

THE GECKO



Edition 2
January 2014

Welcome to this edition of The Gecko. It is hoped that you had a Merry Christmas and that the New Year looks promising.

We've had a huge quarter with activities, events, an award and grants. You can read all about these, and more, below.

You will have seen that our newsletter now has a new name. The newsletter name reflects the gecko

featured in our logo. You can read about the southwestern spiny-tailed gecko at the end of the newsletter.

We would 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 and we'll include it in the next newsletter.

October to December 2013

27 October 2013

Nine members met to cut the seed heads from the pink gladioli. We also gave the seedlings inside the gate on Station St something to drink. And we selected new images to go on our greeting cards.

During the morning Ronnie came across a western bearded dragon and several of us had a good look.

Western bearded dragons rely heavily on camouflage for protection. As long as we don't make any sudden moves, or try to hold them, most western bearded dragons will hold still while we look and take photos.



Western bearded dragon. Photo by Ronnie.

10 November 2013

This was a scout activity where we learnt the importance of monitoring the environment through bird and aquatic macroinvertebrate surveys.

We started by learning how to use binoculars and then identified and counted the ducks on the lake. The grey teal had eight babies so there was something special to see and record. We recounted the experience last Christmas when oil was dumped and washed through the lake. We could see in our weekly bird surveys that the birds left the lake while the oil was there and only came back when the Persicaria, and the last of the oil, was removed.

Sue then went paddling in the lake to scoop up some mud. We poured thin layers of mud into white trays and looked through magnifying glasses to see what was there. There were lots of water fleas, midge larvae and even a tiny fish found.



Scouts looking for macroinvertebrates

23 November 2013

We held a night stalk for which we had eight participants. As usual, we saw many spiders; mostly wolf spiders and garden orb weavers, but also badge huntsman spiders, *Neosparassus* sp. These spiders are called badge huntsmans because of the colourful markings on their undersides. We were lucky enough to see the underside of one as it moved to the far side of a leaf.

Then there was the wolf spider that pounced upon a grasshopper as we were watching. I'm sure the grasshopper was asleep and didn't feel a thing.

The light sheet attracted a number of moths, beetles and other insects. A praying mantis on the sheet was a first for us on a night stalk.



Badge huntsman, *Neosparassus* sp Wolf spider and grasshopper



Thudaca crypsidesma Leaf beetle, Chrysomelinae family



Tymanophora andreae Pantylia sparsa

30 November 2013

This was a big day for us – our very first stall at the Blessing of the River. We had pictures hanging from the back wall showing some of our bushland plants and animals, displays of invertebrates in resin, a bird

nesting box full of beeswax (see story below) and our greeting cards for all to see (and buy).

We spoke with many people and helped them learn more about the bushland. We also sold nearly 200 cards and earned the group some much needed funds. Thank you to everyone who helped out on the day.



Our stall at the Blessing of the River.

One of our founding members, Sian, was officially recognised during the Blessing of the River proceedings by having her name placed on the Environmental Honour Board and receiving a certificate from the Commissioner of the City of Canning.

This honour board, on permanent display near the Canning River Eco Education Centre, is “in recognition of the valued contribution to conserve and enrich the natural environment within the City of Canning”.

This is the first time an honour board of this nature has been placed in the City of Canning and Sian shares the board with 11 others. More names will be added to the board as time goes by.



Sian at the honour board. Photo by Rose

7 December 2013

The East Cannington Early Learning Centre invited us to hold a stall at their Christmas fete. We entertained the kids and listened to their stories of the giant spiders they'd seen in the bushland. And we hovered anxiously as they played with the insects in resin.

We sold a good number of cards to ourselves but very few to the visitors. Unfortunately it seems you can't stop to buy cards when all your child wants to do is run around to the bouncy castle or get their face painted.



Our stall at the Early Learning Centre fete.

8 December 2013

The scouts came and did some seed collecting and propagating with us on 8 December. We collected seed from *Acacia pulchella* (prickly moses), *Daviesia physodes*, *Corymbia calophylla* (marri) and *Kennedia prostrata* (running postman).

It seemed the scouts liked the method of extracting seed from marri nuts – tapping the fallen fruit on the ground to see if seed drops out – as they were still doing it after the session finished.

We sowed some of the marri seed into pots and the scouts were able to take 'their' seeds home to watch them grow. The scouts will bring 'their' trees back to the bush next winter to plant them.



Scouts sowing marri seeds.

16 December 2013

Sue and Sian attended the 1st Forrestfield Scout's badge presentation evening. Sian presented the landcare badge to those who had earned it over the last six months of working with us.

It was also opportune to note that one of the seeds that was sown by the scouts just eight days before had germinated.

Rose, Sue and Sian were presented with gifts from the scouts for the work they had done in leading the scouts through the many activities. Those activities were:

- Planting
- Weeding
- Bird and aquatic macroinvertebrate surveying techniques
- Seed collecting, and
- Propagating.

Further activities are planned with the scouts in 2014 to enable more scouts to earn their landcare badge.

22 December 2013

We started the session by watering the seedlings that were planted in June. Everyone was very pleased with the way the seedlings have grown. They hold great promise for the future.

Ten members then collected seed from ten species of tree, shrub and herb in Gill Brennan Reserve. We collected from *Banksia attenuata* (candle Banksia), *Banksia ilicifolia* (holly leaf Banksia), *Banksia menziesii* (firewood Banksia), *Corynotheca micrantha*, *Corymbia calophylla* (marri), *Daviesia physodes*, *Eucalyptus marginata* (jarrah), *Gompholobium tomentosum* (hairy yellow pea), *Jacksonia furcellata* (grey stinkwood) and *Jacksonia sternbergiana* (green stinkwood).

We had the usual problem when collecting seed from native plants – prickles – and the associated dilemma - to use gloves or not. Using gloves helps protect you from the prickles. But gloves stop you being able to feel things properly and you drop more seed than you collect. Everyone ended up using bare hands and suffered the prickles knowing it was for the greater good.



Hard at work collecting seed.

29 December 2013

Eleven members met at Sian's house to sow the seed collected the previous week and to strike cuttings.

The seed sown were the same as were collected plus *Acacia pulchella* (prickly moses), *Chamaescilla corymbosa* (blue squill), *Eremaea pauciflora*, *Gastrolobium capitatum* (eggs and bacon), *Lomandra preissii*, *Kennedia prostrata* (running postman), *Melaleuca seriata* and *Thysanotus manglesianus* (fringed lily). We also struck cuttings of *Dampiera linearis* (common *Dampiera*).

During the propagation workshop we discussed the use of smoke water as an aid for germination. It has been found that many Australian native plants are stimulated to germinate by the smoke of a bushfire.

To aid germination without the risk of wildfire, smoke can be bubbled through plain water. The chemical compounds in the smoke that help germinate seed are then transferred to the water. The seed is then soaked in the smoke water (or watered with the smoke water after sowing) and, depending on the species, increased germination rates can be expected.

We are trialling watering the bushland with smoke water to see if we can restore understorey plants without propagating them ourselves. A plot has been established in an area where no understorey plants exist and the ground inside the plot has been watered with smoke water. It is now a matter of waiting for next winter to see if anything germinates.

If this method proves successful we will be expanding the use of smoke water to help restore other sections of bushland.



The best part of any workday – morning tea!

A big THANK YOU goes to Ash, Barbara B, Barbara M, Cheryl, Colette, Collette, Debbie, Florian, Jelena, Julia, Karen, Laurie, Peter, Ronnie, Rose, Rosemary, Sara, Sian, Sonja, Stephanie, Sue, Ursula and the scouts for helping out with these activities.

Also this quarter

Bees

Bees moved into two of our bird nest boxes during October. To start with they filled one with honeycomb, decided it wasn't suitable, and moved to a second box. This they also filled with honeycomb before coming to the same conclusion and moving off again.

The boxes were brought down and were used on the displays at the Blessing of the River and the ELC Christmas fete as an example to the public of the damage that bees can do.



Honeycomb in nestbox.

Grant 1

We were awarded two grants in the last quarter. In October we received \$1,300 from the Perth Region NRM Small Community Grant Program.

This was used to print 5,000 greeting cards and purchase some printer ink and paper. The images to go on the greeting cards were selected by those attending the 27 October activity. The cards will be a useful fund raiser for us, as well as spreading the word about the environment to the card purchaser and its ultimate recipient.



The cards bought with the grant.

Grant 2

In November we were awarded \$38,500 from the Western Australian Government's State NRM Program.

This will be put towards weed mapping, weed control and plant propagation over the 2014 and 2015 years. We've been hitting the weeds hard over the last few years and this is our chance to kick them while they're down.

One of the weeds we'll be tackling is the Typha (bulrushes) that have taken over our lakes. After the Typha has been controlled we'll replant the edges with more appropriate sedges and rushes.



Lake covered in Typha.

Upcoming events

January – rubbish collecting

February – AGM

March – night stalk

Dates are to be confirmed.

Dates will be emailed to you, documented on our website and displayed on the noticeboard in the bush.

Southwestern spiny-tailed gecko

The nocturnal southwestern spiny-tailed gecko can be found in an area of Western Australia that closely mirrors the wheatbelt.

It is called a spiny-tailed gecko due to the spines on its tail (who would have guessed). The spines are not sharp but help to break up the gecko's outline as it rests along branches during the day.



The spines on a southwestern spiny-tailed gecko's tail.

The southwestern spiny-tailed gecko is capable of squirting a harmless but smelly fluid from the pores along the top of its tail. This is probably used to deter predators that come too close.

Adult spiny-tails grow to about 13 centimetres long. The females lay two eggs which each measure approximately 16 millimetres x 12 millimetres.



This southwestern spiny-tailed gecko was trying to escape our attention by climbing a grass stem – it didn't work.