

Dandenong Creek: Wildlife of the waterways

Before European settlement, Dandenong Creek and its extensive wetlands would have provided habitat for a large number and great variety of fish, animals and birds. Animals such as kangaroos, possums, wallabies, emus and many species of small marsupials and waterfowl were common in the woodland and along the creek lines. The greatest concentrations of birds and animals were around the adjacent wetlands during summer.

Studies indicate that many species of native animals have been lost from the area. Ringtail and Brushtail possums, echidna and more than 20 bird species remain.

Most of the middle and lower section of the creek have been channelised and only remnants of the original vegetation remain, in small pockets along the Dandenong Creek corridor and in Valley and Portsmouth Reserves. Many old billabongs and wetlands throughout the Dandenong Valley are occupied by a diverse mix of plant communities.

Many plant species found in the area were utilised by Aboriginal people. Today, most of the original vegetation has been removed because of residential development, drainage, clearing and hydrological changes.

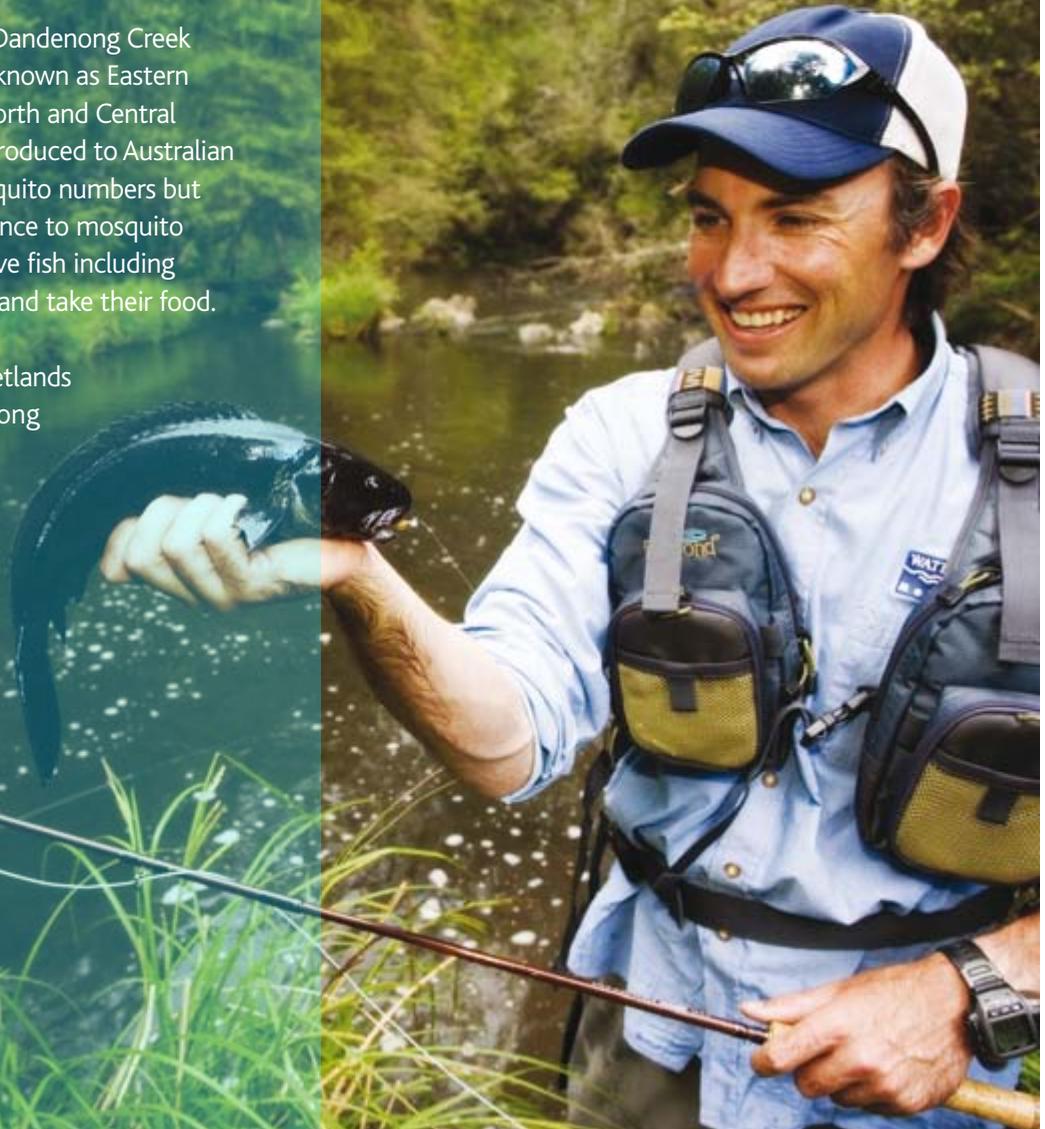


Fish

Three species of native fish (as well as Long-necked tortoises) are found in Dandenong Creek. A number of fish now found in the Dandenong Creek have been introduced from overseas.

The most numerous fish in the Dandenong Creek is the small Mosquito fish (also known as Eastern Gambusia), which is native to north and Central America. Mosquito fish were introduced to Australian rivers and creeks to reduce mosquito numbers but have made no significant difference to mosquito numbers. They attack small native fish including the young of larger fish species, and take their food.

Dwarf galaxias were found in wetlands and small creeks along Dandenong Creek until about 20 years ago. Competition with and attack by Mosquito fish along with habitat loss due to land development are the main causes for the loss of this threatened native species along Dandenong Creek.



Fish



SHORT-FINNED EEL

ANGUILLA AUSTRALIS

SIZE: COMMONLY UP TO 60CM (MALES), 90CM (FEMALES)

Short-finned eels are the most common fish species in Dandenong Creek. These native migratory fish have a long snake-like body and an even golden to olive-green colour. They are active at night and eat crustaceans, insects, yabbies, fish and frogs. All Short-finned eels migrate and breed at one site in the Coral Sea near New Caledonia. They spawn at depths of more than 300m before soon dying. The newly hatched young drift back to coastal areas on ocean currents.

COMMON GALAXIA

GALAXIAS MACULATUS

OTHER NAME:
COMMON JOLLY TAIL

SIZE: COMMONLY 10-19CM

Common galaxias have been found in Dandenong Creek. Their numbers are low, due to fish barriers such as weirs, logs and rocks. Adults move downstream to estuaries to spawn and young spend their first six months at sea. When they return to freshwater rivers and creeks, they are part of large spring whitebait migrations. They eat mainly terrestrial and aquatic insects and crustaceans. They are a long olive-grey fish with variable mottling on their sides.



REDFIN PERCH

PERCA FLUVIATILIS

SIZE: UP TO 45CM

Redfin perch were introduced into Australian waters in the 1860s. The hardy fish live in billabongs, swamps and slow-flowing parts of the creek. They have two characteristic red fins and dark vertical stripes along their silver bodies. These predators are considered a cause of reduced numbers of several fish species and feed on small fish, crustaceans, molluscs and insect larvae.

EUROPEAN CARP

CYPRINUS CARPIO

SIZE: COMMONLY 50-65CM

European carp are the largest fish in the Dandenong Creek system. They are considered a major pest because they create environmental damage by sucking up sediments and uprooting plants to filter out invertebrates, making the water very turbid. Eradication of the fish is complex and costly. Carp can survive low and high temperatures and very low oxygen content. A female can produce up to one million eggs.

Birds

Some of Australia's most iconic bird species may be found at times along the Dandenong Creek, which is a haven for a variety of birdlife including insectivorous birds, nectar-feeders (such as the honeyeaters), birds of prey, seed-eaters and waterbirds.

Among the waterbird species known to inhabit Dandenong Creek and its environs, the Cattle Egret, Australasian Bittern and Blue-billed Duck are listed on Victoria's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act. Three species on this list are migratory and protected by international migratory bird agreements between Australia, Japan and China: Latham's Snipe, Great Egret and Cattle Egret.

About 11 bird of prey species are regularly recorded along Dandenong Creek or in the area, including the beautiful Peregrine Falcon and Wedge-tailed Eagle.

The flora of Dandenong Creek plays a vital role in providing food and shelter for the nectar and seed-eating species of native birds. Many of the established trees such as eucalypts have hollows in them that birds and mammals depend on for nesting, roosting, or simply shelter and protection from predators.



Birds



RED-KNEED DOTTEREL

ERYTHROGONYS CINCTUS

SIZE: UP TO 20CM

Red-kneed dotterels can be found feeding in shallow water around wetlands and lakes. They probe the mud to find aquatic insects and larvae and also eat seeds. This small, plump wader has relatively long red legs, a black cap and breast-band, which stand out against the white neck and breast. The back and wings are grey-brown. They nest in hollows, preferably on an island in a lake. Both parents share incubation of and care for the young, who swim upon hatching.



AUSTRALIAN SHELDUCK

TADORNA TADORNOIDES

SIZE: COMMONLY 55-73CM

This large duck has a black head and body, with distinctive chestnut and white bands around its breast and neck, and the same colours on its wings. Females have a white eye-ring, and graze on grass on land or upended in shallow water, looking for algae, insects and molluscs. Their nests are usually high in a large tree hollow or in a rabbit burrow and are lined with grass and down.

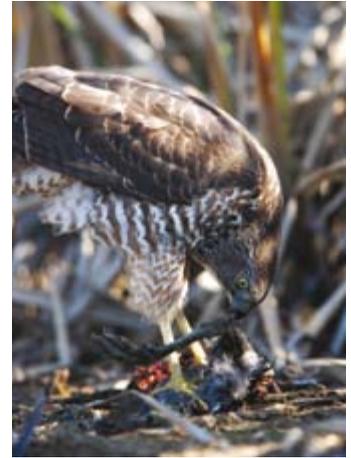


PINK-EARED DUCK

MALACORHYNCHUS MEMBRANACEUS

SIZE: UP TO 40CM

The Pink-eared Duck is small with distinctive zebra stripes along its body, black wings and a pink spot near its ear. It has a pointed leathery flap on the bottom tip of its bill, which enables it to filter feed in shallow water, mainly on microscopic plants and animals. Breeding takes place all year round. Nests are rounded masses of down placed in a hollow or stump above the water.



SWAMP HARRIER

CIRCUS APPROXIMANS

OTHER NAME: MARSH HARRIER

SIZE: COMMONLY 50-60CM

The Swamp Harrier is a large, slim-bodied bird of prey, with yellow eyes, an owl-like face mask, long, yellow legs and a long tail, rounded at the tip. It is dark brown with a prominent white rump. Juveniles are dark brown. When hunting for birds, eggs, large insects, frogs, reptiles and small mammals, Swamp harriers glide low to the ground or water, dropping onto their quarry. Their straw and grass nests are flat cups hidden in dense reeds or long grass.

Birds



WHISTLING KITE

HALIASTUR SPHENURUS

SIZE: COMMONLY 50-60CM

The Whistling Kite is a medium-sized bird of prey. It has a light brown head and underparts, with pale streaks, and dark sandy-brown wings with paler undersides and underwings that form a pale 'M' shape when open. These kites are often seen near water or around farms, soaring in a lazy, circling pattern, searching for dead animals and small, live mammals, birds, fish and insects. They make their large nests from sticks in the fork of a tree.



YELLOW-TAILED BLACK COCKATOO

CALYPTORHYNCHUS FUNEREUS

SIZE: COMMONLY 55-65CM

This large cockatoo has yellow cheek patches and panels on its tail. It feeds in flocks and has a long breeding season. Both sexes construct the large tree hollow nest lined with wood chips. The female incubates the one or two eggs, while the male supplies her with food. If there are two eggs, usually only one chick survives, staying in the care of its parents for about six months.



EASTERN SHRIKE-TIT

FALCUNCULUS FRONTATUS

SIZE: UP TO 19CM

This medium-size bird has a striking black and white striped crested head and a bright yellow breast. It uses its powerful short bill for stripping bark from branches to find insects and spiders. It will also sometimes eat fruit and seeds. The male selects a nest site in the high fork of a eucalypt tree, while the female builds a deep, cone-shaped nest from dry grass and bark strips, covering it with spider webs, moss and lichen.



RUFOUS FANTAIL

RHIPIDURA RUFIFRONS

SIZE: UP TO 16CM

The Rufous Fantail is a small, active bird with a distinctive reddish brown rump and continuously fanned tail. The bird is mainly grey-brown with a dappled white breast, and a reddish 'eyebrow'. The Rufous Fantail actively feeds on insects, often during flight. It constantly fans its tail and flicks its wings while foraging. The long, compact cup nest is made from fine grasses bound with spider webs and is suspended about 5m from the ground from a tree fork.

Birds



RESTLESS FLYCATCHER

MYIAGRA INQUIETA

SIZE: COMMONLY 16-21CM

The Restless Flycatcher has a glossy blue-black head and back, and white underparts with a soft yellow breast. It appears similar to a Willy Wagtail and can be distinguished by the white throat. It feeds on insects, spiders and centipedes. Restless flycatchers build a small cup-shaped nest of bark and grass bound with spider webs, camouflaged with pieces of lichen and bark, and placed in an exposed position on a tree branch, often near or above water.



LITTLE GRASSBIRD

MEGALURUS GRAMINEUS

SIZE: COMMONLY 14CM

The Little Grassbird is a small, streaked dark brown-grey bird with a pale grey breast. It is difficult to see but can be recognised by its three-note whistle. The Little Grassbird eats insects remaining in the dense cover of grasses and swamp vegetation. It builds a deep cup nest of reeds and coarse grasses, lined with feathers and hidden in thick reedy vegetation.



NANKEEN NIGHT HERON

NYCTICORAX CALEDONICUS

OTHER NAME:
RUFIOUS NIGHT HERON

SIZE: UP TO 64CM

The Nankeen Night Heron is a rich red-brown, paler underneath, and has a black crown. It sometimes has distinctive long thin white feathers trailing from the back of its head. Young birds are heavily spotted and streaked white, brown and orange-brown. It is nocturnal and can be seen roosting in branches above water by day. At night, these herons feed in shallow water on insects, crustaceans, fish and frogs. Breeding takes place throughout the year in colonies, often together with egrets and cormorants. The nest is a loose stick platform over water. Both sexes incubate the eggs.



AUSTRALASIAN SHOVELER

ANAS RHYNCHOTIS

OTHER NAMES: SPOONBILL
DUCK, SHOVELBILL, STINKER

SIZE: COMMONLY 46-53CM

Female Australasian shovelers have mottled brown upperparts, chestnut underparts, and a dark brown eye. Males in breeding plumage have a deep grey-blue head with a white stripe between the bright-yellow eye and the bill. The underparts are largely chestnut, while the upperparts are mottled black, grey, white and brown. The bill has an extended pointed tip. Fine hairs along the edges of the bill help this duck strain insects, crustaceans, plants and seeds from the water. Nests are built on the ground in dense vegetation. The female alone incubates the eggs and broods the young.

Birds



HARDHEAD

AYTHYA AUSTRALIS

OTHER NAMES:
WHITE-EYED DUCK,
BARWING OR BROWNHEAD

SIZE: COMMONLY 45-60CM

This medium-size duck appears mainly chocolate brown when swimming, with a white spot under the tail. Males have a white eye. In flight, the underwings are white, edged with brown. A white breast patch is obvious in flight and when standing in the shallows. In flight, the Hardhead's wings make a distinctive whirring sound. These ducks roost on low branches and stumps near the water, breeding in densely vegetated wetlands and diving smoothly underwater for food – aquatic plants and animals, particularly mussels and freshwater shellfish.

AUSTRALIAN PELICAN

PELECANUS CONSPICILLATUS

SIZE: COMMONLY 160-180CM

Pelicans are a distinctive large white bird with an enormous bill and pouch. During breeding, the bill is a brighter colour. The Australian Pelican dips its head underwater to trap fish in its large pouch. It may feed alone, but more often in a group, rounding up shoal fish. Pelicans are widespread on freshwater, estuarine and marine wetlands and waterways including lakes, swamps, rivers, coastal islands and shores.



Frogs

Among the many frog species known to inhabit Dandenong Creek, the Growling Grass Frog is perhaps the best known. Listed on Victoria's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act, the Growling Grass Frog population has declined throughout its entire range over the past two decades and is no longer found in much of the Melbourne area where it was once prevalent.

The croak of the Growling Grass Frog has often been compared to the sound of a boat's outboard motor on low throttle. Many other frog species have made Dandenong Creek their home, each with their own distinctive calls.

Frogs are also extremely important to our ecology. Many people are unaware that frogs are recognised as good indicators of a healthy environment, especially of water quality and toxins. This is because amphibians are covered in skin that must stay moist at all times, making them susceptible to foreign substances entering waterways.



Frogs



POBBLEBONK

LIMNODYNASTES DUMERILII

OTHER NAMES:
FOUR-BOB FROG OR
EASTERN BANJO FROG

SIZE: UP TO 5-8CM

The Pobblebonk is a medium to large mottled dark brown frog. It can be found in large numbers at night, especially after rain. Males call from August to April, usually floating in concealed vegetation. The call is a distinctive resonant 'bonk' sound. These frogs may migrate up to one kilometre to reach breeding sites.



STRIPED MARSH FROG

LIMNODYNASTES PERONI

SIZE: UP TO 7CM

This frog's back is light brown or grey-brown with darker brown stripes and a pale stripe down the middle. Its belly is white, its skin is smooth and its toes have almost no webbing. This frog is a voracious hunter and will eat any animal, including other frogs, smaller than itself. It lives around ponds and wetlands, hiding under logs, stones and leaf litter during the day. Its call sounds like a loud 'tok' or 'cluck'. When breeding, the males begin to call on land and continue in shallow water, usually at night. Breeding occurs throughout the warmer months. Eggs are laid in a floating foam nest, hidden among vegetation. The tadpoles are very large and dark grey to black.



SOUTHERN BROWN TREE FROG

LITORIA EWINGI

SIZE: 3-6CM

This small smooth frog is an agile climber that can jump to catch flies in flight. These frogs, which are commonly found in damp areas in gardens, breed in wet or flooded areas. The males call throughout the year. The call sounds like a repeated 'creeek-creeek-creeek-creeek'. They are brown with variable patterning and may show green markings.



GROWLING GRASS FROG

LITORIA RANIFORMIS

SIZE: 5.5-10CM

This frog is one of Victoria's most endangered species. Adults are usually found near or in water or very wet areas in woodlands, shrublands and open and disturbed areas. Eggs and tadpoles can be found in permanent lakes, swamps, dams, and lagoons with still water. Males are renowned for their distinctive calls, which consist of a long modulated growl or drone, followed by a few short grunts: 'crawark-crawark-crok-crok'. Growling grass frogs are 'sit-and-wait' predators, feeding on insects and even small lizards, fish, tadpoles and other frogs.

Mammals

Dandenong Creek is home to many species of mammals including about eight species of bats. Dense foliage and tree hollows along the creek provide shelter for a great variety of mammals, of which many visitors would be unaware.

Iconic species to Victoria such as the Grey-headed Flying-fox and the Sugar Glider can be found in healthy numbers all the way along Dandenong Creek where appropriate habitat is available.

The creek itself also provides valuable habitat to one of Australia's most loved and recognised animals, the Platypus (*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*). Classified as a regionally significant species, the Platypus makes its home burrowing into the steep banks of the creek. It collects food in large cheek pouches and feeds on yabbies, worms and other small invertebrates.

The Platypus belongs to the Monotreme family, and only one other species belongs to this group in Australia: the Echidna.

The waterway and its associated vegetation provides habitat for a range of bat species. Bats, mainly roosting in tree hollows during the day, come out at night in the warmer months. Bats are an important part of the local ecology, and benefit greatly from Melbourne Water's tree planting along waterways.



Mammals



RAKALI OR WATER RAT

HYDROMYS CHRYSOGASTER

SIZE: UP TO 34.5CM (MALES),
37CM (FEMALES)

Water rats are part of the rodent family but look and behave more like otters. They have a broader nose than an introduced rat and a white tail tip. They vary in colour from grey-brown and rich golden brown to black with cream to golden-orange undersides. They are avid nocturnal hunters and catch fish, frogs, yabbies, and insects before bringing them to land to eat. Water rats are well adapted to the water and are skilful swimmers and divers. They need areas of vegetation to burrow, forage and find refuge.



GREY-HEADED FLYING-FOX

PTEROPUS POLIOCEPHALUS

OTHER NAME: FRUIT BAT

SIZE: BODY UP TO 29CM

This is one of the largest bats in Australia. Mostly dark brown with a grey head and orange-red mantle encircling the neck, it spends much of its time hanging from branches of trees in forests or mangroves. Groups known as 'camps' can be made up of many thousands of animals. This bat searches for food at night, travelling up to 50km to feeding areas. It eats fruit from native and introduced species, particularly figs, and feeds on nectar and pollen from native trees, favouring gum trees.



COMMON RINGTAIL POSSUM

PSEUDOCHEIRUS PEREGRINUS

SIZE: BODY 30-35CM,
TAIL 30-35CM

If you visit the bush at night you might hear Ringtail possums leap around in search of food. They use their white-tipped tails as a fifth limb to manoeuvre through the treetops. Ringtails usually build neat ball-shaped nests of shredded bark and grass in dense bush but will take to nesting boxes. These possums have not fared as well as Brushtail possums in the city and often fall victim to cats.



COMMON BRUSHTAIL POSSUM

TRICHOSURUS VUPECULA

SIZE: BODY 30-55CM,
TAIL 25-40CM

People often regard these beautiful native animals as pests because they live in house roofs and create a terrible din. But 'brushies' have to be admired. They are perhaps the only native mammal that copes well with the stresses of urban living.

Mammals



SUGAR GLIDER

PETAURUS BREVICEPS

SIZE: BODY 16-21CM,
TAIL 17-21CM

Sugar gliders are beautiful and delicate animals, and have survived wherever there is enough food, suitable bush and hollows for breeding. Sap from black or silver wattle trees is one of their favourite foods, especially in winter when insects and flower blossoms are scarce. Equipped with a membrane of skin that extends from their forelimbs to hind feet, these silent and nervous possums can glide up to 40 metres between trees.

WOMBAT

WOMBATUS URSINUS

SIZE: AVERAGE 1 METRE IN
LENGTH AND 27KG IN WEIGHT

Wombats are solidly built marsupials with a squat, round, bear like body, small ears and eyes, and a large naked nose. Their thick, coarse fur varies in colour from sandy brown to grey and black, and is sometimes flecked with fawn. They sometimes sleep with their feet sticking up in the air and can run up to 40kph. They are the closest relative to the koala.

ECHIDNA

TACHYGLOSSUS ACULEATUS

SIZE: BODY 30-45CM IN LENGTH
AND 2-5KG IN WEIGHT

Echidnas are found in the forested reaches of the Dandenong Creek. On their back, sides and tail the echidna is covered with strong pointed spines. In between the spines is coarse hair. Their underside is covered with soft hair. Echidnas need bushland to live in; they are surprisingly good swimmers and don't like the heat. Although widespread, they're not commonly sighted for most of the year. They are mostly solitary and elusive animals. One of the best signs that an echidna is around is the mark they make with their snout in soft sand and soil when they're searching for food – a small triangular furrow with a round hole at its apex.

SWAMP WALLABY

WALLABIA BICOLOR

SIZE: BODY 70-76CM IN LENGTH
AND UP TO 17KG

The Swamp Wallaby is a common, medium-sized, browsing marsupial that is unique in many ways. It is distinguished from other wallabies by its dark colour, different gait and straight tail out behind. They have a broad fourth premolar tooth, which is never shed, and is used for eating coarse plant material. They breed all year round, and are sexually mature at 15-18 months. After a gestation period of 33-38 days only one young is born. The joey stays in the pouch till it is 8-9 months old. They are a solitary animal but will gather when feeding.

Reptiles

There are not a great variety of reptiles that make Dandenong Creek their home, but they still play an important role within the local ecology.

Two species of snakes are widely recorded as living in the area: the Eastern Tiger Snake and the Common or Lowland Copperhead.

These snakes are classified as protected species within Victoria, and are also highly venomous. Generally speaking, snakes need not be feared and are more likely to flee should they sense danger or human approach.

The Eastern Snake-necked Turtle can also be found within the waterway. Listed as a regionally significant species, the turtles have been known to migrate over long distances, sometimes straying from their intended path and ending up in suburban backyards. In the summer season, the female of the species will lay more than 10 eggs.



Reptiles



EASTERN SNAKE NECKED TURTLE

CHELODINA LONGICOLLIS

LENGTH: UP TO 30CM (SHELL)

These turtles live in swamps and slow-moving water and can live to be 50 years old. Also known by another common name of 'stinker', this turtle can eject pungent liquid gland secretions from its 'armpits' and groin when handled or disturbed. Their shell is brown with black edges, and the underside is lighter with black lines. Unlike other turtles, they bend their neck under their shell to hide and hunt, approaching prey with their head sideways, snapping their neck like a snake to catch prey at close range. This carnivore feeds on insects, worms, tadpoles, frogs and small fish, swallowing them whole or shredding them into pieces with its front paws.

EASTERN TIGER SNAKE

NOTECHIS SCUTATUS

LENGTH: 1.2M

The Eastern Tiger Snake is variable in colour in colour from brown, olive, grey to black. The most usual pattern is alternating light and dark bands, which gives rise to the common name. Belly cream, yellow, olive green or grey. Its main food source is frogs, but also eats a wide variety of small vertebrates. It is an extremely dangerous snake which can inflict fatal bites.

COMMON COPPERHEAD SNAKE

AUSTRELAPS SUPERBUS

LENGTH: UP TO 1.7M

The Lowland Copperhead snake is very variable in colour ranging from light grey, brown to black. Often has darker colour on neck and dark stripe down back. Its main food sources are frogs and other small vertebrates. Copperheads produce 15-30 live young. The young are totally independent at birth and are fully equipped with venom, which is toxic enough to be considered dangerous to humans. Although the venom is dangerous, bites are uncommon as the species is not aggressive.

BLUE-TONGUED LIZARD

TILIQUA SCINCOIDES

LENGTH: UP TO 40CM

The Blue-tongue lizard is a large skink about 30-40cm long. It is brown and black blotched on a cream body with usually a dark band behind the eyes. They are easily recognised by their bright blue tongue. They shelter at night among leaf litter or under large objects on the ground such as rocks and logs. They are sometimes found in suburban gardens. Blue-tongues are not very agile and eat slow-moving prey such as snails, beetles and other insects.

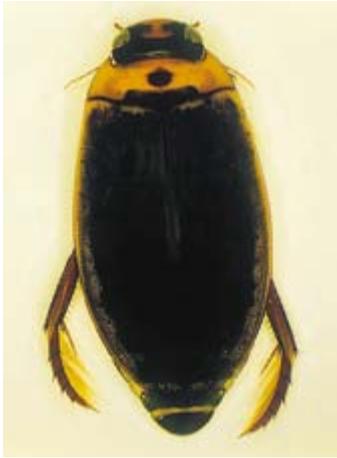
Bugs and Insects

Although often unseen, the role that bugs and insects play within the local and wider ecosystem is extremely important. Birds, fish, frogs, mammals and a large proportion of our other native species would have nothing to eat if insects and other invertebrates didn't exist.

As with any other healthy waterway, there is almost an incalculable amount of bugs and insects that inhabit this vast freshwater environment. The diets of these creatures are many and varied and can include organic material such as algae, bacteria, other bugs and fungi as well as decaying wood and leaves. So as well as providing a food base for frogs, fish and birds, waterbugs are responsible for digestion of a large amount of organic material and passing it on to the food chain.



Bugs and Insects



PREDACIOUS DIVING BEETLE

DYTISCIDAE

OTHER NAME: WATER BEETLE

SIZE: UP TO 35MM

Predacious diving beetles are large predatory aquatic insects that can be recognised by their streamline shape and thin antennae. Both the top and underneath body surface are convex. Hind legs bear a dense fringe of swimming hairs. Larvae of diving beetles are elongate with long legs covered with swimming hairs. Their long sickle-like jaws are deeply grooved to allow stubbing and sucking their prey. The breathing holes are located at the tip of the abdomen and the last abdominal segment often forms a siphon for replenishing air supply. Many larvae have two tail filaments (threads) at the end of the abdomen. (from Gooderham & Tsyrlin, 2002).

WATER BOATMAN

CORIXIDAE

SIZE: 0.8-10MM

Water boatmen are easily seen swimming in still waters. These oval-shaped bugs have very small antennae, with brownish backs and yellow undersides. They may be mistaken for back swimmers because they can be found in the same habitats. But they cannot stay still unless clinging to a plant or to debris. Otherwise they will float to the surface. When looking at them swimming in a water body it may be difficult to distinguish them from small beetles, particularly Predacious diving beetles.



BITING MIDGE

CERATOPOGONIDEA

SIZE: UP TO 50MM

Biting midges have piercing and sucking mouthparts and must feed on liquids. Some have been known to feed on vertebrates such as birds, fish, frogs, horses, cattle and humans. Some adults even require a blood meal to complete their life cycle. Others feed on nectar from plants. The larvae consume mainly decaying plant and animal matter, but some are predators. All adults have a single pair of wings and are generally able fliers. Most aquatic larvae crawl or burrow into the sediment at the water bottom. Sometimes they can be seen wriggling through the water.

DAMSELFLY

ZYGOPETRA

SIZE: 9-50MM

Damselflies are close relatives of the more robust and better known dragonflies. Damselfly larvae can be recognised by their three leaf-like tails and large eyes that allow them to see even behind their back. Damselfly larvae patiently stalk other invertebrates among water plants, using the unfolding action of their lower jaw armed with hooks to grasp prey.

Bugs and Insects



SNAIL

PHYSIDEA

SIZE: UP TO 30MM

Snails have a unique feeding structure called a radula that is a belt of teeth stretched over a cartilage base. This is used for grinding and rasping food. Freshwater snails have several methods for breathing underwater. Some have gills within a mantle cavity inside the shell, others obtain oxygen from an air-filled space within the body and yet others have a peripherally placed pseudobranch, which is a small triangular shaped process, presumed to have some respiratory function. The snail secretes its own shell. As snails grow, more calcareous material is deposited along the periphery of the shell.

CADDISFLY LARVA

LEPTOCERIDAE

SIZE: UP TO 20MM

Caddisfly Larva (plural – larvae) are worm-like with three pairs of well-developed legs on the first three body segments and hooks on the last one. Caddisflies are related to butterflies and moths. Their soft bodies are usually covered in a protective silky case. They eat algae and plants (living and dead). They use silk to build cases from gravel, twigs or sand depending on what they can find. They are also an important food for many fish.



Plants

Dandenong Creek is home to some of Victoria's most beautiful flora.

These vegetation communities contain many types of plants, including the iconic Eucalypt tree. Commonly known as gum trees, these majestic plants are relied upon by our native fauna to provide valuable sources of food and shelter.

Hollows within these trees act as homes for a large variety of animals including mammals, birds, reptiles and even some amphibian species.

Before and after European settlement, a great variety of Eucalypt species were used by indigenous populations for applications including making bags, nets and string, wood for tools, weapons, canoes and various other implements. The flowers provided nourishment for humans and animals, and Eucalyptus gum was often applied to ease toothache.

Dandenong Creek is also home to at least two populations of tree species that are rarely found in such numbers and in healthy condition. Classed as regionally significant, Muttonwood can be found in very large numbers along the creek. The other species is Yarra Gum, which is listed nationally as rare along with its associated vegetation community.



Plants



MANNA GUM

EUCALYPTUS VIMINALIS

SIZE: UP TO 20-25M

This tall and spreading forest or woodland tree has long, narrow, fragrant leaves and sheds its cream or white bark in long ribbons. Its cream flowers are mostly seen in summer and it provides many hollows for nesting birds and marsupials. It grows along watercourses and on moist, well drained soils. It is found in the upper and middle sections of Dandenong Creek.

SWAMP GUM

EUCALYPTUS OVATA

SIZE: UP TO 30M

The Swamp Gum is a variable, small to medium-size woodland tree featuring wavy, broad, dark green leaves. Its bark sheds in strips from upper branches, leaving smooth, white bark on the lower trunk. It has cream flowers mostly through winter to early spring. Swamp gums grow in poorly drained, swampy sites and depressions in the landscape and are found throughout Dandenong Creek except the lower section. *Eucalyptus yarraensis* (Yarra Gum) is a very similar tree with rough bark on all branches and slightly smaller leaves. A woodland dominated by Yarra Gum occurs in the middle section of Dandenong Creek.

RIVER RED GUM

EUCALYPTUS CAMALDULENSIS

SIZE: UP TO 45M

This large spreading woodland tree has dull, greyish-green leaves. The bark is shed in plates, leaving cream or pink patches on the grey trunk and branches. Its small flowers can be seen throughout the year. It is a long-lived tree that develops large hollows with age and is used by a range of animals. The most widespread eucalypt in Australia, it is found in the lower sections of the Dandenong Creek valley, the floodplain and temporary wetlands.

MUTTONWOOD

RAPANEA HOWITTIANA

SIZE: UP TO 10M

The tough leaves of this tall shrub or small tree are shiny dark green on top and dull below with wavy margins. Small green flowers are found along small branches in spring to early summer. It is an excellent mid-storey plant which grows in shade and can form thickets. Its fruit provides food for birds. Muttonwood grows on moist, well drained soils along waterways but will withstand extended dry periods when established. It can be found on the upper and middle sections of Dandenong Creek and can be confused with the weed *Pittosporum undulatum*.

Plants



RUNNING MARSH FLOWER

VILLARSIA RENIFORMIS

SIZE: UP TO 1M,
FLOWERING STEM TO 1.5M

This is an aquatic herb, similar to the Water Lily, with glossy green rounded leaves held on or just above the water surface. It grows in shallow grassy wetlands and features showy, yellow flowers in spring to early summer. It provides habitat for frogs, small fish and many invertebrates. This attractive plant is now uncommon in the Dandenong Valley. It is suitable for home garden ponds.

TASMAN FLAX-LILY

DIANELLA TASMANICA

SIZE: UP TO 1M,
LEAVES UP TO 80CM

This is a large spreading tussock with dark green strap-like foliage. It features delicate blue flowers which are 1.5m high in spring and summer and are followed by bright purple berries. The foliage, which was used by Aborigines as fibre to make twine and baskets, is found on moist, well drained soils in riparian areas and forests.