



COOLEMAN RIDGE PARK CARE GROUP

Newsletter
November 2020

Previous Meeting
Sunday 18 October 2020
Darrell Place

Rain had threatened but it turned out to be a perfect day for weeding. Rob did his stint in the morning, digging out wild sage, Paterson's Curse and the occasional *Verbascum*. Ten more weeders arrived for the afternoon shift including a very welcome three new people: Nick Crean, Rosalie and Mike Pearson.

Linda took Sean Meere and Lyndal Lewis to the "western shelf" where they disposed of thistles (pulled them out) and briar roses (cut and dabbed). However, there are lots more briar roses there for next time.

Doug took Juma Kepher, Natasha Cole, Natasha Oates and Nick Crean up to the extensive bulbine lily patch and began a search and destroy of wild sage and yet-to-flower St John's wort. Soon after, they switched to weed-wanding the masses of small *Verbascum* rosettes hidden in the grass. A surprising number, really. Superficially the area looks clear of *Verbascum* but the group must have removed ancient flower spikes that give clues as to the whereabouts of seedlings. Anyhow, sage was piled up on the side of the track and wort treated similarly.

Linda Spinaze, Rob Lundie and Doug Tinney

A Moment in Nature

Unusual things happen on the Ridge. Maybe they are not unusual, more never seen before. When walking recently on the track forming part of the Centenary Trail overlooking the

Next Meeting
Sunday 15 November 2020
Lincoln Place

Time: 8.30 am – 11.00 am

NOTE NEW TIME

Meet: Lincoln Place

Bring: hat, gardening gloves, small digger, water to drink.

Task: Weeding of invasive, exotic plants. Native plant identification.

Contact: Linda Spinaze 6288 6916

Arawang homestead, my wife and I heard a contretemp between what sounded like a wattle bird and a Currawong high up in a large tree adjacent to the track. Nothing unusual in that. When both birds had moved away, something of some size came thudding to the ground beside us. Seemed like the cranky birds had thrown something our way. It was grey and furry about the size of a kitten, quite fresh but very difficult to identify as it didn't have a head. Lack of a long tail eliminated a cat but the short fluffy white tuft at the rear and no claws suggested it was a rabbit kitten, about half grown. It appeared the rabbit (there was a warren underneath the tree) had been taken by a raptor, partially consumed, then either wedged in a branch where the Currawong found it or brought there by said scavenger. Whatever the reason it's the first time I've been nearly hit by an airborne mammal.

Doug Tinney

Mistletoe

I recently noticed that someone had sawn off a low-hanging mistletoe from one of the ancient Red Box (*Eucalyptus polyanthemus*) trees above Lincoln Place. I wondered whether this person knew that, although mistletoe was traditionally thought to kill trees, recent research has found that it is a valuable and fascinating plant.

Mistletoe, which is semi-parasitic, has evolved together with its host, and unless the tree is unhealthy, a few mistletoe clumps should not cause any problems. Mistletoe can manufacture its own food through the chlorophyll in its leaves, but it depends on its host tree for water and physical support. Mistletoe fruit is usually red and tasty, and with the leaves and nectar, are an excellent food source for birds (especially the beautiful, tiny Mistletoe Bird), possums and caterpillars.

However, in times of drought, mistletoes can have a negative effect on eucalypt trees. Mistletoe leaves do not have the ability to close their leaf 'pores' like eucalypt trees can. This means that these 'pores' (stomata) remain open and the tree's valuable moisture is lost by evaporation. If the tree is heavily infested with mistletoe this is likely to have a detrimental effect and may be the tipping point to cause decline and possibly death. Fire, on the other hand, kills the mistletoe because mistletoe does not have epicormic buds like eucalypts, and therefore cannot re-grow after fire. An open landscape does not encourage fires in the canopy of these isolated trees, so these trees become more heavily infested with mistletoe.

Did you know that the word mistletoe derives from an old German language – "mistel" meaning dung, and "tan" for a stick!

Apart from mistletoe, there is another semi-parasitic plant on Cooleman Ridge. I am referring to the Native Cherry, or *Exocarpus cupressiformis*. This bright green cyprus-shaped tree uses its roots to parasitise the roots of nearby plants, as well as photosynthesising its own nutrients.

Linda Spinaze

Comings, Goings and Sightings

Apart from the views, one of the joys of walking on Cooleman Ridge is that you are likely to see something different each time: Another family of six ducklings on the Old Dam. The chicks looked more than just bits of fluff so hopefully they will all survive. A White-faced Heron fishing around the edges of the Kathner St dam and then further up the hill lots of Red-rumped parrots. A wedding at the Anniversary Seat on a beautiful, sunny Saturday. A couple from Watson walking on the Ridge for the first time declared that it was the best of all the Canberra hills and ridges that they had visited. A Gippsland Water Dragon nearly trod on as it sat in the middle of the track next to an ants nest just up from the Kathner St dam. A couple of hours later it was still there but poking out from a hole it had dug. A female laying her eggs? No sign of her nor the hole on the following day.



Water dragon

Photo: Rob Lundie



Water dragon laying eggs?

Photo: Rob Lundie

Finally, a farewell and thank you to the 26 cows that have grazed along the back track for about a month. They have been moved over to Narrabundah Hill behind Duffy.

Rob Lundie