

THE GECKO



Edition 24
July 2019

Welcome to the July 2019 edition of The Gecko.

The rains didn't come until the beginning of June this year so quite a few plants didn't survive through this last dry season. But the rains are here now and haven't disappointed. Despite the predictions for

below average rainfall, let's keep our fingers crossed for a long, wet winter.

The latest weed-mapping results indicate we are winning the battle against a couple of species. See page 3 for details.

April to June 2019

28 April 2019

The rains had yet to arrive so we were out watering our seedlings again in April. As we could see that so many had died, it was with renewed optimism that we looked at photographs of the area before we started.

Yes, many of the seedlings we have planted over the last four winters have died. But those that have survived are growing up and starting to make the area look like it can be revegetated after all.



Watering the seedlings

After watering we collected seed from the woolly bushes, *Adenanthos cygnorum*. Collecting seeds from this species is a new skill, taught to us by the City of Canning's Natural Areas Team. The seeds were difficult to spot and it certainly gave us an appreciation of the determination needed by the fauna that feed from this species.

Our next challenge will be learning how to grow this species.

26 May 2019

Still no rain and we were watering again. Rain was forecast for the following week so we were optimistic that this would be the last time for a few months.

After watering we looked at one of the first orchids to flower – a bunny orchid. It is the only specimen we know of this species in our bushland and were happy to see how much bigger it was when compared with previous years – five leaves with three flowering stems.



Common Bunny Orchid, *Eriochilus dilatatus* ssp *multiflorus*

We then looked at areas we had revegetated a few years ago and marvelled at how much the plants had grown. What was once a racetrack for hoons on trail-bikes is now an impenetrable wall of tangled branches. We can only hope that all of our revegetation projects work out so well.

Thanks to Bev and Siew for providing morning tea.

30 June 2019

The skies were grey and there was the occasional shower of rain passing, so hopes were not high for a big turnout. But our volunteers are made tough and didn't disappoint for our first planting session of the season.

Twentyfive volunteers, including two City of Canning councillors, plus seven City staff members planted, fertilised and watered around 2,500 seedlings in two hours.



Busy planting

We were disturbed by a couple of light showers as we worked but were able to take shelter under some rain-ponchos kindly donated by Yaso.

After the plants were in the ground, the next job was to demolish the morning tea. This was done with great enthusiasm! Thank you to everyone who contributed to a great spread.

And many thanks to everyone for helping get the plants in the ground.

A big THANK YOU goes to Addy, Amelia, Barbara M, Bev, Carl, Collette, Emerson, Graham, Harmony, Holly, Ian H, Ian J, Imogen, Isaac, Jackie, Jelena, Kade, Katrina, Koda, Lily, Mandy, Mark, Melaine, Merise, Mia, Ronnie, Rosemary, Sian, Siew, Toby, Yaso and the City of Canning's Natural Areas Team for helping out with these, and other, activities in the bushland.

Upcoming events

28 July – Planting 9am to 11am – Luyer Ave near the intersection with Gibbs St. This will be a National Tree Day event and advertised widely. We will need lots of help to plant around 6,000 stems. If that isn't enough to get you to come along, planting will be supported by snacks and followed by a sausage sizzle lunch plus a hot drink from the coffee van. Bring gardening gloves (if you have them) and a reusable coffee cup.

18 August – Birdwatching 8am to 11am – Meet at the gate opposite 261 Station St. This is our annual birdwatching activity held with BirdLife WA. We'll walk from Station St to Wharf St, and back again, noting all of the bird species we come across. Bring a fold-up chair and your own morning tea to enjoy after the walk as we compile a collective tally of the birds seen. We have three sets of binoculars that can be borrowed on a first come, first served basis.

Details of our other activities are yet to be finalised but will be distributed by email and advertised on our website.

Also this quarter

We are part of a study of fox movements in suburbia. While foxes have been studied in rural areas, very little data is available to show how they move around the landscape in suburban areas.

A fox in our bushland was trapped and it was given a radio-tracking collar. The fox will be tracked until the collar's battery runs low (expected to be during next summer). At that point the fox will be trapped again and euthanized.

We are already starting to see the effects of having a fox in our area. Normally we would arrange to have foxes removed from our bushland as soon as we see the first sign of them. But now we have to learn to live

with bird carcasses and large holes being dug everywhere.

If nothing else, this study is already making us appreciate having a fox-free environment.



Fox den

Winning the war against weeds

Every three years, the City of Canning engages a contractor to survey reserves for weeds. This gives an indication if weed problems are escalating, staying the same or diminishing.

Our areas were surveyed last spring and the results were recently revealed. Even though many hours of weeding, both by hand and chemical, are invested in the land, many weeds are still present at levels seen in prior years. But we did see some significant successes this time around.

Bridal Creeper, *Asparagus asparagoides*, and *Watsonia* sp. are two weeds that have shown significant reductions in abundance in the last three years in our area. We have weeded Bridal Creeper so well that it was only mapped in one spot, while *Watsonia* was not found at all.

Watsonia has been targeted by us and the City of Canning for many years. We have been digging it out by hand since 1998 and the City started spraying it regularly around 10 years ago. In the last few years it has also been hand-weeded by the City's Natural Areas Team.

It takes time and effort, but it can be done. After 20 years of dogged determination and persistence it appears we have won the battle against *Watsonia*!

While it is certainly a win worth celebrating, we mustn't relax. Seeds in the soil will continue to germinate and more could be brought in through any number of ways. We could easily see our achievements lost if we were to let our guard down. To misquote Thomas Jefferson, the price of freedom is eternal vigilance.



This was the first area we cleared of *Watsonia*. Clumps of *Watsonia*, a bulbous plant with strap-like leaves, can be seen dominating the understory in the foreground and background. While the *Watsonia* wasn't this dense through all of our bushland, it gives an indication of how much we have achieved.