

# THE GECKO



Edition 3  
April 2014

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Welcome to the April 2014 edition of the FQPB News.

There was a lot of animal activity this quarter and we've expanded our digital footprint by getting a facebook page. Read all about it below.

We would also like your input. Have you taken a photo or seen something in the bush that you'd like to share with the group? Send it in to [fqpbushland@gmail.com](mailto:fqpbushland@gmail.com) and we'll include it in the next newsletter.

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## January to March 2014

### **26 January 2014**

Eight members met on this very warm Australia Day morning for a short session. We started with watering seedlings as we waited for everyone to arrive. We then picked up rubbish along the Luyer Ave boundary of Black Creek Reserve.

While it was not great that we have to collect rubbish, it was pleasing to note that this year's haul was much reduced compared to previous years. There was so little collected – just a couple of bags of rubbish and recycling – that Colette took it all home to put in her bins. Thanks Colette!

### **8 February 2014**

We held a night stalk with the scouts and it was great to see so many people attend. The evening started with what was meant to be a short demonstration of how best to see the eye-shine of animals. However, every time Sian started to explain about holding the torch by the side of your head, a bat would be seen and everybody's attention would move up to the sky.

The bat (or bats) seemed to be hawking for insects at the treetop level and over the clearing in which we were standing. It could be seen as a small, fast-moving, winged shadow against the dimming sky. We couldn't see what type of bat it was, but it is probable it is a lesser long-eared bat as that is the species we have seen before.

Once the sun had gone down and we could no longer see the bat we started on our stalk. To begin

with we couldn't find anything. But then we started finding plenty of spiders. They were mostly wolf spiders, but came in a variety of shapes and sizes.

Then one of the scouts saw a movement on the ground and went to investigate. What was seen on the surface was the entrance to a burrow, but the burrow was surrounded by a silken, flexible collar. A few gentle probes of the burrow entrance brought its occupant to the surface.

Soon everyone was huddled together as a trapdoor spider was encouraged to come out of its burrow. Cameras were trained on the burrow and video recordings of the spider were made as it came to the surface. The spider would attack the probe being used to mimic an insect, realise it had been tricked and retreat back into the burrow, pulling the collar down around the entrance as it did so.

Stephanie took a video of this happening and placed it on YouTube at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VUF\\_HLrCRo&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VUF_HLrCRo&feature=youtu.be) .

Everyone then made it back to the start point where we looked at the moths and other insects attracted to the light trap and enjoyed a slice of cake.



Checking out the light trap.



Wolf spider, *Lycosa* sp, and *Argoctenus* sp. (*Argoctenus* by Stephanie).



*Thudaca crypsidesma*, left, a weevil, *Catasarcus* sp., and a caddisfly.



A beefly, left, and a wasp.



*Heleioporus eyrei*, moaning frog. Photograph by Stephanie.

## 12 & 13 February 2014

The City of Canning Bush Crew and Ecojobs joined forces to remove Typha (bulrushes) from two of our lakes.

Conditions on the dry lakes were uncomfortable, with noisy brushcutters operating most of the time and a lumpy lake-bed making walking while carrying a bundle of cut leaves treacherous.

But our workers shook off these conditions (or perhaps it was because of them) and finished the job in double-quick time. The job was set to take three days, but the team's hard work saw it done by lunch on day two.



Hard at work.



Before and after slashing the Typha.

We then waited a few weeks for the Typha to sprout from its rhizomes and sprayed it with herbicide. We'll keep doing this until it gives up. The lake will then be replanted with native sedges and reeds.

## 23 February 2014

Ten people attended our AGM this year. Sue and Rose presented the chairperson's and treasurer's reports, respectively, and, in hindsight, the year looked pretty good.

We received three grants, developed a brochure, purchased our badges, and printed a new set of greeting cards. We did lots of planting and weeding. Plus we're now taking the First Forrestfield Scouts through their landcare badge.

The website is going strong with newly photographed species appearing all the time. We're picking up most of our new supporters through the website and receiving requests from around the world to use images found on the website.

Our first public nature walk was held in September and we plan to hold it again this year. Our bird

watching walk with BirdLife Australia was also well attended and will continue this year.

There were changes made to the structure of the group this year. We formed a committee to have regular meetings and to be able to make decisions without having to go to the whole group.

We also had a change at the top. Sue did not renominate for chairperson this year and Sian stepped into the position. Thankyou Sue for leading us over the past few years. Many great things have happened during that time and they are mainly due to your drive and enthusiasm.

#### 4 March 2014

The Canning River Eco Education Centre has become the first outlet to sell our greeting cards. They are displayed on our information board, on the right as you enter. This is on a trial basis, but we have our fingers crossed that the cards will sell well without causing too much of a burden to CREEC staff.

If you would like to buy our cards you can visit CREEC on the banks of the Canning River, corner of Kent St & Queens Park Rd, Wilson; send us an email; or buy them at our activities. Being blank inside makes them suitable for any occasion and at only \$1 each they are hard to pass up.



The cards available at CREEC.

#### 5 March 2014

Thanks to Sara we now have a facebook presence at [www.facebook.com/friendsofqueensparkbushland](http://www.facebook.com/friendsofqueensparkbushland). We're starting small on facebook with limited public interaction. As we get more confident and gauge the interest we'll increase the functionality.

#### 8 March 2014

There was a significant change in the weather so a small group gathered to water the seedlings. Our hypothesis is that if plants can 'anticipate' and 'prepare' for rain, then they would do so with the passage of a cold front or significant drop in temperature. It is at times like this that we give the seedlings a drink.

#### 29 March 2014

The wet afternoon seems to have put most people off, but the night stalk itself was pretty much dry. Three intrepid night stalkers braved the dripping trees and threat of further showers to see what was out and about.

Usually we look for eye-shine to find our quarry but, with water everywhere, everything glinted back at us. A change of tactic was required and we focussed on movement. Fortunately for us, there was no wind so anything that moved had to be alive.

And what moves on a wet and windless night? Frogs! We saw three different species and we saw them many times over. Almost everything that moved was a frog. And, because there were so many of them, we could see that individuals really do have different markings.

We saw some spiders and a grasshopper too. But that night was definitely the night of the frogs.



Banjo frog, *Limnodynastes dorsalis*. The line down the spine and red inner-thigh patches are distinguishing features.



Moaning frog, *Heleioporus eyrei*. The moaning frog lays its eggs in a burrow and waits for rising water levels to flush them into a pond.



Motorbike frog, *Littoria moorei*. The motorbike frog's call sounds like a motorbike changing up through the gears.



Grasshopper.

A big THANK YOU goes to Ash, Barbara M, Colette, Collette, Florian, Jason, Jelena, Jill, Karen, Laurie, Peter, Ronnie, Rose, Rosemary, Sara, Sian, Sonja, Stephanie, Sue, the City of Canning Bush Crew and the scouts for helping out with these activities.

## Upcoming events

April – Watering seedlings

May – To be advised

June – Planting

## Also this quarter

### Foxes

Sian set a trail camera (a motion activated camera) in Gibbs Street Reserve in January and photographed at least two red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) and a domestic cat (*Felis catus*).



Fox in Gibbs St Reserve photographed with a trail camera.

This led the City of Canning to engage Eddie, from Feral Invasive Species Eradication Management, to catch and dispose of the foxes. Eddie set traps on five consecutive nights but caught only one of the foxes. The fox was caught in Banksia Gardens West – across Welshpool Rd from where Sian was photographing.



Fox caught in Banksia Gardens West.

The traps used have rubber jaws so they grip the fox's leg tightly but don't break bones. While initially alarmed by our presence, the fox quickly calmed down when it realised we didn't pose an immediate threat. Eddie said that he regularly takes foxes home and young ones are easily tamed to become pets. Eddie studies his foxes and shares his insights with the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

However, not every fox can be taken home and, while nobody likes that the fox needed to be euthanized, it had to be done to protect the native wildlife. Evidence that the introduced foxes have been eating our long-necked turtles (*Chelodina oblonga*) and birds is found around their dens. Dens are usually surrounded by turtle shells and bird carcasses.



Turtle found near a fox den.

Sian then set the camera in the same location for a further five weeks but didn't see the second fox return. Perhaps he was spooked by the activity.

Eddie shared an interesting aspect of the fox's lifestyle. The dog fox can have as many as six 'wives', with each vixen having her own territory and digging her own den in which to give birth. After

giving birth to pups, the vixen doesn't leave the den for two weeks, during which time she is reliant upon the dog to bring her food.

This could explain why you will sometimes hear about a fox killing all of the chickens in the henhouse but not eating them. The fox kills the chickens all at once so they don't move to a safer roost while he's gone (the fox doesn't know that the chickens can't escape the cage). But he can only carry one chicken at a time to his 'wives'. The fox will then make a number of return trips as he delivers all of the chickens to his families.

However, in the meantime, the chicken owner goes outside in response to the commotion, scares away the fox and reports this as a case of mindless violence.

Interestingly, Sian saw and photographed a rabbit in Black Creek Reserve soon after the fox trapping had finished. This was the first rabbit she'd seen in the reserves in about 15 years. Was this a coincidence or a direct consequence of removing the fox?



Rabbit in Black Creek Reserve.

Unfortunately, the rabbit then invited a friend over to stay. Knowing what rabbits get up to we started to be concerned.

The trail camera was used to confirm that we only had two rabbits to contend with. Cage traps are being used to capture the rabbits and remove them from the reserve.



Rabbits eating cabbage in front of the trail camera.

## Harvestmen

A new order of animal – harvestmen - was found in Black Creek Reserve on 14 February. Harvestmen are arachnids, like spiders and scorpions, but a distinct group of animals.

They look a lot like spiders but only have one body segment, whereas spiders have two with a 'waist' separating the segments. Another difference is that harvestmen have two eyes while spiders have eight.

Fossilised specimens have been found in Scotland and the surrounding rock has been dated to 400 million years ago. These fossils look very much the same as the animals we see today.

Unfortunately, not much is known about harvestmen in general and even less about our specific species.



The long yellowish features at the head end of the animal are its very long jaws.