

Your Molonglo Catchment

April 2011

Newsletter of the Molonglo Catchment Group

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Bush on the Boundary- Molonglo Valley *by Andy Westcott and John Hibberd*

The Molonglo Catchment Group received a 2010-2011 ACT Environment Grant to establish a Bush on the Boundary (BoB) reference group for the Lower Molonglo Valley. For those unfamiliar with the BoB concept, its aim is to act as a forum for community groups, researchers, government agencies and developers to come together in a common space to develop approaches for the preservation and promotion of the importance of urban bushland surrounding Canberra's suburbs.



John Hibberd addresses the crowd in front of the Feral proof Fence, just one of BoB's success stories.

BoB develops specific initiatives aimed at engaging local communities in the protection of local nature reserves and adjacent naturally vegetated lands. The BoB concept first sprung up in 2006 when the Ginninderra Catchment Group and the Conservation Council identified an opportunity to engage with the developers of Forde to ensure the protection and enhancement of the adjacent Mulligan's Flat and Goorooyaroo Nature Reserves, which was the site of long-term ongoing scientific research by the ANU and CSIRO aimed at a better understanding of woodland ecosystem dynamics.

The success of BoB Gungahlin in ensuring the Forde development was sensitive to its surroundings, and an opportunity to expand this successful model elsewhere in the ACT, led to the Molonglo Catchment Group engaging with Conservation Council to seek funding for the establishment of a BoB Molonglo group to ensure the suburbs of Wright and Coombes along with Molonglo stages 2 and 3 are undertaken in a manner that is sensitive to their surroundings, and which preserves and enhances ecological connectivity in the Lower Molonglo landscape.

The group is now well established and meeting the 2nd Tuesday of every 2nd month (next meeting is scheduled for 7th June). A wide range of groups are represented from the Land and Development Agency, ACTPLA and Parks Conservation and Lands, ANU, CSIRO and Greening Australia, through to local community groups such as Friends of the Pinnacle and Southern Tablelands Ecosystem Park. A range of topics are covered at each meeting and we are always happy to welcome along new members to the group who have an interest in developing programs working together to achieve environmental and ecological sustainability in the Molonglo Valley .

For more information contact the BoB Molonglo Valley Coordinator, Anna See, on 6229 3210 or bushcare@consact.org.au.

Little Burra Grazing and Riparian Management

by *Andy Westcott*

On Sunday 4th April a small but enthusiastic crowd attended a field day on managing grazing pressures and riparian health in Little Burra and Fernleigh. The field day was sponsored by ActewAGL's Source Water Protection team. Alison Elvin from Natural Capital was our presenter for the day and spoke to the group about their particular weed problems and what this meant about their soil and land management practices. We spoke about the key stages of a weed's life cycle when it is vulnerable to various control measures and how to ensure the removal of one weed does not result in the invasion of another. The group discussed the various techniques they had used including the use of Cereal Rye (not to be confused with Rye Grass) to fill the void left by the removal of a weed while waiting for germination of your native species. The technique involves putting down a bit of top soil with the Cereal Rye seed along with the seed of the native species you are trying to establish. The Cereal Rye, a cheap, non-invasive, sterile species, germinates quickly, within 3-5 days, and fills the void left by the removal of the weed. This prevents the establishment of a weed on the bare ground while waiting for the slower germinating native species to sprout. The native will germinate with time underneath the Cereal Rye, which, once its lifecycle has been completed, will die off leaving your native with room to thrive. We visited a local property to see this technique in practice and were impressed with the results.



Alison discusses riparian plants with the audience

Weeds were not the only topic on the agenda with Alison covering soil health before moving onto farm dams, creek and rivers. With the help of some samples from her own farm dam Alison set up a model to demonstrate the benefits of a good riparian area consisting of groundcovers, grasses, rushes, shrubs and trees. We also spent some time covering the ideal dam design which restricts stock access to a single area and offers a range of habitat zones, using vegetation, rocks and logs along with varying water depth thus promoting a diversity of life. This design results in improved water quality in comparison to the more traditional round dam with no riparian vegetation and unrestricted stock access. Alison also discussed using the same riparian vegetation principles when dealing with creeks or rivers that occur on your property.

We hope to run more field days in the Little Burra and Fernleigh area in the future and would love to see a few new faces come along. A big thank you to Sarah Gowland of Little Burra for her assistance with planning the field day and to Alison Elvin for sharing her knowledge with the group. If you are a resident of the area please feel free to give the Molonglo Catchment Coordinator, Andy Westcott, a call in the MCG office on 6299 2119 if you have an idea for a field day you would like to discuss.

Cuumbeun Nature Reserve Walk

By Tom Baker

On Sunday 3 April , about a dozen walkers participated in a short walk on the Eastern Escarpment, just east of Queanbeyan, accessed from the west gate on Captains Flat Road. This is one of a series of short walks organised by Queanbeyan Landcare Inc. for 2011.

The eastern edge of Cuumbeun Nature Reserve (north), gazetted in 2001 , commands views westwards over Queanbeyan and towards Canberra. Vegetation is consistently a dry woodland of *Eucalyptus rossii* (scribbly gum), *E. macrorhyncha* (red stringybark), *E. nortonii* (bundy) , *E. polyanthemos* (red box), and *E. mannifera* (brittle gum) with a dominant understory of *Joycea pallida* (Red anthered Wallaby Grass), several wattles, *Indigofera australis*, *Styphelia triflora* with yellow tube flowers, cassinias and a variety of peas and forbs. The pleasure of this easy grade walk was enhanced by the lack of weeds, which are inhibited by the lack of soil depth and nutrients, aside from near waterways.

The European history of the escarpment is one of vegetation clearance for soldier settlement projects, doomed to failure by the poor, well drained soils and resilient native vegetation. A Management Plan for the entire Nature Reserve of 709 hectares was prepared in May 2006. The woodland is an Endangered Ecosystem under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995. The two bushfires of 1985 burnt a minor percentage of Cuumbeun.

One of the highlights of a very enjoyable autumn walk was the discovery of a colony of *Diplodium decurvum*, the summer greenhood, and a pair of boobook owls, worrying some honey eaters. A Bird list was compiled by Martin Butterfield.

The next short Queanbeyan Landcare walk will be on Sunday 16 May at the Gale Precinct, the 100 hectare high conservation woodland just south of Queanbeyan, meeting 9.30am half-way along Wickerslack Lane.



Boobook Owls observed during the walk to the eastern escarpment

Four Pretty, Dangerous Water Plants

By Dr Stephen Skinner

The recent interest in Mexican Waterlily (*Nymphaea mexicana*) is understandable, and long overdue. The waterlily clumps have been loitering in the channels of Jerrabomberra Wetlands for some years. It is also found in a few small wetlands, and a well-known roundabout around the city. The plant is a problem because it is an exotic growing in a catchment area, because it forms clumps to the exclusion of all other wetland plants and because it is very nearly impossible to eradicate. Most waterlily species and hybrids have branching, tuberous rhizomes that form in the upper few centimetres of mud on the floor of a pond or billabong. They are robust but quite easy to lift and clear if that is required. *Nymphaea mexicana*, but not the yellow hybrids derived from it, has a very different rhizome indeed. The rhizome is conical, descending and may penetrate up to a metre into the sediment on a waterway floor. It is also very long lived. In addition, *N. mexicana* will self-propagate from stolons, setting down a descending rhizome at each node, and may also produce viable seed. Seed has not been reported often in Australia.



Yellow Water Flag as a specimen plant, ANU



Iris pseudacorus flower

Yellow Water Flag (*Iris pseudacorus*) is a spectacular feature plant in a formal water garden, but a decided pest along the banks of a catchment stream. In Adelaide, along the edges of the Torrens Lake in the centre of the city, yellow water flag clumps were established not long after the weir was constructed. These clumps have become old and woody and have, at times, excluded other, native emergent clump-formers from getting established. It is a major exercise to contain the water flag and revegetate the banks. Water flag looks great in the courtyard of University House, but would not be an asset to the flora of the lower part of Sullivans Ck, let alone along the edges of Lake Burley Griffin.

Blue Flag is also an eye-catcher. The one that has escaped into the bulrushes at Jerrabomberra appears to be *Iris versicolor*. It also has turned up around the edge of Isabella Pond. Like its yellow European relative this vividly blue flowered North American does well in a contained space, but can so easily become weedy in a waterway. They are drought resistant when established and grow from seed. The vagrants in Teatree Court Retention Pond are contained and having to compete with *Typha orientalis* and *Schoenoplectus validus*, two vigorous locals. It is the possibility of seed getting down into Lake Jerrabomberra and beyond that poses the risk.

I have a soft spot for Pickerel Rush. It was one of my early purchases for a water garden I made when I was a high school student. The blue flowered common one (*Pontederia cordata*) is weedy, forming large clumps in swampy ground and spreading by fragmentation. Even in the eastern United States, where it is native, it can turn feral. There is a patch in the drain-line between Entomology and the Botanic Gardens on Clunies Ross St. It would be a pity if it spread further, but it is only mildly frost tolerant.



Iris versicolor amongst *Typha*

Sustainability on Small Farms Wraps Up

By *Andy Westcott*

For almost 2 years now the MCG have been working with Greening Australia on the Sustainability on Small Farms Project. This project was funded through the Australian Government's Caring for our Country initiative. The project was developed to meet the overwhelming demand for information and on-ground support from small farm hotspots around the ACT and Molonglo catchment. The project provided extensive on-site advice, support and tailored incentives aimed at improving the sustainable management practices across several small farms in the Molonglo catchment. The project included:

- Nine open farm/field days which attracted a total of 216 people, field days included:
 - Native Grass and Pasture Weed seminar with Geoff Robertson and Alison Elvin.
 - Jane Myers Managing Horses on Small Properties seminar
 - Managing Horses on Small Properties field day with Jane Myers of Equiculture and Alison Elvin of Natural Capital.
 - Organic Farming in the ACT at Pialligo Apples. Presenters at the session were Jonathan Banks of Pialligo Apples, David Dumaresq of the Fenner School and David Pearson from University of Canberra and Australian National University.
 - Soil Carbon under Pastures farm day with local farmer Sherry McArdle-English, and representative from the Department of Industry and Investment and the Department of Environment, Climate Change, Energy and Water.
 - Two field days with local bird expert Nicki Taws to discuss the biodiversity benefits of revegetation on properties.
 - A Reading the Landscape with David Tongway field day in Burra.
 - Workshop on use of the Vegetation Monitoring Manual, A Step-by-Step Guide to Monitoring Native Vegetation in the ACT (Sarah Sharp and Lori Gould, 2010) was held in Carwoola.
- On-ground outcomes included:
 - A total of 79.1ha under voluntary management agreements, 33.8ha of revegetation, 38.9ha of serrated tussock control and 6.4ha fenced.
 - The 33.8ha of revegetation utilised local provenance tubestock and provides habitat linkages and stepping stones between remnant patches.
 - Two landowners were provided with funding towards the cost of chemicals, as part of integrated control programs across 38.9 ha.
 - Thirty four land managers informed of appropriate grazing, weed and feral animal control during site visits and a further 216 at field days and farm visits.
 - 6.4ha of grassy box woodland protected by fencing.



David Tongway conducting a soil test at the Reading the Landscape field day

The MCG are proud of the projects achievements and would like to thank everyone involved in field days, property owners who undertook on-ground work and management agreements and a special thank you to Ange Calliess of Greening Australia for all her hard work in ensuring terrific on-ground outcomes were achieved.

MCG Project Funding

By Andy Westcott

The Molonglo Catchment Group recently opened the 2011 round of MCG Project Funding to its member groups. The initiative began in 2010 as a way for the MCG to provide direct support to Landcare and Parkcare groups undertaking projects whose aims matched those of the Molonglo Catchment Strategy. It was also developed as a way for volunteer groups to access small amounts of funding (less than \$500) without onerous application and reporting requirements.



Volunteers busily at work on Mount Majura

We received some outstanding applications this year and have been able to fund 6 projects from groups all over the catchment for projects including:

- The purchase of equipment to aid in the fight against weeds.
- Professional consultation to develop a landscape plan for Burra Park which will incorporate the natural environment.
- A National Tree day planting on Mount Majura.
- Materials to construct rabbit and roo proof tree guards.

Thanks to all the groups that applied, the MCG is very pleased to be able to assist out dedicated volunteer groups in their endeavours to manage the natural assets of their patch and contribute toward our vision of a healthy, diverse and productive environment treasured by the whole Molonglo catchment community.



MCG Vice President Tom Baker assisting a member group at the Festival of the Forests.

MCG Membership

By Andy Westcott

For those of you who are already members of the MCG you will have received a letter by now encouraging you to commit to the MCG for another 12 months. If you are not currently a member then we would love to welcome you on board. If you are, Landcare/Parkcare group membership is \$25 for 12 months and means you are eligible for the MCG Project Funding discussed above. Individuals can also join for \$5 with corporate membership also available for \$100. For more information on what is available to MCG members, please contact Andy Westcott the Catchment Coordinator on 6299 2119.

Managing Horses on Small Properties

By Andy Westcott

Later in the year, from November onward, the MCG will be running the Managing Horses on Small Properties field days once again. We recently received funding from the NSW Environmental Trust to run 7 of these field days across the region. For those of you unfamiliar with the days they involve Jane and Stuart Myers of Equiculture and Alison Elvin of Natural Capital explaining the principles that underpin good horse management, particularly the key things to consider when designing your property to ensure the welfare of your horse and the environment. This is followed by a property planning session with Jane and Stuart from Equiculture. This involves participants reviewing aerial photos or sketches of their properties with Jane, Stuart or Alison to get a rundown of what they could change, or in some cases where to start, to get the best results for their property, their animals and the environment.



In the afternoon its out into the paddock for a hands on session, Alison Elvin discusses the various native grasses and common pasture weeds we come across and helps participants to understand the processes at work on the properties leading to specific issues. As we walk over the properties Jane points out various infrastructure features of the property that are great or that could be modified to improve the property's sustainability.



These sessions have been very well attended in the past so be sure to get in early to reserve your place. Keep a look out on the MCG website as we expect to announce dates and venues in the coming month.

If you believe your area would benefit from having a Managing Horses on Small Properties field day, please call the MCG office on 6299 2119 and talk to Andy Westcott about the possibility of having one of the 7 days in your are.

Coordinator's Report

By Andy Westcott

Since December's newsletter the Molonglo Catchment Group has been busy on a range of projects. As you have already read we have wrapped up the Sustainability on Small Farms project which has been a focus of ours for some time now. Our ACT Environment Grant to assess the feasibility of the Step-by-Step Guide to Monitoring Native Vegetation in the ACT (Sarah Sharp and Lori Gould) has also been completed. Rainer Rehwinkel analysed the results of our field trial and we are now confident the methodology can be used as a tool for Landcare groups to monitor their patch. Keep an eye on the MCG website as we hope to make an exciting announcement regarding this project in the coming months.

The group has attended a range of events over the last few months from the Queanbeyan Regatta to the Festival of the Forests. We display at these events as a means of passing information onto the community, they also provide an opportunity to have one on one dialogue with people who may otherwise not know about the work we do. In addition to displaying at public events we have run a GPS Training workshop for a member group and run 4 workshops/field days on sustainable management of small properties.

That's it for the Easter edition of Your Molonglo Catchment, have a safe and happy long weekend. Things will be a bit quiet in the MCG office at some point over the next few weeks while I take 2 weeks leave after the birth of my second child. Stephen Skinner and Lynton Bond will be on hand to keep things ticking over. I will get back to any outstanding emails or calls as soon as I am back on deck.

Support

For more details on events being run in the Molonglo catchment visit www.molonglocatchment.com.au. If you have any questions about events or want to discuss NRM in the catchment please feel free to call me on 6299 2119, email me at coordinator@molonglocatchment.com.au or drop into the office at Unit 13, Cassidy Arcade 72-76 Monaro Street, Queanbeyan between 8am and 4:30pm.

The operation of the Molonglo Catchment Group is supported through the Australian Government's Caring for our Country initiative with the support of the ACT Natural Resource Management Council.



Tom Baker and Steve Welch at the Festival of the Forests display.



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COUNTRY

