



Network News



Newsletter of the Wedderburn Conservation Management Network – June 2011

Conserving Biodiversity

Malleefowl Mound Line Searches

On Saturday May 21st, fourteen sturdy souls participated in a malleefowl mound line search through a section of the Wedderburn Block of the Wychitella NCR. The day was jointly coordinated between the WCMN and the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group. Participants ranged from interested community members, WCMN and VMRG members, Parks Victoria staff and even a lady from New Zealand. The day began with an induction session on the monitoring techniques and equipment used by the VMRG when conducting line searches and how data is collected and stored. Lunch was had at Doug's property before we all headed off to tackle the bush. The area chosen for the search had not been formally surveyed before so we were heading into uncharted territories! Because it was the first time many of us had participated in a line search, it was taken at a slow and steady pace and frequent stops were made to ensure the line remained reasonably straight. Some of the bush encountered was very thick and difficult to move through, but we were able to locate two unmarked mounds in the search area. These will now become part of the VMRG monitoring program. We had to abandon the search mid walk as it was becoming dark and cold quite quickly. Most of the group were to be involved in another search on the Sunday, but due to thunderstorm activity, it was cancelled.



Members of the VMRG, the WCMN and other volunteers get ready for the search.

Indigenous crew search for malleefowl mounds

On Tuesday and Wednesday May 23rd and 24th, I was involved in searching an area of the SkinnersFlat Block of the Wychitella NCR with 9 employees of the Ngurta Werkitya Program, a group of young indigenous people from Swan Hill and Mildura, Rod and Leota from VMRG and Suzie from Parks Victoria. This block contained two known mounds, which luckily we located, (it would have been a bit embarrassing if we didn't), and we located two unmarked mounds, which will become part of the VMRG monitoring program. It was a really successful few days. The top photograph shows members of the WCMN and VMRG, the bottom shows the indigenous crew at work



Members of indigenous crew and other volunteers having a break

The WCMN is looking at conducting these searches annually with the assistance of the VMRG and Parks Victoria, and anyone who wants to take part.

Article - Wendy Murphy

Photograph of line searchers – top, Lynton Schreiber

Biodiversity across Borders Conference

On Thursday 9th June a group of WCMN members left Jacka Park, Wedderburn, in a mini bus to arrive in time for the annual all day Biodiversity conference at Ballarat. Dr John Williams (advisor to NSW government) and Professor Peter Gell presented a rather depressing picture of the Murray Darling System. A key point was that the flood plains which were a key part of the system in Pre European Australia are no longer sustaining the system. They suggested that the original ecology may be irreversibly changed as the aquatic plants are now adapted to turbid water. However pre European aquatic plant structure still survives in the headwaters and with intensive management of the middle and lower watercourses over many years it may be possible to flip the hysteresis.

The resilience of ecosystems was a recurring theme of many of the presentations/studies given during the day and was elaborated in the Question and Answer forum. It was in this forum that the interface between scientists and public policy was discussed. Professor Ian Lunt made the point that Ecology departments in Australian (Victorian) universities lack funding and that governments won't act unless confronted by overwhelming expert advice from scientists. Community lobbyists also need to have input and several Landcare group members spoke passionately about the need for more government action.

Dr Paul Boon gave a summary of his group's recently completed 3 year study, which includes a fine-scale mapping (1:10000) inventory of the current distribution of species within the saltmarsh, mangroves and estuarine wetlands in Victoria. He also made the point that his study was over budget and there was no part of the original budget to communicate the content of this report to the general public.

Probably one of the main messages I took away from this conference was that in order to effectively manage the environment we need far more comprehensive longitudinal monitoring of the populations, without disturbance of species involved, so that we can more accurately model them.

Finally the 'Precautionary Principle' should guide public policy. That is where knowledge of the effects of land management is incomplete then err on the side of caution.

That is to say that if a population is diminishing and its interactions with the rest of the ecology is largely unknown then it is wiser to act to prevent extinction than to allow extinction to happen and then observe the effect on the rest of the ecology.

At the end of the day we were exhausted but very enlightened from the intensity of the information presented.

Article - Barrie Taylor

Fungi Workshop full of information

*The Fungi – An Introduction to a Curious Kingdom
Presented by Alison Pouliot*

Arriving at the workshop was an education in itself. A vast display of fungi of many types each labelled and grouped accordingly. I'm glad I arrived early and had some considerable time to study this display before the workshop commenced. The Saturday workshop had the maximum number of participants. It was repeated on Sunday

Alison began the theoretical part of the workshop by providing a brief history and discussion of historical and traditional knowledge, uses and beliefs about fungi. She covered the process of identifying fungi, and the major field characteristics, which gave the participants a much better understanding of what to look for when in the field. The importance of obtaining spore prints as a tool for identification, and how to obtain them was also covered. Many workshop participants had an interest in the uses of fungi, and Alison clearly reinforced the importance of absolute positive identification of edible species before using any fungi for food. This was reinforced by a clear description of the toxicities of fungi and what will happen



to you if you ingest fungi that has not been correctly identified. Types of fungi, how they reproduce, their taxonomy and classification and useful field guides and tools were also discussed.

After lunch, armed with field guides, compact mirrors (for viewing the undersides of fungi), magnifiers and warm clothes we moved to a forest site near Kingower. Initially the area looked rather devoid of anything like fungi. But with the group became more confident about where and how to look, and a surprisingly long list of fungi were found and examined. Descriptions and information was provided by Alison and also by Marj May who has been involved with Fungi map for some time.

It was a valuable and informative workshop. If you missed out, try (next year) to get to any of Alison's fungi workshops that she runs at several locations during Autumn.

Article - Annette Robertson

Conservation and farm forestry at the Imlal Project

I left Wedderburn early on the morning of 10th June for Bendigo in order to board a mini bus organized by North Central CMA to visit the Biorich Demonstration site at Lal Lal near Ballarat. The attraction of this project for me was to see at first hand revegetation work which was utilizing the natural habitat design principles laid out in the book "*Recreating the Country*" written by Steven Murphy.

The project, developed in cooperation with Ballarat Region Tree growers (BRT) aims to design and plant a 10-hectare bio-rich demonstration plantation on the kaolin clay mine site owned by Imerys. The site is being established in a buffer zone on low-lying swampland surrounding the mine.



This project aims to integrate natural habitat for flora and fauna with farm forestry and thus achieve two goals at once; the harvesting of useful wood based products and the creation of sustainable habitat.

The design principles involve consideration of such things as choosing a diverse range of indigenous plant species grown from seed collected locally, including appropriate food source plants and the randomization of certain species to mimic natural processes. Other considerations involve the creation of five structural layers including understorey, shrub species and canopy trees and the incorporation of selected forestry species. Ongoing monitoring of the progress of the area is achieved using photopoint monitoring set up by members of a local University, aerial photography and the regular surveying of bird species in the area. To date 2,500 plants have been put in the ground and there are plans for corridors of the same sort of plantation which will connect indigenous remnant vegetation on the site.

As part of the tour we were split into two groups with one group viewing the conservation aspects of the site followed by a change over from conservation to production aspects.

The thinking behind the revegetation concept when compared to previous notions of simply 'planting trees' is more sophisticated and aimed at the construction of resilient sustainable habitat. A great deal of thought has obviously been put into planning this project. It is an exemplary project worthy of consideration by other groups involved in natural resource management.

It also seems to me that this type of enterprise has great possibilities for encouraging landscape connectivity on private land as the production / commercial / conservation blend would have a wider appeal than conventional wildlife corridors to private landholders especially farmers.

Article - Michael Moore

Photograph – Gib Wettenhall -discussion of bird surveys

Wheel Cactus Injecting Day

Even a very bad weather forecast did not deter a hardy band of 8 volunteers from Wedderburn Conservation Management Network and Wychitella Landcare group joining 6 Parks Victoria Staff at "The Granites" (Mt Eggbert). The task was - to perform some concerted work on injecting wheel cactus in the adjacent public land managed by Parks Victoria. We were fortunate to have the use of the relatively new Mt Tarrengower

trailer, complete with many injecting guns, backpacks and chemical, plus as we later discovered the all important barbeque. The team had an “induction” by Janet Richardson, the most experienced wheel cactus injector in the district, then set off to work across the flat area on the Eastern side of the road. With so many people working, it didn’t take too long to cover that area. We then tackled the area on the main reserve. Although in recent months work has been done on reducing the considerable population of cactus, they still seem to keep reappearing. As an illustration of the challenges faced with controlling wheel cactus - It was discouraging to come across a school group walking through the area, and then later discover that a number of cactus wheels had been chopped off or chopped up and left on the ground – thus allowing more plants to grow.



A hearty barbeque lunch was had amidst a few light rain showers. The weather was now looking more threatening, so we decided to call it a day. There is still plenty of work to be done in the area for another time.

Article - Annette Robertson

Non Lethal Kangaroo Control Methods

The Wedderburn area has become a real hotspot for research in recent years because of the diverse biodiversity assets of the area. The WCMN were lucky enough to have a talk by Dr Graeme Coulson, Helena Carter and Annabelle Minter from Melbourne University who have all been involved in researching techniques for non lethal control methods for kangaroos. Dr Coulson explained how ultra sonic noise such as those produced by products including ShooRoo car equipment can’t actually be heard by kangaroos whose hearing range is below that of humans. He then went on to mention the tests done on olfactory deterrents such as dog urine and horse urine. It was found that dog urine did have a deterrent effect, although it did also have the opposite effect at times in that the kangaroos were inclined to come to the smell station to investigate before moving away. Horse urine had little effect. Fertility control methods were explained, as was fencing but they are still very labour and cost intensive control methods and not always successful. The most interesting research is being conducted on the natural ‘foot thumping’ kangaroos seem to have when alerted by something. It’s not entirely clear what signals this thump, what it actually means or which kangaroos in the mob it is directed at, but that’s where Annabelle’s research is being conducted. It was all very interesting, but the issue is that there are still no effective non lethal control methods available at this point of time.

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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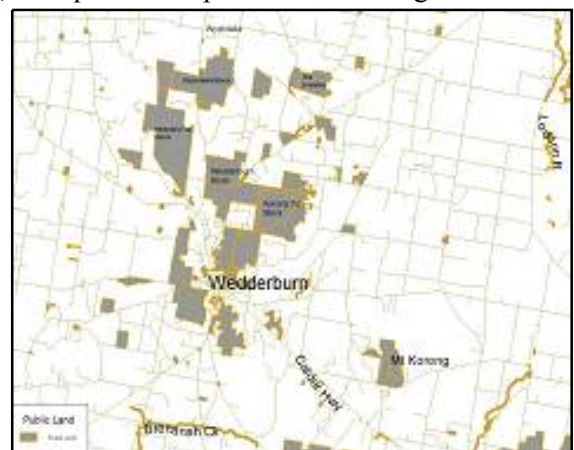
Website addresses

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

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

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

LPLN- Loddon Plains Landcare Network



The WCMN Area of Interest