



COOLEMAN RIDGE PARK CARE GROUP

Newsletter
August 2023

Previous Meeting **Sunday 16 July 2023** ***Chauvel Circle***

A beautifully clear and bright midwinter afternoon brought out quite a number of weeders. Alan Ford, Helen Govey, Chris Oates, Jenny Shapcott, Paul Sheils, James Smith, Linda Spinaze, Rohan Thomas and Doug Tinney met at Chauvel Circle and welcomed new volunteer Christian Piironen. We decided to have another go at the *verbascum* on One Tree Hill, so we trekked across the Ridge, digging out any African Love Grass we encountered on the way. We targeted the seed pods on top of the now blackened spikes and we also dug out or dabbed any new and emerging *verbascum* rosettes. It was interesting to note the number of pods that still had seeds in them this late in the year. We were also surprised by the number of *fleabane* that were still seeding. We lopped off the heads and bagged the seeds of both species. We cut down a few clumps of briar rose, poisoning the stumps.



Rohan Thomas, James Smith, Linda Spinaze, Chris Oates, Christian Piironen, Paul Sheils
Photo: Helen Govey

Next Meeting **Sunday 20 August 2023** ***The Old Dam***

Time: 1.30 pm – 4.00 pm.

Meet: Freebody Place.

Bring: hat, gloves, water to drink.

Task: weeding.

Contact: Linda Spinaze 62886916

Sept meeting: Sun 17, Anniversary Seat

At one point, a large and seemingly disoriented wallaroo blundered through the weeding area. It may have been sight-impaired. In the end, we filled eleven large bags of *verbascum* and *fleabane* seedpods.

Chris Oates

Western Edge

The CRPCG, as a member of the Conservation Council ACT, is working with them to monitor and advocate for biodiversity of the ACT's Western Edge. The [Capital Ecology preliminary ecology report](#) on the Western Edge Investigation Area (WEIA) (commissioned by ACT Government in 2021) indicates ecological concerns and recommendations for further investigation. Some issues of concern are: Habitat for threatened birds, including superb parrot breeding areas and little eagle; mature trees protection; and Murrumbidgee River Corridor

threats such as spreading exotic weeds (eg African Love Grass).

Helen Govey

Peregrine Falcon on the Ridge



Peregrine Falcon

Photo by angelb

AZOLLA: a scientist's view

There has been considerable interest in 'pink dams' across Canberra in recent years with the latest photo opportunity appearing in a small dam on Cooleman Ridge. The pink colour is caused by a blanket of a small fern which has grown across the surface:

Azolla. *Azolla* is a small free-floating fern that grows in freshwater systems. Like other ferns the spores can be spread by wind, with waterbirds or any other animal (including humans) also responsible for its spread.

Azolla is typically between one and three cms in diameter with fine roots of up to five cm long that hang down into the water. It ranges in colour from bright green to deep red and it is particularly conspicuous when it turns bright red. There are two species native to Australia – *Azolla filiculoides* and *Azolla pinnata*. The literature suggests that the pink (or red) colour can be caused by either low phosphorus or high light conditions. There was some talk among colleagues that (cold) temperature may be a trigger for it turning pink before dying off, but I am struggling to find clear evidence of that in the literature. The fact that the Cooleman Ridge dam still has *Azolla* in late July suggests that maybe temperature is not the key trigger (or this year

has not been cold enough). It may be that if it is turning pink and there has not been a noticeable change in the light conditions, then perhaps it may be the result of lower phosphorus concentrations in the water – which is a good thing! There are suggestions that a blanket or mat of *Azolla* is the result of high nutrient conditions. However, work by the CSIRO in the 1990s demonstrated that *Azolla* can live under a very large range of nutrient conditions. The phosphorus concentrations they were reporting for 'maximum biomass' far exceeds most of what we observe in our urban waterways. More recent research that I have come across suggests it has a 'complex relationship' with phosphorus. My quick review of the data for the dam on Coleman Ridge does not show a clear pattern with phosphorus. *Azolla* appeared in November last year without a noticeable increase in phosphorus and there have been some quite high phosphorus recordings over past spring/summer periods without any sign of *Azolla*. My take home message from the small amount of research I have done is that *Azolla* in ponds is a bit of a mystery. Given it is spread by spores, we would expect it to be almost everywhere, but it isn't. It seems to come and go! I have noticed it for many years in ponds at the back of the Australian Institute of Sport – which are currently free of *Azolla*! This is a great example of where we still have much to learn.

Professor Fiona Dyer, University of Canberra

ACRONYMS!

A friend and I recently came across a newcomer to the Ridge and Canberra. She was looking for Guinness Fort. As we looked puzzled, she said she had seen a sign saying Guinness FT. We both laughed as I explained that the only forts likely to be on the Ridge would be those built by children, and that FT stands for fire trail.

Rob Lundie

CRPCG Annual General Meeting

The AGM for the CRPCG will be held at 78 Sidaway St, Chapman on Sunday 10 September at 2 pm. All welcome.