THE GECKO

Edition 27
April 2020

Welcome to the April 2020 edition of The Gecko.

With hot weather continuing until late March we have spent a lot of time watering our seedlings. Some have died, but many have survived. It is hoped that the worst of the hot weather is over now and we don't have to tend to them so often.

This is especially important now that we are in a time of social distancing due to the Covid-19 pandemic. To help reduce the rate of spread, all of our group activities have been cancelled until further notice.

But that doesn't mean you can't enjoy the bushland. It still needs us to be visiting. Just maintain a safe distance between you and anyone else in the bush. We still need to watch over the bushland and report anything untoward to the City of Canning on 1300 422 664.

January to March 2020

26 January 2020
Six of us gave our seedlings an Australia Day treat with some extra water. Just as well, as the following day soared to 40C!

Watering the seedlings.

After watering we went on a nature walk where Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoos, *Calyptorhynchus banksii naso*, were a hot topic. We found the seed pods (honkey nuts) of Marri, *Corymbia calophylla*, that had been chewed by the cockatoos. These had distinctive markings made by the birds' lower bill as they held the pod steady while extracting the seeds with their top bill.

We then found some honkey nuts that still had seeds inside and had some fun shaking them loose.

These Marri nuts (left) show the markings left by cockatoos when extracting the seeds (right).

A little further on, we came across a cockatoo sitting quietly in a tree. This bird was very interesting as it had the pale markings on its body and face suggesting it was either a juvenile or female bird but it also had the solid red tail marking of an adult male. We decided it was a male that was transitioning from juvenile to adult and so displayed plumage from both life stages.

We then found a tail feather from a female bird. This was compared with a feather from an adult male that had been found a few days earlier to see the difference. The adult male tail feathers have a band of solid red across the centre third while the female tail feathers are paler in colour and marked with black bands.

Tail feathers from Forest Red-tailed Black Cockatoos. The top feather is from a female bird, the bottom is from an adult male.

23 February 2020
Eight members attended the Annual General Meeting. Our committee for the next 12 months is:

Chair: Sian
Vice chair: Kade
Secretary: Jackie
Treasurer: Sian
Ordinary committee members: Collette, Jelena and Ian

29 March 2020
Unfortunately, to help reduce the spread of Covid-19, this activity was cancelled. We would have been collecting ants to help the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) with their Ant Blitz.

DPIRD wanted people to collect ant specimens and send them in so that they could identify which species of ants were where and possibly find invasive ants that they didn't know about.

The Tuesday group had been collecting ants from our reserves during March and the monthly group activity was going to be the final collection day. Even though we didn't get as many ants as we might have hoped, we still sent in 38 samples.

Two days after the samples were deposited with DPIRD we received the identifications. From the 38 samples collected we ended up with 22 different species. These are:
Aphaenogaster barbigula
Camponotus calceus
Camponotus sp. (native)
Crematogaster queenslandica
Dolichoderus ypsilon
Iridomyrmex chasei group
Iridomyrmex discors
Iridomyrmex purpureus
Iridomyrmex rufoniger
Iridomyrmex sp. (native)
Meranoplus sp.
Monomorium sp. (native)
Myrmecia sp.
Notoncus hickmani
Ochetellus glaber
Papyrius nitidis
Pheidole sp. (native)
Podomyrma adelaidae
Polyrhachis sp.
Rhytidoponera metallica
Rhytidoponera violacea
Technomyrmex jocosus

We collected the majority of the ants using home-made pooters. Pooters are a container with two holes in the lid. Tubing, or a flexible straw, is poked through each hole (a separate piece of tubing for each hole with one end inside and the other outside the jar). If the holes are too big to make a good seal they can be filled with plasticine or tissue.

As you suck through one free end of the tubing, a vacuum is created in the jar. The vacuum is filled with air being sucked in the free end of the other piece of tubing. If an ant is near the free end of tubing it is also sucked into the jar. This technique works for anything that is small enough to go up the tube.

Ian is using a pooter made from a coffee jar and flexible tubing.

Be warned: Some ants can release formic acid after being trapped and this can be sucked up the tube. It doesn't taste very nice. Other bad things can also be sucked up the tube so be careful where you point it. Don't try to suck up hairy caterpillars. Many caterpillars have irritating hairs and you don't want these in your throat.

A big THANK YOU goes to Barbara M, Collette, Ian, Jackie, Jelena, Kade, Lily, Mia, Rosemary, Sian, and the City of Canning's Natural Areas Team for helping out with these, and other, activities in the bushland.

Upcoming events

All upcoming events have been cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Also this quarter

Skeleton Weed, *Chondrilla juncea*, was identified in our bushland in February. Following advice from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), 134 plants were located and treated by the City of Canning's Natural Areas Team.

The City of Canning's Natural Areas Team treating the Skeleton Weed. The white powder is a herbicide that is piled up around the cut stems.

The area where the plants were found has been mapped and a close eye will be kept on the area over the next few years.

While the plants cause huge problems in agriculture by contaminating crops and clogging machinery, they don't seem to be such a problem in bushland.

A Skeleton Weed flower.

The plants in our bushland have been known about since at least 2012 but were only correctly identified recently. Our plants hadn't increased greatly in number nor had they spread very far, which is why they weren't recognised as being a problem. In the eight years since first recording them, they had spread over an area approximately 15m x 15m and increased in number to 134 plants (many of them seedlings).

Skeleton Weed can grow to be 1 metre tall and wide, but the largest of ours were only about half that size. They have wiry stem with few leaves and produce yellow flowers during summer and autumn. The flowers are followed by wind-blown seeds reminiscent of dandelion seeds.

DPIRD has more information here - https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/skeletonweed/skeleton-weed-declared-pest?page=0%2C0#smartpaging_toc_p0_s4_h3 – including how to identify the plant and how to report your find.

The wiry stems of Skeleton Weed can make it blend into the background.

Cat trapping occurred in our bushland in February with two cats being caught. They were taken to the City of Canning's cat management facility where their owners were attempted to be identified and contacted. It isn't known if the cats were

microchipped but without one, or a collar with identifying tags attached, their owner/s can't be identified. Their photographs were displayed on the City of Canning's website but, if nobody claimed them, they will have been rehomed or destroyed.

The two cats caught in our bushland. Photos: Max.

Our reserves have been declared cat prohibited areas by the City of Canning in order to help protect the wildlife. This means cat owners should ensure that their cat doesn't go into the reserves. Any cat in the reserves is at risk of being trapped and impounded.

Also, if you have cats visiting your property you can borrow a cat trap from the City of Canning. Once caught, the City's rangers will visit you and impound the cat. To save your cat from being trapped, make sure it doesn't stray from your home.

The Containers for Change container deposit scheme starts on 2 June 2020. This is where you can receive a refund of 10 cents for every eligible container you take to an authorised refund point.

This scheme is designed to reduce the amount of litter created by those who consume drinks outside of their home. As such, not all drink containers are eligible for a refund. Those drinks that are normally consumed at home, like plain milk, cordial and wine, are not eligible.

You can return eligible drink containers and take the refund yourself, or you can donate your refund to a registered group. The Friends of Queens Park Bushland has registered to receive 10 cent refunds. You just need to use **our scheme ID - C10242280** – when you drop off your containers.

If you have trouble remembering our scheme ID you'll be able to find it at the bottom of our website's home page - https://www.friendsofqueensparkbushland.org.au/

We had a couple of nice finds in the bushland during March. The first was a species of jewel beetle, *Temognatha lessonii* (no common name). This is a big beetle around 33 millimetres long and has been found mainly across the southern half of Australia. It appears to be associated with Eucalyptus and Corymbia species of trees (we found it under a Marri tree) but there is very little known about the species.

The beetles start life as grubs and are likely to be found inside the trunk and branches of a tree, feeding on the wood. After pupating they would emerge from the tree in order to mate and lay eggs. Our beetle was found dead, hopefully after it had laid eggs to start the next generation (it is female).

Temognatha lessonii. The grid lines are 2 millimetres apart.

The story of the second find begins in winter of last year. You'll recall from the October 2019 newsletter that the City of Canning removed mounds of dumped soil from one of our reserves.

Now growing in the cleared area is Angled Lobelia, *Lobelia anceps*. This is a native plant that we have not previously recorded growing in the Queens Park Regional Open Space.

It is likely that this plant had been growing at the edge of a mound and not seen under the associated weeds. With the removal of the excess soil and weeds, the rootstock has made a comeback. We will be nurturing this plant and helping it regain its rightful place in this patch of bush.

Angled Lobelia, *Lobelia anceps*.