now become one of the chief swimming events in the world". However, as the years went on it had to be cancelled due to pollution in the river. The pollution was noted to be exceptionally bad after rainfall events, with the last race held in the 1980's.

Narration - Sarah: Over time people have come to value the Yarra River and made considerable efforts to return it to its former state. In the 1970's, the introduction of the Environmental Protection Act meant that industry could no longer empty their waste into the river. Importantly, community efforts have resulted in increased vegetation along the river banks and in catchments.

Narration - Sarah: If you look behind you at the river bank, the area here makes a significant difference to helping improve water quality. This area is an ephemeral wetland, installed as part of the Yarra River Biodiversity Project. It is used to treat stormwater runoff. Sarah Buckley, the Senior Sustainable Environment Officer at the City of Stonnington will explain how it works, you might like to wander around while she does.

Sarah Buckley: *The main asset put in place is an ephemeral wetland, at Stage 1 near Grange Road. Treats stormwater runoff from roadways, driveways, and walkways that usually goes into the drains and straight to the river, untreated. There's a diversion pipe that takes that water to a gross pollutant trap first, which takes out the litter and some of the sediment. And then it goes into a settling pond, which takes out some more sediment. And then it gets sent through a wetland, which removes even more sediment, plus heavy metals, and it takes out nitrogen. The plants themselves take the nitrogen out. An ephemeral wetland, by definition, is one that has water in it temporarily and moves through the system on a regular basis. So whilst it only treats a small portion of stormwater from the whole catchment, it's a large portion of the stormwater that falls in the very localised area [around the river], and it's a good example for the community in terms of showing what council is trying to do for stormwater quality improvements.*

Narration - Sarah: If there were wetlands like this all up and down the river, maybe in the future we could hold swimming races here once more. This is a dream the Yarra Swim Co., a local community group, hopes to make a reality.

Narration - Sarah: Wetlands like these provide important habitat for frogs. According to Melbourne Water the diversity of frog populations in the lower Yarra is high and stable, so it is important that we protect these natural areas to ensure this continues. You might like to take a moment to stop the audio and listen out for any frogs around you. One species of native frog that has declined since European settlement is the growling grass frog. Have a listen to its call [insert call]. Is it familiar to you? Growling grass frogs have disappeared from much of their former range, but isolated populations still exist in the greater Melbourne area. They were once so abundant in Victoria that they were used for dissections in universities and to feed the snakes at the Melbourne Zoo. Loss and fragmentation of suitable habitat is a continuous threat to Growling Grass Frogs, which is listed as vulnerable under the *Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*.

Growling Grass Frogs like to live amongst reeds, sedges and rushes growing in and along slow moving streams. They feed primarily on ground-dwelling insects such as beetles, termites, cockroaches, moths, butterflies and insect larvae. However, they also eat lizards, snakes, fish and even other frogs. These frogs breed in the spring and summer, usually from November to March

Narration - Sarah: By planting indigenous species in your garden, you can help native species like the Growling grass frog move about our busy city. Lookup “Sustainable Gardening in Stonnington” to find out more.