



COOLEMAN RIDGE PARK CARE GROUP

Newsletter
February 2016

Previous meeting
Sunday 17th January
Group Area North
above Chauvel Circle

A very pleasant morning greeted Linda, Rob and Alan as they made their way up to the area above Chauvel Circle. On the way they were overtaken by an English man walking his dog (on a lead, see article below). He expressed an interest in what we were doing but did not have the time to join our Group. However, he was encouraged to pull out fleabane and verbascum on his walks and was happy to have his name added to the mailing list to receive the Newsletter.

While Linda and Rob made good progress on the verbascum and fleabane, Alan concentrated on the skeleton weed (*Chondrilla juncea* – an erect, hairless, perennial herb, growing to 90 cm).

Early bushfire control methods

From the early days of the federal capital, the administrators knew that that their small settlement and outlying properties would always be at risk from bushfires, ringed as they were by forested mountain country to the west and south. In 1915, the dangers of fire were especially great after a period of prolonged drought. That summer, calico notices were printed and distributed warning against careless use of fire and forbidding camping or trespassing on Crown lands. In November, the Administrator, David Miller, circulated a form requesting landholders in all corners of the territory to compile a list of names of residents willing to assist in bushfire

Next Meeting

Sunday 21st February

Group Area Central above Darrell Place

Time: 8.30 am – 11 am

Meet: at the end of Darrell Place

Bring: hat, gloves, hacker, drink, raincoat if it is wet

Task: plant identification and weeding

control. Equipment that should be held on hand included chains, rakes, beaters, metal buckets and hurricane lanterns. 1000 gallon ship's tanks, if available, would provide good water containers. (Two of these vessels can still be seen, abandoned, at the Tuggeranong Homestead property.) A horse-drawn provisions cart would also be useful, for feeding volunteers.

Lands Officer James Brackenreg advised requisition of used cement bags from the Works Branch, and the cutting of hurdles, all of which could be stored and used as beaters. Rakes and beaters and other equipment would be placed at forest camps and work depots throughout the territory, and equipment would also be stored at Yarralumla Homestead.

Brackenreg proposed that fire breaks be burnt around the few public buildings in the city – offices, hospital, Yarralumla and Springbank Homesteads, and around Mt Stromlo and the work camps. But he didn't advise the general burning of fire breaks in rough country, as the hot and dry conditions made this too dangerous.

Jenny Horsfield

January burn offs



In early January the CRPCG was notified that the ACT Fire Management Unit planned to do a cool burn in some areas of the Cooleman Ridge to reduce the fire-load. This activity is unusual for this time of the year, but the weather forecast of calm and cool days enabled the decision.

Some areas to be burnt had vigorous verbascum growth, so I was interested to see how verbascum reacts to fire. I missed the opportunity to take photographs before the

fires, but I took some photographs the day after the fires to provide an immediate post-fire record. I counted 23 verbascum in this area (of 15mx15mx8mx8m) on 22nd January. The verbascum have now browned off, and I will continue to monitor this site to assess the regrowth over the next 12 months.

The burn was very well controlled, with no scorching or damage to the trees or bushes. With the heavy rains over the past few weeks these areas have now sprouted amazing new soft green growth. The kangaroos and rabbits must love it.

Linda Spinaze

Connections

Cooleman Ridge is not isolated. It has connections both to the east and the west, part of a wildlife corridor that extends to the river and beyond to the west and to the border and beyond to the east. Elements of the corridor have north and south connections.

This allows the various animals (unfortunately including foxes and cats) to move through the landscape. Kangaroos are the large animal that moves around on the ground but others, echidnas, for instance may also use the corridors. Birds fly through them and it may be that insectivorous bats utilise these pathways in the air.

Alan Ford

Recent sighting on the Ridge



Echidna, near corner of Bicentenary Nature Trail and Darrell Place Fire Trail
Photograph by Rob Lundie, January 2016)

Native wildlife and loose dogs

I can well understand that dog owners love to let their pets run free, swim in the pond and generally enjoy nature. However, I wish that they also would consider the wildlife of our Nature Park and get their dogs to run around where they can do no damage.

A few years ago my patch had several protected animals, kangaroos, wombats, blue-tongued lizards, brown snakes and black snakes. They are gone now and I firmly believe that the loss to the Nature Park has to do with loose dogs following their natural hunting instincts to attack animals, chase them and sometimes to kill them.

As park carers we should, in a friendly manner, advise dog owners about the dog-on-leash rules and that there are other areas where dogs can roam freely without destroying wildlife.

A more efficient method may be to take photos of the loose dogs in a way obvious to the owners. This may seem too difficult for some of us, so we may choose the easier method of putting up more notices. In any case, something should be done or we'll find our environment the poorer.

Gösta Lyngå