



COOLEMAN RIDGE PARK CARE GROUP

Newsletter
March 2017

Previous meeting
Sunday 19th February
Group Area North

A perfect morning for weeding: sunny but not at all hot. Rohan began early, working on verbascum and phalaris above Chauvel Circle. He was later joined by Linda and Rob who tackled verbascum, blackberries, briar roses and other assorted woody weeds. Cutting, dabbing and bagging the seed heads was their chosen method. As they worked, they were pleased to look up into the trees and see new growth sprouting after the recent infestation of Christmas beetles.

Meanwhile, up from Kathner St, Alan took out some verbascum as did Doug after he had whipper-snipped the track that constitutes the end of the nature trail. Arminel too worked on verbascum virgatum aka Marsh Mullein in the fenced regeneration area, removing about 50 of their seed spikes and about the same number of shrivelled new rosettes. There were also some shrivelled *V. thapsus* rosettes.

She also spoke with a passing family, out for a walk with a dog and two children, about what she was doing. She was able to show the children a recently shed snake skin, lying in the grass.

As always, it was good to see Malcolm, and to welcome Graham back.

Rob Lundie

Next Meeting
Sunday 19th March
Group Area Central

Time: 1.30 pm – 4.00 pm

Meet: Darrell Place

Bring: hat, gloves, secateurs, doover-dabber, hacker, drink, raincoat if it is wet

Task: plant identification, weeding

Contact: Linda Spinaze 6288 6916

**Meetings are now from 1.30 pm
to 4.00 pm**

Rabbits!

Park Carers will be watching with interest to see the effect in our region of the new strain of Calicivirus, being released this month in Namadgi National Park and Mulligans Flat reserve. Will it have anything like the dramatic effect of the Myxomatosis virus in the 1950s? Its spread was 'almost without parallel in the history of infections', according to the scientists Frank Fenner and F.N. Ratcliffe who were involved in its release.

Earlier attempts at rabbit control in Australia were hampered by the authorities' lack of biological understanding of the species. Methods such as poisoning, fumigation, trapping and ripping of burrows all had varying degrees of success, but could not cope with the overwhelming numbers that constituted the rabbit plague in the Australian

landscape. Even the building of the 'rabbit proof fences' did not guarantee success, because they could never be maintained at 100% efficiency.

The swift spread of the myxomatosis virus between 1951 and 1953 saw dramatic and long lasting reduction in rabbit numbers in the central and southern regions of Australia. Farmers marveled at the change in their pastures; city people were more uneasy. After an outbreak of human encephalitis in Melbourne in February 1951, much public concern was expressed about the health implications of 'myxo', concern that was only put to rest by the actions of three scientists, Frank Fenner, Ian Clunies Ross and Frank MacFarlane Burnet, who inoculated themselves with the virus with no ill effect.

Jenny Horsfield

Curious Cooleman

If you enter Cooleman Ridge from Darrell Place and then proceed right up the hill on the fire trail, you will come to a group of boulders at the top on your right. This landmark is called "The Sentrybox". It was named by the farmer who had the paddock - called the Sentrybox Paddock. This could possibly have been Fred Rowley, who received this part of Cooleman Ridge after WW1.



The Sentrybox

Photo by Rob Lundie



View from The Sentrybox

Photo by Rob Lundie

Just as the ABC and Canberra Times have Curious Canberra, if you have any questions about Cooleman Ridge as you walk along it, let the editor (Rob Lundie) know and we will attempt to find out.

Rob Lundie and Linda Spinaze

Friday morning meeting at Kathner Street

Dust, pollen, heat, total fire ban days - the Summer has been great for reptiles and grasshoppers, but rather discouraging for volunteers.

However, I've recently been getting in some useful sessions at our fenced regeneration area. *Verbascum virgatum* has increased there this past season. Pauline featured this weed in the newsletter of June 2006. Its common names include Twiggy Mullein, Marsh Mullein and Stinking Mullein - all describe features that distinguish it from the larger, soft-leaved Great Mullein.

This weed really liked the wet conditions in Spring, but survives extended dry periods. Using an old steak knife and the wonderful Vietnamese traditional hand-weeder called a Ho Me, I've prised many deep roots out of the talcum-powder soil. This work has taken minimal effort on my part, and disturbs the soil as little as possible. Once the Autumn rains begin, it will be time to rake the exotic annual grasses and forbs into swales, with the *Verbascum* spikes under them. Hopefully the many native species in the area will germinate as the weather cools and moisture returns! Perhaps more volunteers will also be inspired to join the sessions!

Arminel Ryan



Sulphur-crested cockatoo Photo by Helen Cross