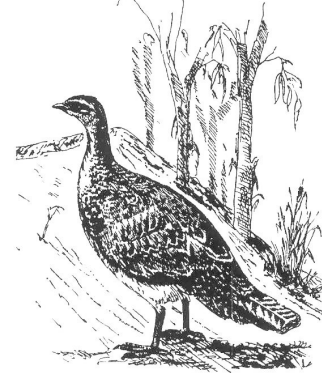




Network News



Newsletter of the Wedderburn Conservation Management Network – June 2009

Conserving Biodiversity

American Conservation Volunteers – Wendy Murphy, WCMN Ranger

On Thursday May 28th I had the pleasure of supervising 9 American Conservation Volunteers inject wheel cactus at Mt Egbert. Previous to their injecting work they had been conducting malleefowl mound searches in the Wychitella Block and were very grateful to be in more open country doing something different.

The day started out with a talk by Ranger Suzie Deason on the history of the wheel cactus in the Wychitella area, the processes involved in injecting wheel cactus and the safety measures required.

In bright sunshine the group was let loose in a set area to “destroy” as many wheel cactus as they could find. The enthusiasm was quite a sight to see with some heading off in “Terminator” style while others took a more passive approach. A couple of them actually had a race to see who could get to the first cactus after it was spotted about 100m away. About an hour and a half in to the injecting while having a break as a group it was discovered that we had misplaced one of the volunteers, so a search party was sent out to locate him. Thankfully he was quickly found and the group returned to the top of Mt Egbert for lunch.



The afternoon session was taken a little more slowly with the morning enthusiasm waning greatly. About an hour was spent injecting a few more cactus before a group decision was made to call it a day. Many of the volunteers were almost asleep as soon as they got on the bus. But it was a great effort and many cacti will be turning their toes up.

Endangered Orchid Found At Nardoo Hills

We have confirmed the occurrence of a very rare orchid – the northern golden moths or *Diuris protena* – at Bush Heritage Australia’s Nardoo Hills reserves. The newly described orchid was listed under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* in 2007, and is only found in Victoria where it is classified as endangered. The orchid was first discovered and described in 2006 in the grasslands of Terrick Terrick National Park c.60 km to the north-east of the Nardoo Hills. Although a number of populations have been recorded from grassy remnants in recent years, many sites are very small and vulnerable to a range of threats. The Nardoo Hills population of over 400 plants is the largest in Australia, and occurs in species-rich grassy yellow box woodland on the slopes of Mount Kerang.

Bush Heritage’s ecologist David Baker-Gabb first spotted the orchid last year and alerted Deanna Marshall, Senior Flora Officer with the Department of Sustainability and Environment. They then had to wait for the plant to flower again before it could be collected and formally confirmed. The wait was worth it, says Deanna. ‘It’s a really significant find because of the population size and because it’s on secure land.’ The discovery is very good news for the orchid’s long-term survival.

The presence of the orchid at Nardoo Hills suggests that restoration work at the reserve is really paying off. As Bush Heritage ecologist Paul Foreman says, ‘I’m sure all that rabbit and weed control work done by David Baker-Gabb, Jeroen Van Veen and many volunteers has had something to do with it.’ Previously grazing by rabbits and stock would have restricted flowering and therefore threatened the orchid’s long-term survival on the property.

Discussions with the Victorian Herbarium indicate that the likely pollinator for the orchid is a native bee that also pollinates bulbine lilies that are similar in size and colour to the orchid. Bulbine lilies are widespread across the Nardoo Hills.

The Victorian Herbarium is keen to collect seed from the population as a contribution to the Millennium Seed Bank Project. The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, UK, are running the project, which aims to conserve 10 per cent of the world's wild plant species by 2010 – concentrating on the 'rarest, most threatened and most useful species known to man'.

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The Release of Malleefowl at Wychitella, Where To From Here? – An abstract of a report by Peter Morison



Northern Golden Moth Orchid

Photograph by Jeroen Van Veen

On 4th August 2008 two young malleefowl (one male and one female) were released at Wychitella Nature Conservation Reserve as part of the Wedderburn CMN's ongoing drive towards conservation of biodiversity. On arrival at the predetermined release site the birds were fitted with radio transmitters then released together. Birds were initially tracked each day for the first week and were to be tracked 2-3 times per week after the first week until the tracking devices ceased to function.

The female appeared agitated after release and quickly disappeared into the bush. The bird travelled considerable distances each day after release. On the fourth night it was located and food was left without disturbance. It was roosting on the ground. On the fifth night the bird was again located and found to be in a poor state. Food was left at the location. The bird was found dead the following night. The female body was sent for autopsy.

The male appeared unstressed at the release and walked slowly away. It was tracked and sighted close to roosting time 24 hours after release. It was then tracked and located at its roost site at night to enable the placement of food. Food was placed close to this roosting site and did disappear. The male stayed very close to this location for the following week which seemed to indicate that it was eating the food. At the roost site the male was found to be roosting in a bush only 1m from the ground. When located at a later time it was observed roosting some 2-3 m from the ground. Nine days after release the transmitter on the male ceased to function. The area was searched and no feathers were found. No feathers were found at subsequent checks within the foraging area and the male is assumed to be still alive. This assumption appeared to be substantiated by sightings of a juvenile bird made by Peter Watts some 4 months after the release (December Newsletter).

In view of the experience gained by the release of the birds the Wedderburn CMN has been in the process of reviewing plans for future releases. Advice has been sought upon possible contingency actions in response to unexpected circumstances such as those which did arise i.e. poor roosting and lack of foraging of at least one of the birds. The WCMN has taken heed of suggestions made from various agencies, academia and knowledgeable individuals. A future plan may involve considerations such as:

- The availability of a suitable fox proof enclosure for use in a soft release, or the case of possible intervention and housing of distressed birds. Possibly the birds could be hatched and released within 24 hours of hatching into such an enclosure built at the release location.
- Perhaps vitamin injections given before release.
- The next release being carried out with more birds to ensure a greater likelihood of some birds surviving.
- Improved tracking devices and a roster for tracking to allow both Parks Victoria staff and Wedderburn CMN members to work together to obtain and swap information about the bird locations.
- Obtaining a permit for release well in advance of the proposed release date.

The release experience has also raised questions best answered by future research.

Photo Point Monitoring In Progress – by Wendy Murphy and Michael Moore

Five members of the Wedderburn CMN recently attended a photography workshop at the Daylesford Learning Centre with the intention of improving their skills in photo point monitoring of the environment within our focus area.

Photographs, well taken and documented, provide an excellent record of environmental change. Photo point monitoring is a standardized procedure used by environmental authorities worldwide for documenting both spatial and temporal environmental change. The camera, when used in this way, is recognized as an important scientific tool. Group members found the workshop helped in understanding camera operation and the techniques and principles essential to obtaining valid results. The workshop was attended by about fifteen people from various backgrounds: environmental managers, landholders, members of Landcare groups, environmentalists and also two archeologists keen to utilize the technique in their work. As well as theory there was also an outdoor activity where we could try out our new found skills and knowledge. Overall, this was a very useful and informative day enjoyed by all.



Following on from Michael's report, I have been putting into motion some of the points we were shown at the Photo Point Monitoring Workshop. So far two sites have been monitored using photos taken from set points. The first site is the Korong Bushland Reserve and the second site is the trial ecological thinning site at Doug Pocock's property. As more works occur in other areas, photo monitoring points will be set up there also to record the progress of the site and the works.

“Nature Notes” For April and May - L and A, WCMN Nature Observers

During the months of April and May bird sightings have been predominant, mostly due to emerging food sources for local birds. Almost bare paddocks have been visited by flocks of red-rumped parrots seen feeding on the ground while the sound and sight of very large flocks of corellas are noticeable in the early mornings. Eucalypts that are currently in flower are attracting the noisy flocks of brilliant green and red musk lorikeets and another brightly coloured bird, the male red capped robin, has been sighted recently. His brilliant red forehead and chest contrasting with a white front and black back draws attention to his movements in spite of his small size. The chattering of restless flycatchers and their incessant activity makes these scenes most entertaining to observe.



A few pairs of southern white face have been observed feeding on grass seeds, decreased numbers of these birds have been seen in recent months. Wedge-tailed eagles have also been sighted feeding on animal carcasses such as dead sheep in paddocks and dead wallabies in the bush.

On one of our walks we encountered a young stumpy-tailed lizard, about half grown, basking in the sun under a low bush, it responded to our disturbance with an impressive threat display.

Mistletoe in large volumes on trees at the edge of the forest has been changing colour, the leaves turning to a rusty red. Ruby Salt bush at this time of year has abundant red fruit (sometimes orange or yellow). After the rain there has been a proliferation in growth of twining fringe lilies now beginning to look like a thick piece of green cotton reaching up to climb onto whatever they can. Young quandong trees have also been showing healthy growth in recent months in spite of the drought, but many will be eaten off by kangaroos

and wallabies before they can grow much higher. Unfortunately scratched and disturbed areas of soil are indicating an increasing amount of rabbit activity in the native vegetation. There are lots to observe in our focus area. Keep your eyes and ears open.

Getting Paid For Looking After Shrubs and Trees? Jeroen Van Veen **Adding Value to Your Land**

Carbon emissions trading is a hot topic these days and among all the smoke, mirrors and political tug of war around this subject it is difficult to obtain a proper understanding of what this kind of trading is all about and the logic behind it. The main principle to keep in mind is that the availability of clean air and a reduction in greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere is worth money to some people.

If the demand for clean air and species diversity gets high enough there will be a push for a trading system that includes not only **carbon emissions, but also biodiversity and landscape conservation**. A future where landholders get paid to manage parts of their land for conservation might sound like a farfetched fantasy of an overly optimistic environmentalist, but the fact is that in very small doses this is what is starting to happen already.

For the last few years the Victorian government has been running the Bush Broker scheme. This scheme brings together developers, power companies, road construction managers and others who need to clear native vegetation for their different projects, and landholders who own similar bits of bush. The state laws dictate that the land clearer needs to offset the vegetation losses by having similar land conserved. Through this Bush Broker scheme, landholders receive a negotiated payment to manage their remnant vegetation for conservation.

All landholders involved in deals so far report successful business. One striking detail emerging from this scheme is that the better condition natural bush is in, the more money it is worth, showing that good long-term management brings in more dollars down the track.

Stewardship payments for landholders or a broader biodiversity and carbon trading scheme might not be such a far flung fantasy after all

Another way money comes into the countryside for conservation work is through national non profit groups such as Bush Heritage Australia (BHA) or the Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC). Donors and members give money on the understanding this gets spent on the protection of land these organisations acquire.

Finally, a third stream of dollars finds its way from private businesses that benefit from having a clean, green image. These businesses and other organisations need to be able to tell their clients that they support the Plains Wanderer, Helmeted Honeyeater or the Bilby or that they are a company that is “carbon neutral”. The demand of the clients of these companies for clean and green products is big enough to result in millions of dollars going into conservation works on private land throughout Australia. As Wedderburn landholders we just need to become a lot more tuned in to these opportunities. There are currently some 36 broker firms operating in this national “voluntary offset” market of which only Greenhouse Balanced is active in the Wedderburn area.

What is the Wedderburn Conservation Management Network?

The WCMN is a network including interested individuals, 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

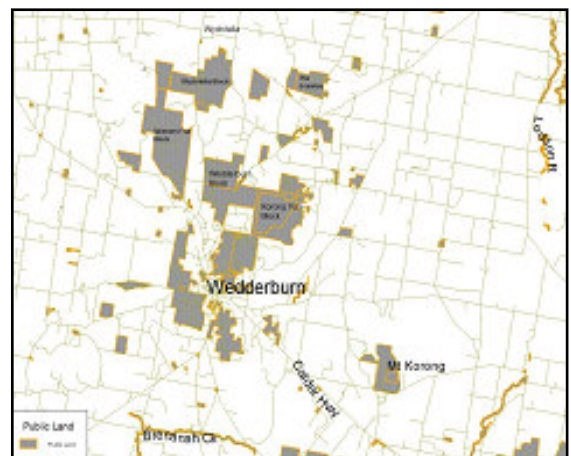
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Website addresses

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

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



The WCMN Area of Interest