



# Vegetation Communities of the Darebin Creek Catchment

Stretching from Woodstock to Alphington, the Darebin Creek winds its way through volcanic and sedimentary soils to the Yarra. These soils, along with other landscape and climate attributes, once influenced the distribution of a range of native plant species that formed eight major communities within the catchment. With the advent of the arrival of Europeans came the introduction of a range of agricultural, settlement and commercial practices that threatened the native flora and fauna of the Darebin Creek Catchment. Today, as a result, few areas of native vegetation remain.

## **Plains Grassland**

Once more commonly the home of the flightless bird, the Plains Wanderer, Plains Grasslands stretched through the north-west of the catchment to Victoria's Western District. The diverse range of herbs, daisies, lilies and grasses were noticeably colourful in the early years of European colonisation which provided a plentiful range of foods for the Kooris of the area.

The hard soils of these areas have a high proportion of basalt rock and as a result, trees and shrubs have difficulty growing here. Plains Grassland plant communities are virtually devoid of trees and shrubs. Native grasses make up the canopy of this community, much as trees would in a forest, the difference being that whilst trees tower overhead, this canopy is sometimes only knee high! Today, Plains Grassland is one of the most threatened plant communities in Victoria. The main grassland community found in the Darebin Creek region was dominated by Kangaroo and Wallaby Grasses. Other plants included the prickly Blue Devil, the Small Vanilla-lily and Clustered Everlasting. Many grassland species can also be found in other communities such as Plains Grassy Woodland.

## **Stony Knoll Grassland and Cliff / Escarpment Shrubland**

In some rocky and elevated areas, Stony Knoll Grassland still remains. Stony Knoll Grassland would have once included a range of shrubs leading to the community developing into a shrubland rather than a grassland. The rocky nature of the soil protects some plants from grazing. This has allowed the community

to develop a greater level of species richness and to survive to the present day. Plants included Drooping Sheoke, Rock Correa and Wedge-leaf Hop-bush. In basalt areas, Escarpment Shrubland was dominated by Lightwood and Tree Violet, and in sedimentary soils Burgan and Sweet Bursaria were more prominent.

## **Escarpment Woodland**

Similar in species composition to Escarpment Shrubland, Escarpment Woodland was dominated by River Red Gums rather than by shrubs. This community formed narrow strips along protected creek escarpments in the lower reaches of the Darebin Creek. Escarpment Woodland has a number of plants in common with Plains Grassy Woodlands with the exception of Burgan. This dense shrub with a mass of white flowers shaded the community to such a degree that herbs and small shrubs struggled to take hold.

## **Plains Grassy Woodland**

Plains Grassy Woodland was once found on the basalt floodplains in the north-west of the catchment. The soil associated with these woodlands was generally alluvial or volcanic in origin. River Red Gums were the dominant tree species and made up around 30% of the canopy. Other trees included the Silver Wattle, Lightwood and Black Sheoke. Plains Grassy Woodland understorey was predominantly grassy with scrambling herbs. Such plants included Kangaroo Grass, Loose-flower Rush, the attractive native Bluebells (*Wahlenbergia* spp.) and Slender Speedwell. Today these communities are rarely intact.

Many old River Red Gums do however still persist throughout the catchment, some of them being several hundred years old, often threatened by urban and rural land use and development.

### **Floodplain Riparian Woodland / Riparian Scrub**

Floodplain Riparian Woodland and Scrub occurred on the banks of the Darebin Creek as well as throughout low-lying areas where these water-bodies were prone to flooding. The woodland community was dominated by River Red Gum occasionally interspersed Silver Wattle. The transition from Floodplain Riparian Woodland to Scrub was influenced by landform with scrub forming close to the water's edge. A range of understorey species was present in both these communities and as the woodland community moved toward the creek, plants adapted to wetter soils became more prolific. River Bottlebrush and Woolly Tee-tree with Muttonwood made up the canopy of Floodplain Riparian Scrub, developing into a dense riverside thicket. Terrestrial and semi aquatic plants such as sedges and rushes persisted to the creek's edge. Streamside plants such as these are called riparian plants, which is where these plant communities derive their name.



### **Creepline Grassy Woodland**

Similar to Plains Grassy Woodland, this community had many plants in common yet occupied a different part of the landscape with River Red Gum becoming the dominant tree species. Creepline Grassy Woodland lined the banks of non-permanent waterways within the basalt plains. A non-permanent waterway is a stream or creek or even river that dries up during certain seasons and holds water during others. Streamside or riparian plants present

in Floodplain Riparian Woodland were also found in this community and was dominated by River Red Gum.

### **Permanent Wetland**

The group of plants that make up this community is often called an aquatic herbfield. A herbfield is a plant community that is generally dominated by herbs rather than trees or shrubs. Herbs are different from trees and shrubs in that they do not have woody tissue. Aquatic plants rarely need woody tissue as they float in order to reach the sunlight. As a result, many aquatic communities are herbfields. Herb species found in the permanent wetlands of the Darebin Creek Catchment include the Water Plantain and the Water-pepper. Reeds such as the Common Reed and Water-ribbons could also be found in these wetlands and were important as their height determined the structure of the canopy along the banks of the waterbody.

### **Seasonal Wetland**

Seasonal Wetlands also existed within the catchment. Their hydrology, or pattern of filling with water, was different from permanent wetlands in that they lost water to evaporation by either remaining boggy or drying up completely. As a result of this, seasonal wetlands supported different plants with abilities to survive under these different conditions. Such plants included herbs such as Naked Crane's-bill and Swamp Isotome, sedges and rushes such as and a relative of the Water-ribbons, Streaked Arrow-grass.

### **Further Reading**

Banyule City Council, *Banyule's Indigenous Plants*, BCC.

Beardsell, C. (1997) *Sites of Faunal Significance in North East Melbourne*, North East Regional Organisation of Councils.

Beardsell, C. (2000) *Vegetation Communities of the City of Banyule*, BCC.

Society for Growing Australian Plants (1993) *Flora of Melbourne*, SGAP.

**For further information please contact the Darebin Creek Management Committee on 9499 4454 or visit our website**

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