



# Network News



Newsletter of the Wedderburn Conservation Management Network – October 2011

Conserving Biodiversity

## Peas, Wonderful Peas

The wildflower season was not as spectacular as expected this year. The early rains we had in January and February were promising, but the subsequent grass growth and returning dry spells meant the herbs and flowers did not do as well as last year. The exceptions seem to have been the bushpeas, and generally all the plants of the *Fabaceae* family. This family contains a lot of the really palatable species that rabbits, wallabies and hares love to eat and there is speculation that the bushpeas received some welcome respite from browsing because of the oversupply of grass as a foodsource.

*Eutaxia microphylla* did well along the edges of some of our creeklines and significantly increased its numbers and also flowered profusely. *Swainsona behriana* flourished in the grasslands to the north east of Wedderburn. *Templetonia stenophylla* was previously only found at one location in the Nardoo Hills reserve of Bush heritage Australia (BHA) around Mt Kerang, but was seen at 5 different spots throughout those hills this year. *Indigofera australis* was found near Buckrabunyule road, far north of its normal range that normally doesn't extend much further than Bendigo. *Daviesia ulicifolia* was seen in dense flowering stands for the first time in 12 years throughout the forests of the Wychitella NCR.

Many herbivores love eating plants from the *Fabaceae* family as they generally are more nutritious than other species. They are a legume, which means that many of them use a bacteria to take nitrogen gas (N<sub>2</sub>) from the air and transform it into a digestible version. This is called nitrogen fixing. They also transfer this food stuff into the soils underneath and thus make this mineral available for other plants as well. They are therefore a very important element in the ecosystem and without them the bush wouldn't function. So even though the unusual volume of grass growth has stymied the wildflowers in general, it has taken the pressure off the peas which in turn is benefitting the health of the bush overall.

Article - Jeroen van Veen



## Loddon Plains landcare Network Bus Trip

The LPLN bus trip designed to visit three iconic wetland sites within the network's area of concern was intended primarily to be a mixture of a social and environmentally educational event held to fit in with the Naturally Loddon Festival. At 9.05 am on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September we set off up the Loddon Valley Highway with some forty assorted souls aboard a comfortable coach bound firstly for Bill Twigg's farm – *Nil Desperandum*. Bill informed us as we went along that he and his wife, Gwen, had inherited the farm forty years back and that at that time it was in need of some TLC. The following years saw Bill and Gwen lavish much time and effort in improving the farm with special emphasis on environmentally friendly farm practices. The results were visible as we toured the farm. One of the jewels in the crown of their achievements is Bill's creation of an artificial wetland from what was originally a dry flat paddock. This wetland has been created from scratch including the gathering and treatment of seeds used to create this wonderfully verdant environment.

We were also treated to a visit to Gwen's refurbished pioneer cottage complete with fire burning in the grate and a realistic array of Australian memorabilia – an impressive effort.

After morning tea and light refreshments we set off further north towards Durham Ox and a stretch of the Serpentine Creek where the Maxted family have a fine homestead. Our host for this part of the trip was Laurie Maxted who has farmed for many years in this area. Laurie, a staunch environmentalist, regaled the group with aspects of the historical development of the area and indicated some of the thousands of trees planted on his farm. Upon arriving at the homestead half of our group boarded the Maxted punt for a cruise on the fairly sluggish water of the creek. This boat trip gave us fine views of the flora and fauna that make up the riparian habitat. Many species of birds were viewed and wondered at. A fine lunch followed – a change around of groups then we were off on the last leg of our journey.

We arrived at Tang Tang Swamp to be informed by Ian Hocking and Mal Brown that this wetland was ranked the sixth most important wetland out of four hundred in Victoria for the breeding of the endangered Brolga and one of five such aquatic ecosystems in the Loddon River catchment. The area is used by many species of birds and not surprisingly has a long history of aboriginal use. There is also evidence of early pioneer huts. Unfortunately, due to pressure of time we could not go into the swamp but managed to glimpse aspects as we drove round the perimeter.

The tour proved to be very successful with many favourable comments including, that it was informative to see successful farmers as living proof that profitable, productive, sustainable and environmentally friendly farm enterprises can result in the creation of resilient long term habitat and increasing landscape connectivity.

Article - Michael Moore, Photograph – Mal Brown



### **Birds Are Busy!**

There is a lot of activity among the many bird species in our area at present. Many are nesting and some interesting observances have been made in recent weeks. The spotted pardalote, a beautiful small bird, not seen a lot recently, is currently nesting in small holes in the ground.

Two were seen on consecutive days at two quite different sites. Musk Lorikeets, colourful and noisy, are enjoying feeding on some flowering trees, but are also nesting. The Observers have been monitoring the progress of a pair of Brown Falcon nesting near to home. The interactive behaviour with other bird species is captivating. With so much water still around in table drains and low lying areas, Pied Cormorants, Spoonbills and Ibis are relatively common these days. It is a great opportunity to view many different waterbirds that not been seen much during the dry years. Black faced cuckoo shrikes seem to be gathering in unusually large numbers, and an unusual bird sighting recently was a European Goldfinch seen in a local native garden.

Wildflowers have been plentiful and in considerable variety. Although Golden moth orchids had almost finished flowering at many known sites, late last month a large number were seen flowering in a railway reserve. The warm weather has quickly put an end to the flowering display of orchids such as Waxlips, but it has also brought out the Sun Orchids. This year has seen orchids appearing in most unusual places, and it continues to be an exciting time to find plants flowering in areas where they have not been seen for many years.

Enjoy being out in the natural environment, there is always so much to see, but be observant too, snakes are already out playing their part in the biodiversity of the landscape that we share with them.

Article - Wedderburn Conservation Management Network "Observers"



## National Malleefowl forum attended by Wedderburn Conservation Management Network members

Six members of Wedderburn Conservation Management Network attended the Fourth National Malleefowl Forum held in Renmark, South Australia in late July. The Program was full of diverse and interesting speakers who provided comprehensive reports on monitoring, research, management and community engagement with Malleefowl across Australia. Issues relevant to the preservation of this iconic species and the challenges of effectively managing its habitat provided much food for thought. Although the numbers of birds, and the health and availability of suitable habitat varies a great deal across Australia, the conference highlighted that the fundamental challenges for maintaining healthy populations of Malleefowl are very similar.



The importance of regular systematic monitoring of Malleefowl populations was highlighted. The Wedderburn area was included as part of the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group reporting on monitoring and activities. Remote camera monitoring of Malleefowl activity is increasingly being used at numbers of sites and WCMN presented information about the local camera monitoring site with a poster presentation on the second day of the forum.

A more comprehensive report on the Forum presentations will be available on the Wedderburn Conservation Management Network blogspot : [wedderburncmnnews.blogspot.com](http://wedderburncmnnews.blogspot.com)

Article -Annette Robertson

Photo Caption: Shows members at the forum in front of the WCMN Poster presentation

L-R Annette Robertson, Peter Watts, Wendy Murphy (Ranger/Facilitator WCMN) , Lynton Schriever, Doug Pocock, Jan Llwelyn

## The Malleefowl Festival



The malleefowl festival, scheduled to coincide with the Naturally Loddon Spring Festival, was held on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> September at the Town Hall in Wedderburn. This was the first time that this event has been held and proved to be a great success with approximately one hundred people turning up to participate in the fun of the day. School children took part in competitions involving painting and both model and mask making. The malleefowl *boogie* was performed and people were treated to never before seen film of malleefowl activity photographed by members of the Wedderburn CMN.



The Wedderburn CMN wishes to express its thanks to the many people and organisations involved in making the event a success including Wedderburn College staff and students involved, members of the Wedderburn Men's Shed and enthusiastic local volunteers. The event could not have proceeded without funds provided by the Norman Wettenhall Foundation.

Article – Michael Moore

### WCMN Vegetation Surveys

Vegetation surveys have commenced this year with Terri Williams of DSE helping out. Terri was involved with the initial setting up and surveying of the three different vegetation survey types the WCMN participate in, namely malleefowl mound vegetation surveys, (6 in total set up in 2008), kangaroo exclosure plot surveys, (9 in total set up in 2007) and 50m structure surveys in all EVC types within the Wychitella NCR, (approx 20 in total set up in 2004). Replication of these surveys began in 2010 and will continue in the coming weeks.

Data from the one exclosure plot and one of the 50m transects have been compared, but no malleefowl mounds data has been analysed to date.

A general trend so far suggests that there is currently more ground cover, ie grasses and herbs and shrub growth and canopy cover has expanded. There are less patches of bare ground.

Volunteers are most welcome to help out with the surveys. Four Bendigo TAFE students assisted with a malleefowl mound vegetation survey in September, but there is more work to be done.



Another collection of vegetation surveys the WCMN have recently set up is in the proposed 256ha burn area in the Korong Vale block of the Wychitella NCR. 11 posts were placed in the ground at various locations with the plants within a 2m radius recorded. This will provide us with some data on species type and abundance pre and post burn.

Article – Wendy Murphy

**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

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**WCMN Chairman, Michael Moore – 54943542**

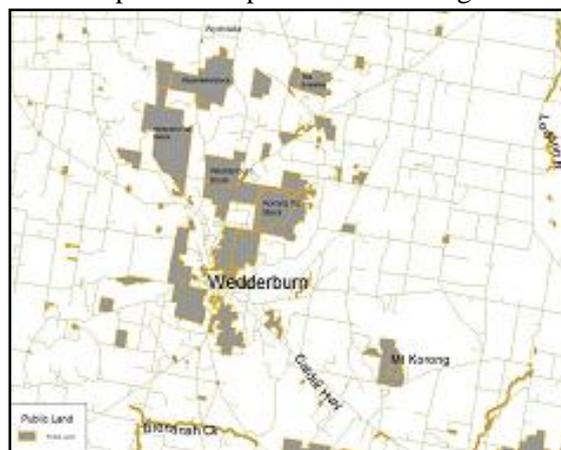
**Website addresses**

<http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/home/january/web/index.html>

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

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

LPLN- Loddon Plains Landcare Network



The WCMN Area of Interest



**NORTH CENTRAL**

Catchment Management Authority

*Connecting Rivers, Landscapes, People*