



COOLEMAN RIDGE PARK CARE GROUP

Newsletter June 2014

Previous Sunday Meeting, 18 May, Group Area Central (Darrell Place)

It was a fine and sunny afternoon with a touch of cool on the breeze – perfect conditions for five sturdy blokes to lay waste to heaps of wild sage, verbascum and St John's Wort. A largish patch of blackberry, first attacked some 18 months ago and now reshooting, copped a follow-up hammering. Definitely a pleasant way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

Next Meeting – Sunday 15 June

Where: Group Area South – Mt Arawang

Time: 13.30 – 16.00 hours

Meet: Namatjira Drive entrance to the Arawang horse paddock.

Activity: Plant identification, removal of weeds.

Wear suitable protective clothing. Don't forget something to drink.

Canberra Tree Week 21-27 July

Did you know that National Tree Day is scheduled for 27 July? Neither did we. But TAMS, along with the NCA and the ANBG is working on promoting a whole week of tree celebrations in the lead up to that day. Keep an eye out for the impending action!

They're baaaack.....

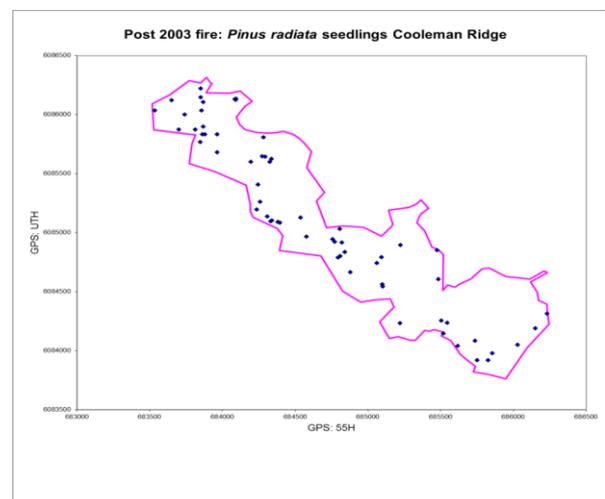
Those of you blessed with a memory may recall in the newsletter of May 2013 a querulous piece about unidentified wallabies on Mt Arawang. In the June 2013 newsletter the well-credentialed Will Osborne opined they were most likely wallaroos probably coming over from the Murrumbidgee River corridor. Will commented, “..females have that paler colour and quite yellowish tail; males are dark grey almost black”.

Well, on the last day of May this year and based on Will's description, a male and a female wallaroo were seen traversing the slopes of Mt Arawang. Seems like autumn is the time “our” wallaroos come visiting.

Pine Wildings (seedlings) on the Ridge

Malcolm Gill, long time member of our Park Care Group and even longer time scientist, has kept a record of *Pinus radiata* wildings found on the Ridge since the fire of 2003. Malcolm writes: *There were 61 Pinus radiata wildings measured and removed. They were distributed across the Ridge and could easily have dominated the vegetation in another generation. The last one was found in July 2012; it was 2.2 metres tall and had about 8 rings but was not reproductive. We think the vast majority of plants arose as the result of the fire. Seed release and dispersal would be expected to be at a maximum soon after a fire.*

The distribution looks like this:



What's around

Digitaria brownii, Cotton Panic Grass – Notes by Linda Spinaze



This grass has been present on Cooleman Ridge for a few years, but originally I knew of only one plant. This was right beside the main path, above Monkman St. Before the new cut-drain path was bull-dozed, I collected seed from this plant, and after the works were finished I scattered them in the spot that they had originally grown. To my disappointment, no plants emerged.

A few weeks ago I had the bright idea that I should search for this plant down-hill from the original plant, since most plants will spread their seed down-water. So I left the path and looked. Lo, there were large patches of *Digitaria brownii*! They looked a little worse for wear after the whipper-snipping and cool-burning and very dark with some fungus on the leaves but showing the distinctive inflorescence. I always think that this grass looks very similar to Red-leg grass (*Bothriochloa*) but the inflorescence is spread out (digitate) and has white cotton/fungus-hair between the florets/seeds.

I believe that it is used as a pasture grass in Queensland, but I don't see it very often around Canberra. There are 35 native species of *digitaria* (finger grasses) in Australia, with 9 introduced species. This year it flowered in April after our heavy autumn rains, but I think in previous years it flowered earlier, possibly mid-summer.

The Word from the West (by Arminel)

Out here in the wild west of Australia, I'm reminded of how Pat and I became Park Carers. Fifteen years ago, on our first trip outback, we stopped for a cuppa by the roadside at Wittenoom. Blue sky, purple ranges, red sand and a plethora of plants flourishing at the wayside. We recognised none of them. No weeds – just exquisite grasses, shrubs and flowering plants, all a polite distance apart as if planted and tended by an invisible gardener. It was a moment of wonder – an epiphany. All those years of struggle in our garden, establishing the foreign plants we knew and liked, when this country was already the Garden of Eden! We resolved to get to know the

country and plants in our own backyard – and go local!

Having become part of the team on Cooleman Ridge and learnt so much about its flora, we find ourselves recognizing so many of the strange plants out here in the West. The knowledge gained near home deepens the appreciation of the grand scenery we're travelling through. Thank you dear comrades!

Arminel was in Broome when she composed the above message. In contrast, a few days earlier in Meekatharra, she commented that almost every day on the trip they'd come across 'frican love grass on the roadside. Sigh!!!!