



Network News



Newsletter of the Wedderburn Conservation Management Network – March 2013

Conserving Biodiversity

Kooyoora Connections CFOC Project 2012/13

The WCMN has been delivering on ground works and community education events in the Wedderburn district since September 2003. Since July 2010, the majority of these have been achieved through the Kooyoora Connections Project, which is funded through a Commonwealth Caring for our Country (CFOC) grant. This good work has continued in 2012/13 with the project well on track to meet or exceed all targets.

So far in 2012/13 the WCMN has fenced 48 hectares (ha) of remnant Box Gum Grassy Woodland vegetation, undertaken 23 ha of remnant enhancement plantings and completed 46 ha of direct seeding. Most of these works have been carried out in a key strategic corridor between Mt Kooyoora and the Sunday Morning Hills, and will greatly enhance the longer term biodiversity benefit of this district. Further remnant enhancement planting and direct seeding is still to be completed, primarily in the Mt Korong district. This will take place when weather conditions are cooler and wetter.



Weed control in the district has continued to focus on Wheel Cactus and Bridal Creeper (both listed as Weeds of National Significance), as well as Horehound and African Lovegrass. In 2012/13, 80 ha of CFOC-funded weed control has focussed on the Mt Korong and Little Mount district; these works have been complemented by the treatment of a further 88 ha on roadsides, creek lines and in the Wedderburn State Forest through a DSE Bush Guardians grant.

This year's WCMN rabbit control program has also focussed on private properties within the Mt Korong / Little Mount district, with over 150 ha treated. The WCMN works complement those funded on adjacent public and private land by WCMN partners Parks Victoria, Trust for Nature and Greenhouse Balanced. The WCMN fox baiting program, which takes place annually over more than 2000 ha, is currently underway at Wychitella Nature Conservation Reserve and an adjacent block of private land. This program aims to provide protection for Malleefowl hens and chicks during the breeding and hatching season. High levels of fox activity have been recorded around an active Malleefowl mound this year, which has disrupted the hen's egg-laying behaviour on at least one occasion. In keeping with an adaptive management approach, the WCMN has positioned more bait stations close to this active mound to increase the likelihood of foxes encountering and taking baits and offer greater protection to these endangered birds.



The annual WCMN kangaroo monitoring program is also underway. The program is being led by WCMN Ranger Graeme Tennant and Jeroen van Veen of Bush Heritage Australia, with assistance from Bendigo TAFE students.

Under the Kooyoora Connections Project the WCMN has also delivered many successful community events. In 2012/13, these have included guest speaker evenings on bats and seed provenance, a seed collection workshop, a visit to the Mt Rothwell predator-free ecosystem and a bird watching field day, as

well as several schools events involving students from Bendigo TAFE and Wedderburn P12 College. The next guest speaker evening will be “Box Ironbark Bugs” on Friday 17 May at the Royal Hotel in Inglewood – we hope to see you there!

Article and photos by Karly Learmonth - top photograph, WCMN sign on fenced remnant, bottom photograph, inside a fenced remnant

Farewell and Thank You

I have finished up with DSE having accepted a voluntary departure package. Of my 22 years with the Department more than seven have been spent setting up then working with the Wedderburn CMN. I thank the people of Wedderburn and District with whom I have worked. It has been a wonderful experience and I have greatly valued the friendliness, hard work, passion and enthusiasm of members. You have really kicked some serious goals. The transformation of the landscape is in itself a great story and I hope the CMN continues its great work long into the future. I hope to maintain some contact with the group in some way even if it's just as a member. Keep up the great work. Long may the Wedderburn Malleefowl survive.

Peter Morison

Hot, Dry and a little rain this month

It has been hot and dry. Nature can demonstrate signs which may be accurately interpreted as predicting when the weather will change. A few weeks ago there were dragonflies in small numbers one day, then much larger numbers the next. We carefully documented this observation, and then waited for the rain. It did come, two days later.



The brief rain causes a miraculous change in the lichen common in the local bush. During dry hot weather it crunches underfoot. After only a small shower the lichen rehydrates and becomes thick, soft and spongy, and very bright in colour.

Walking in the bush in the early morning to beat the heat, we have observed other natural responses to the ongoing hot dry weather. Meat ants are particularly active. The nests seem to be multiplying and getting much bigger. An area we visit has an old track on the border of a paddock and the bush, with six enormous nests in a space of less than 100 metres. Many trees have dropped their seed onto the ground.

“Nature Notes” has often referred to our bird bath and its many visitors. One very hot morning something unusual was sighted taking advantage of it. A full grown sand goanna was lolling about in the water. It didn't stay long enough for us to get a photograph but certainly seemed to enjoy the dip.

Many trees have been totally skeletonised by grubs. Large patches of bush are looking like there has been a bushfire. Once the grubs finish one tree they need to move on. We have encountered numbers of these grubs on stony ground between defoliated trees.

Observing our natural environment continues to be a satisfying pastime even though the weather has been challenging.

Wedderburn Conservation Management Network” Observers”

WCMN Seed Collection Workshop – Lindsay Ezard, Active Seeds Pty Ltd

On 22 March 2013 the WCMN hosted a seed collection workshop at the Active Seeds Pty Ltd seed orchard at Gowar East. Lindsay Ezard, a professional seed collector with more than 30 years experience and Vice-President of the Kara Kara CMN, shared his expert tips and techniques with the group.



The workshop was a great success, with 26 people from three CMNs as well as the BushTender program attending. After a brief introductory session, Lindsay led the group on a walk around the property, stopping at various plants along the way to discuss appropriate timing and techniques for collecting and preparing seed. The group learned about Acacia, Hakea, Melaleuca, Casuarina, Leptospermum, Eucalyptus and Dodonea, as well as kangaroo and wallaby grasses, Lignum, Bluebush, Saltbush and Juncus. Lindsay discussed which species work well when sown directly into the soil and which are better as tubestock. He also pointed out which species are usually

covered in meat ants (e.g. *Acacia acinacae*) and which might give collectors allergic reactions (e.g. *Acacia montana*). After a tasty lunch catered by Sweets and Treats Café in Wedderburn, Lindsay demonstrated useful tools for the home and professional seed collector, ranging from pruners and sieves to a grass harvesting trailer, mulcher and beefed-up vacuum cleaners.

Feedback from participants was universally positive, with overall satisfaction rated between very high and awesome. In thanks for his efforts, the WCMN presented Lindsay with a new edition of Neville Cayley's *What Bird is That?*

Article and photograph by Karly Learmonth, photograph – presentation session

Mt Rothwell Excursion

This privately owned Environmental Research Property is a joy to visit. It is 480 hectares of Victorian Volcanic Plains and Woody Grassland EVCs, protected by covenant and providing habitat for more than half a dozen 'little Australian mammals' extinct in the wild and now living and breeding in a safe environment. Protected by a 3 metre electric fence, designed and built when the property belonged to John Womesley, it was then known as the Little River Earth Sanctuary. Members of the WCMN including Peter Morrison, joined by 7 friends, shared some delicious delicacies, threatened by a rather demanding emu who stole sausages off the BBQ & even out of the hands of the unwary. We had two excellent guides, Prenda and Nathan, who took us through some of the more established tree covered grasslands while there was still daylight, until a sharp shower of rain drove us back. After darkness fell we walked and climbed up through open grasslands up to the top of the granite rocky outcrop called Mt Rothwell, on the lookout for little mammals.



There was no shortage of sightings as the sun set behind us. Rufus Bettongs, a small kangaroo species with a prehensile tail, were very quiet, feeding with little concern for our gasps and stares. As were Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies who moved quietly through the granite rocks as we climbed higher. Eastern Barred Bandicoots were more elusive and difficult to see as they are quite small (less than a kilo) and of similar colour to the dry grass and almost indistinguishable until they move; but we did see more than our guides expected. They are much paler and smaller than the more common Brown Bandicoots, otherwise sharing the same feeding and breeding habits. Long-nosed Potoroos and Eastern Spotted Quolls are very shy and hard to spot, but one obliging Eastern Spotted Quoll displayed his scavenging skills very close by as he jumped up on the chopping block where Prenda had recently chopped up rabbits. This Quoll and two more live in the machinery shed; it is sad that our forebears did not recognize the potential of the Quolls to tame for pets in place of cats! We also were lucky enough to see a Barn owl who studied us for some minutes before gliding silently after prey.



Our walk was sadly interrupted by a rather cold wind and then heavy rain which seemed to worry us much more than the feeding animals. We were happy to return to the meeting shelter for coffee and a debrief with Prenda and Nathan before heading home in all directions. I am confident that all participants enjoyed the experience and will spread the word to encourage future visitors as well as to plan another visit themselves.

Jill McFarlane

Mt Rothwell arranges guided night walks on the last Saturday of every month. Cost \$35 pp. Booking is essential Tel: 0434 953 355 Article by Jill MacFarlane, Photos by Barrie Taylor – top eastern quoll, bottom- rufus bettong

The Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group annual reporting back weekend 23 and 24 March.

Ouyen was chosen as the venue due to considerable increase in interest in Malleefowl following recent sightings of large numbers of birds feeding on roadsides in the local area.

The weekend commenced on Saturday with a public information session held at the recreation reserve. Dr Jo Benshemesh gave a comprehensive overview of the work of VMRG, the history of monitoring and numbers of birds recorded over time. He touched on reasons why numbers have spectacularly increased and how abundant food sources found on the roadside (canola from grain carting vehicles) have affected the Malleefowl behaviour

VMRG have recently produced ten interpretive signs. The reporting back weekend was used as an opportunity to publicly unveil the first one – now in place at the Ouyen Recreation Reserve.

Formal reporting back was carried out at the harness racing pavilion, with a delicious lunch provided by local community groups. Jo Benshemesh highlighted the main information recorded on the National Malleefowl Data base and confirmed that numbers of active Malleefowl mounds have increased dramatically. Jo also stated that the research and monitoring is showing that there appears to be no correlation between fox baiting and fluctuations in Malleefowl numbers.



Melbourne University researchers gave a presentation on the early stages of their research project on Adaptive Management of Malleefowl.

The VMRG submission in response to Fire Operation Plans for the Mallee was outlined, with major concerns regarding the 5% target critically impacting on biodiversity and Malleefowl habitat. Particular concern was highlighted where areas burnt by wildfire are not included in the burn target.

Ron Wiseman presented a motion camera sequence from a Malleefowl mound in Wathe reserve showing fox activity removing chicks, whole eggs and returning multiple times over several hours. In between fox visits the birds stoically returned and kept tending the nest.

President of VMRG Peter Stokie reported that the annual training weekend had gone very well this year with fourteen new monitors trained.

On Sunday twenty people visited the Iluka Mining Offset vegetation blocks on Tony and Bev Bingleys property adjoining the Annuello Flora and Fauna reserve. This area has not been searched for Malleefowl mounds, but tracks are frequently seen. A fire break was recently constructed as part of the management plan, which revealed a working nest beside the track. We sighted a Malleefowl in the offset block.

The reporting back weekend was a valuable opportunity to learn more about the VMRG activity over the past year. It was encouraging to see community interest and involvement with the activity, and to view the area that may be searched sometime in the future.

Article and photograph by Annette Robertson, photograph – members of the VMRG

The WCMN is a network including interested individuals and both public and private land managers who 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.

For further information concerning any items in this newsletter or other aspects of the WCMN contact **WCMN ranger, Karly Learmonth- 0429 356 285**
WCMN President, Michael Moore – 54943542

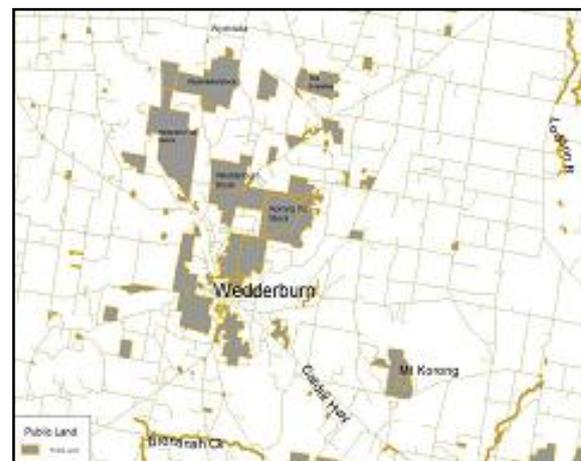
Website addresses

www.wedderburncmn.org

<http://wedderburncmnnews.blogspot.com/>

www.lpln.org.

LPLN- Loddon Plains Landcare Network



The WCMN Area of Interest

‘Proudly supported by the Victorian Government Landcare Grants Program’.



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