



# Network News



Newsletter of the Wedderburn Conservation Management Network – February 2009

## Planning meeting held at Inglewood – Peter Morison

A planning meeting of members of the Wedderburn CMN was held on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January to discuss in more detail the application of funds granted to the CMN for use in its ongoing work aimed at restoring the habitat of the nationally endangered malleefowl and other woodland birds.

The main projects to be undertaken will be fox baiting, ecological thinning trials, wildlife corridor creation, revegetation and weed control. The money will also be used to develop a plan to protect the Wedderburn bushlands from wildfire as well as identifying some areas for possible ecological burning.

The CMN aims to use local contractors where possible for all works – see article below.



Members of the Wedderburn CMN at a planning meeting

## News from the Bush – Wendy Rose

### *Baiting and Drought Keeping Fox Numbers Low*

On February 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, I joined members of staff from DPI St Arnaud and Rob Brouwers from Parks Victoria Maryborough, to conduct a fox spotlight transect. A transect involves driving along rather slowly while shining a spotlight and continuously counting foxes. The transect begins just out of Wedderburn and takes in Korong Vale, Woolshed Flat, Wychitella, just south of Buckrabanyule and ends where the Buckrabanyule Rd meets the Calder Hwy. The total distance covered was 50 km and it took about 2 hours to get around.

Wednesday night saw 9 foxes counted and Thursday night saw 6 counted. These are the lowest numbers recorded so far. This transect has been spotlighted by

DPI, Parks Victoria and the Wedderburn CMN since 2006 with an average of 14 foxes being seen each time, (the highest being 23 foxes during the first transect). The most surprising part was the lack of young foxes seen. Only two were counted for both nights.

We can assume that the continuing baiting program the Wedderburn CMN conducts in the Wychitella Nature Conservation Reserve, in conjunction with Parks Victoria, and some landholders is having an impact on fox numbers. The baiting is occurring around the breeding season and as young are moving away from the dens, thus removing much of the current and future breeding stock. But it must also be assumed that the recent dry weather may be playing some role in keeping numbers low as their food sources are also reduced.



Wendy at work replacing fox bait

### ***Malleefowl sighting in Wedderburn CMN revegetation.***

Recently I received a phone call from a resident in the Wychitella area informing me that they had observed a malleefowl using vegetation planted by the Wedderburn CMN 4 years ago. The resident reported seeing the malleefowl in the early mornings on their driveway and then moving back into the vegetation during the day. Also using the same vegetation on this property are a breeding pair of goannas and a plethora of reptiles and bird species. Keep tuned to this newsletter for developments.

### **Horehound, the unwelcome guest - Jeroen van Veen**

For most native plants and animals the widespread winter rains of June and July 2008 were very good news. They were however not the only ones to benefit from that much needed drink. Weeds have had a boost in the Wedderburn district with last year's rain falling at exactly the most opportune months for quite a lot of them. Paterson's Curse (*Echium plantagineum*) received a new lease on life after the rain in November and many plants set seeds from new flowerheads soon afterwards. Heliotrope did a roaring trade after the above average rainfall in December.

One of the most active weeds of 2008 has been Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*). It came as a bit of a surprise to many landholders in the district as they had not observed much activity from this species over the previous few years. Horehound had therefore been put on the less urgent list by many landholders. The June and July rains set off a germination wave of Horehound seeds that easily tripled or quadrupled the existing stands of this species everywhere.

Under the Victorian Conservation and Land Protection (CaLP) Act 1994, Horehound is listed as a 'Regionally Controlled' weed in this part of the state, which means that it is the landholder's responsibility to prevent the spread of this species. As a responsible land manager, Bush Heritage has set its employees and volunteers to work since June to deal a heavy blow to the Horehound population at the Nardoo Hills reserves. These staff and volunteer workers have used a combination of methods to kill off a significant number of plants so far. When the ground was still moist and therefore soft enough they have pulled out many adult plants by hand, moving systematically through the most heavily infested gullies. Their work was then followed up by two or three workers with knapsack spray units to apply a broadleaf specific herbicide to the remaining large stands of tiny emerging seedlings. Included in this spray was a pre-emergent herbicide that killed the next generation of Horehound yet to germinate and replace their dead parent plants. When the ground dried up later in 2008, many stands of Horehound were attacked by spray only, as pulling the plants out of the hard ground was no longer an option.

Horehound is sometimes underestimated as a weed, as it does not seem to be too invasive compared to other weeds like Paterson's Curse or Wheel Cactus (*Opuntia robusta*). It is also a perennial weed and invades at a much slower rate than the more explosive annual weeds that come and conquer within one season. It does however take over once it has settled at a site and overwhelms any native plant that would otherwise grow at that spot. At the Nardoo Hills, Horehound has taken particularly to disturbed soils under large trees and at the top of the hills and in the deepest part of gullies where the sheep camps used to be when the hills were still part of grazing properties. Under the trees it out-competes native shrubs like the Tree Violet (*Hymenantha dentata*) and the Mallee Wattle (*Acacia montana*). Its seeds are equipped with many hooked fringes that stick easily to the fur of kangaroos and other animals, which spread the Horehound throughout the area. A bushwalk through Wyperfeld



Stand of horehound pulled out and killed

National Park in Western Victoria gives a good picture of how invasive Horehound can be once it goes untreated. Most of the lower areas that were once wetlands in that park are now large Horehound monocultures.

Horehound, alongside Heliotrope (*Heliotropium europaeum*), also seems to have been the main beneficiary of the small amount of rabbit warren ripping done at the Nardoo Hills. Each site that was ripped about one year ago is now infested by a combination of Horehound, Heliotrope and a few Black Berry Nightshade plants (*Solanum nigrum*). This is one reason why Bush Heritage has decided to try to control its rabbit population by fumigation only from now on.

In the absence of any other structural plant of the Horehound's height, this species does offer some habitat value to native animals, in particular small reptiles that need to hide. While clearing Horehound at the Nardoo Hills both the Grey's Skink (*Menetia greyii*) and the Olive Legless Lizard (*Delma inornata*) were observed scuttling through a stand of Horehound looking for cover.

The DPI Website reports that there are currently two biological control trials taking place in Victoria. One is using the Horehound Plume Moth (*Pterophorus spilodactylus*), while the other involves the Horehound Clearwing Moth (*Chamaesphecia mysiniiformis*), but neither method is in use in Wedderburn. Horehound is a native to the Mediterranean and was first introduced to Australia by early settlers who liked to use it to make herbal tea. The plant has a strong aroma and you can easily pick up the smell after a good rain. One great tip for pulling Horehound by hand: Use gloves as you can't see how many Bull-ants are hiding underneath the foliage.

### **The Network in Action – Michael Moore / Diane Bunnett**

Part of the funds mentioned in the first article above is being spent on two projects at two different sites within the Wedderburn CMN's focus area. The work has concentrated so far on measuring and pegging out in preparation for the fencing of 1500 metres of an erosion site at one property while 600 metres of fencing at the other property will be erected in order to keep stock out of this site. It is intended that both sites will then be revegetated thus enhancing the environment and providing further connectivity for the benefit of wildlife.

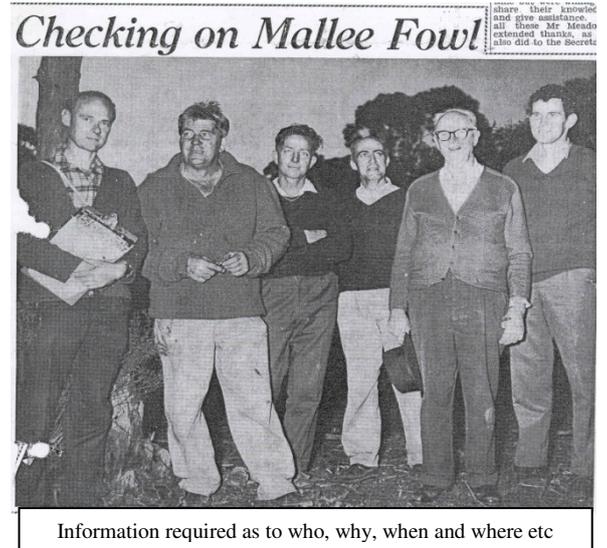
The work to be carried out at both these sites illustrates well the *networking* nature of the CMN. Contributors to the projects include:

- The landholders who are providing the land to be used for both projects.
- Parks Victoria who offer the use of a vehicle.
- DSE who are acting as the sponsorship organization for finance and also offering expert advice.
- North Central Catchment Management Authority who are supplying both the Drought Team for fencing and two monetary grants for group maintenance and promotion.
- Loddon Shire Council whose Landcare coordinator, Trevor Barker, will be organizing the efforts of the Drought Team.
- Wedderburn CMN, apart from providing the finance is also providing the project officer in the person of Mrs Diane Bunnett who will oversee the progress of the projects.
- Various contractors required for spraying, ripping, direct seeding and fencing, are all local people.

It is the cooperation, collaboration and coordination of this network of sources that makes the work possible. This is one of the main functions of the Wedderburn CMN i.e. bringing together and working with farmers, members of the general community and agencies to provide better results for farmers and enhancement of the environment for all.

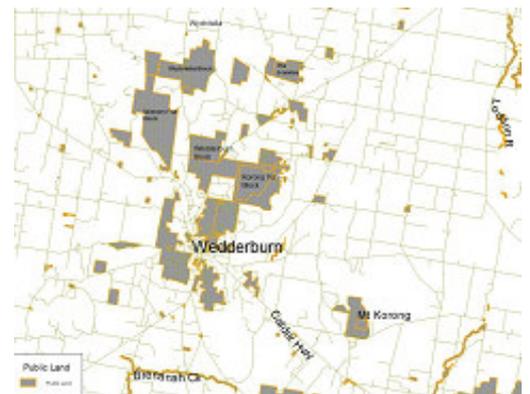
### Assistance Required – Michael Moore

The Wedderburn CMN has always been interested in the local history of its focus area particularly the development of the Wychitella Nature Conservation Reserve and the wildlife that inhabits the area, both now and in the past. The *bit of history* that was included in the December newsletter, a newspaper cutting from the Inglewood Advertiser featured interest in malleefowl dated 1861. The photograph shown opposite shows evidence of continued interest in the malleefowl but we lack information concerning what occasioned the taking of the photograph. We would welcome any information that readers may be able to provide.



### What is the Wedderburn Conservation Management Network?

The WCMN is a network of people including interested individuals and both public and private land managers who have come together to promote a shared aim. That shared aim is to work with the community in general to promote profitable, productive and sustainable human enterprises while conserving and indeed enhancing the biodiversity of their area of interest.



The WCMN Area of Interest

For further information concerning any items in this newsletter or other aspects of the WCMN contact - **WCMN ranger, Wendy Rose - 0438384053**  
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