

# THE GECKO



Edition 9  
October 2015

Welcome to the October 2015 edition of the Gecko.

This quarter was a lot like last quarter. We did some planting and pulled some weeds. But we also had a stall at the CREEC Science Expo, held a bird watching walk and a nature walk.

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

## July to September 2015

### **2 July 2015**

This quarter started as the last quarter ended – with planting. Six of us, plus four members of the City of Canning's Natural Area Team, met to see 236 plants find their forever home.

We started in an area that had topsoil and mulch from a nearby site placed on it a few years ago. Seed stored in the soil from the original site had germinated and started the revegetation process.

However, it was mostly understorey plants from the pea family that had germinated. We were there to add some overstorey plants and some variety to the species range.



Planting amongst the self-germinated plants.

We then moved to the DPaW grant site we had been working in during June and squeezed in some more plants. While there, it was pleasing to see some Australian magpies and a willie wagtail foraging amongst the recently planted seedlings.



An Australian magpie helps to keep the insects away from our seedlings.

### **5 July 2015**

Eleven volunteers, including four children, enjoyed a sunny morning of planting. We planted, staked and watered 212 seedlings. The timing was good as in the afternoon the seedlings received some extra water from the skies.

This is the first time the volunteers have planted in this area of bushland, which is surrounded by businesses in the Welshpool industrial area.



A sunny morning was followed by rain in the afternoon.

The soil was tested earlier this year and found to be very low in nutrients. We're hopeful that the fertilizer tablet that was buried with each plant will be enough to get them going. We'll keep an eye on them and give them a top up if needed.

### 9 July 2015

With a minimum of 1C (and an apparent temperature of -1C) it was understandable if you wanted to stay in bed this morning. But four hardy volunteers joined the City of Canning's Natural Area Team to plant, stake and water 460 seedlings into ground still supporting a thin layer of ice.



A cold and misty morning greeted the early birds.

The temperature had only reached 13C by the time we finished, but the sun and activity made it feel much warmer and we had started stripping off the layers of clothing.



Hardy planters rugged up against the cold.

Thanks to Lee for bringing the morning tea today.

### 12 July 2015

A further 175 plants were planted today by seven volunteers. Many thanks go to those who were able to keep planting for another hour after morning tea.



Hard at work - head down, bum up.

There was only one problem with staying on – we had used all of our water before the break. Never fear! Resourceful Lee happily stooped at the edge of the lake refilling our containers. This meant all of the plants received a good amount of water before we left.

### 16 July 2015

Today's planting session was a National Tree Day event and advertised in the Canning Times. Unfortunately we didn't attract anybody not already involved with the group.

All the same, the five volunteers and six City of Canning staff members managed to plant over 600 seedlings.



An interesting find during the day was a burrowing spider (probably a mouse spider) accidentally dug up while planting a seedling. Needless to say, the spider wasn't very happy about the situation and made its feelings clear to anyone who cared to get close enough to see. You can read more about spiders at the end of this newsletter.



This spider was not happy about being disturbed.

### 18 July 2015

It was a drizzly morning – enough to make you wet, but not enough to water the plants. Sian wasn't sure if anyone would turn up and so hadn't laid any plants out. But she needn't have worried. Eight volunteers planted 135 seedlings in quite muddy ground.

It rained during the evening of the day after planting and flooded some of the areas where we had been planting. All that was left to see of our plants were their bamboo stakes.



The water level rose so that the seedlings used the stakes as snorkels.

We marvelled at the number of pygmy sundews, *Drosera glanduligera*, that were growing on the mud and discussed their carnivorous habits. Sundews have developed hairs that excrete mucous. This mucous is sticky and traps insects that touch it. The mucous then digests the insect and the nutrients released from the insect are absorbed by the plant.

Sundews need to eat insects to thrive as they grow in soils that are deficient in nutrients. Without eating insects the plants wouldn't survive. Plus, there would be more mosquitoes around to bother us.



*Drosera glanduligera* showing mucous-tipped hairs.

### 23 July 2015

Our last planting session with the City of Canning's Natural Area Team saw five volunteers help plant 399 seedlings. We will still have planting sessions on the weekends but the majority of the plants are now in the ground.

While planting, we found a frog. This species is commonly known as a banjo frog and makes an explosive 'bonk' sound – a bit like a banjo string being plucked. Our frog had its photo taken and then was placed out of harm's way so that we wouldn't step on it.



The banjo frog disturbed while planting.

### 26 July 2015

For some reason, volunteers had trouble finding the planting site. Two went to the wrong location to start with and another wandered around the correct piece of bush but still missed us. In spite of this, eight volunteers planted 135 seedlings this morning.

Today's seedlings were planted in an area we started planting at the beginning of June so we were able to admire our early work up close. We now hope that the rains continue well into spring to give our babies a good start in life.



Finding a bare spot to plant a seedling is difficult in this forest of stakes.

### 1 August 2015

We're still planting but it is getting very near the end. 192 seedlings were planted by eleven volunteers today. Planting went so quickly that there were no plants needing our attention after morning tea and our short, quick session remained just that – short and quick!



Many hands make light work.

### 8 August 2015

The mice were separated from the men this morning with only five hardy souls braving the rain. But they weren't so hardy that they wanted to stay longer than 1 hour.

The rain came down heavily at times but we were saved from the wind, which didn't pick up until after we'd left.

Nevertheless, we planted 82 seedlings and munched through half the morning tea before heading home for a much needed change of clothes.



Planting in the rain. Photo by Jelena.

### 15 August 2015

We are so very nearly finished with our plantings now. Today saw 117 seedlings planted by seven volunteers.

Only dribs and drabs to go in the ground now and they will be done by a small weekday team.

One incident marred a perfect day. As we were walking back to our cars we could see a vehicle on the verge not far from us. A man then started cutting into a fallen branch with a chainsaw. The branch was dead but was still attached to a living tree.

Not knowing the man's intentions, the City's patrol & security team was called and we were advised that the issue would be treated as a priority.

We weren't game to approach a man with a chainsaw so left the area. But a check on the area later in the day found that the man had gone and the tree was still standing. The dead branch was still there too.

Although the branch is dead it still plays a vital role in the ecosystem and should be left as it is. Species of fungi have colonised it and are breaking down the wood and returning nutrients to the soil. It is also used by a variety of animals as shelter and as a hunting ground.

### 16 August 2015

The Science Expo at the Canning River Eco Education Centre (CREEC) was a great success. Many people came to look at our displays and play our game.



Our stall at the Science Expo. Photo by Jelena.

Our seven volunteers were kept busy all day answering questions and telling people about the wonders of the bushland.

### 29 August 2015

The weather held off just long enough for 10 volunteers to do two hours of weeding today.

The weeds were growing so strongly that they were smothering the seedlings we planted earlier in the winter. We think the strength of the weeds has something to do with the compost we incorporated into the soil earlier in the year.

This area had never been able to grow anything – not even weeds. So, earlier in the year we had compost incorporated into the soil and treated it with a soil wetting agent. If the size of the weeds is anything to go by, it has done the trick.

So that we don't lose these vital nutrients, we are removing the flowers and laying the weeds upside down on the surface. This will allow the weeds to decompose and return the nutrients to the soil while making sure they don't go to seed.



Weeding around the seedlings.

### 12 September 2015

The day started with rain and so only five hardy BirdLife Australia members attended the bird watching walk. But that was okay because it meant that we could move more quietly through the bushland and were not disturbing the birds quite as much as a large group would.

We saw 40 bird species in total and stopped to admire many of the wildflowers too. The most interesting sightings of the birds included an adult male red-tailed black cockatoo feeding an adult female. This was suggestive of courtship behaviour as the male demonstrates that he is a good provider.

We also saw a female rufous whistler collecting nesting material and a purple swamphen being followed by a young chick.

But the best sighting of all was of a pair of striated pardalotes taking food into a hole in a concrete wall.

This indicates that they are feeding young and it is at least the fifth year in a row that they have used this nesting site.



Watching the red-tailed black cockatoos.

### 20 September 2015

We had a very nice day for the nature walk with the sun shining and only a light breeze. The nine attendees enjoyed a walk through the bushland hearing Collette talk about the wonders of the plants and animals that live there.

Several bobtails were seen during the morning and a galah was sitting in a hollow of a dead tree. We learnt about buzz pollination and how our native bees know how to do it but the introduced honey bee doesn't. If we lose our native bees then there won't be pollinators for many of our wild flowers.

We also saw the differences between male and female *Allocasurina* species and the marks left on gum nuts by black cockatoos when they feed.

We ended the walk by thanking Collette for an interesting discussion followed by a yummy morning tea provided by Jelena and Rosemary.



Studying a woolly bush.

A big THANK YOU goes to Anne, Ash, Banita, Barbara M, Bev, Caleb, Claire, Collette, Emily, Florian, Ikhlaas, Janelle, Jelena, Jill, John, Lee, Luke, Mandy, Marion, Max, Nikole, Omar, Peter, Ronnie, Robin, Rose, Rosemary, Sara, Sian, Sue, Stephanie, Swastik, Taea, Tehlia, Ubaydah, Wayne, Zaid and BirdLife Australia members for helping out with these activities.

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## Upcoming events

October – Weeding

November – Night stalk

December – Seed collecting

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

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## Also this quarter

**Last quarter** we reported on finding the skeleton of a tawny frogmouth. This quarter we can go one better and report finding a living bird in our reserves.

The latest sighting was made in the same reserve in which the skeleton was found but we don't know if the birds came to us as a couple or if it was a coincidence finding them both so close together. Either way, we hope our living bird finds our bushland comfortable and decides to stay.



Tawny frogmouth.

**Two new native plant species** for our bushland were identified this quarter – *Daviesia nudiflora* and *Tibonanthes australis*.

Only two plants of the *Daviesia* were found but we'll be keeping an eye out for more now that we know what we're looking for. Seed pods are developing so we'll be watching these and propagate them when they are ready.



*Daviesia nudiflora*.

Four plants of the *Tibonanthes* were found, but there are likely to be more. This is a small plant and in the same family as kangaroo paws and *Conostylis*.

These grow in winter-wet areas and are in a spot that doesn't get as wet as it used to. Our plants had just started flowering when found so we'll keep an eye on them and collect seed later in the year.



*Tibonanthes australis*.

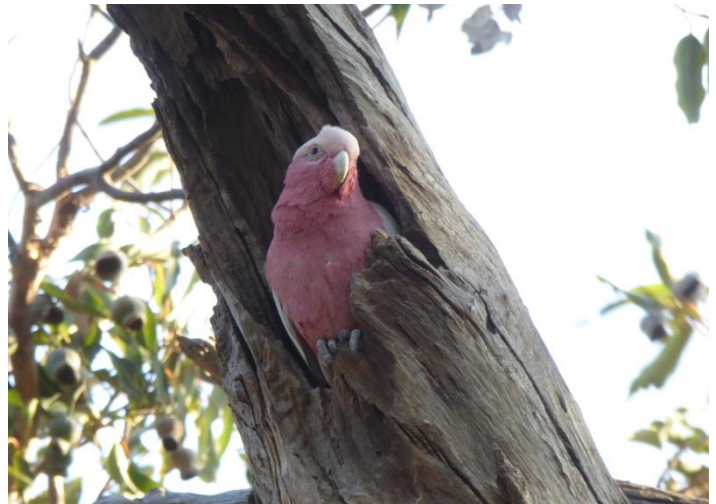
**Cat trapping** happened in September. We had seven traps each night over four nights, but caught no cats. However, we did catch a bobtail. Bobtails like to explore anything new in their area and this leads them inside things like cat traps. This one (below) spent the night munching on cat food before being released in the morning.



The bobtail shortly after being released from the cat trap.

**Bird nesting** is well and truly underway in the bushland. As well as the birds seen on the bird watching walk (12 September), we also found nests of a galah and an Australian magpielark.

Galahs nest in tree hollows and the one in the photo has been seen at this hollow for more than two weeks. The hollow is in a dead marri, *Corymbia calophylla*.



Galah at its nesting hollow.

Australian magpielarks make mud nests on sturdy branches. This one has also made its nest in a marri, *Corymbia calophylla*.



Male Australian magpielark sitting on its mud nest.

# Spiders

We are fortunate (or not, depending on your fondness for spiders) to have a great variety of spiders in our bushland. Big and small, dull and colourful, aerial and ground dwelling, we have found them all. Spiders can be broadly separated into two groups – primitive spiders and modern spiders.

Primitive spiders have an ancestral lineage that goes back more than 360 million years. They primarily live in holes or burrows, are large spiders and take several years to reach maturity. Females can live in the same burrow for 20 years or more and rarely, if ever, leave the burrow – feeding on invertebrates that stray within striking distance of the entrance.

These spiders have fangs that both point downwards. This means that to strike they need to rear up and drop down on their prey. This is why spiders will sometimes adopt an aggressive pose when threatened. The only way to defend themselves is to bite, and the only way to bite is to rear up. Primitive spiders include the trapdoors, funnel-webs and brush-footed trapdoors.

While secretive, we have managed to see and photograph a few primitive spiders in the bush.



This spider is probably a type of mouse spider



Lidless Banksia Trapdoor, *Chenistonia tepperi*

Their burrows vary greatly, with the trapdoor spiders having some of the most interesting. Trapdoor spider burrows can be so distinctive that sometimes the species can be identified just by the type of door it builds on its burrow.



The burrows of trapdoor spiders can be almost invisible with the door closed. The photo on the left has the lid open, the one on the right shows it closed.

Not all trapdoor spiders make the traditional trapdoor as shown above. Some have a loose tube of webbing, like the open end of a sock, which they can pull down closed behind them when they retreat into their burrow.



Modern spiders have wandered further down the evolutionary path than the primitive spiders. Modern spiders use web to catch, subdue and wrap prey, have short lives and their fangs point towards each other. This means that they don't need to rear up to strike and so don't need to be on a solid surface to strike. No longer needing to be on solid ground, spiders began building webs between branches and using them to catch flying insects.

Many modern spiders are easily seen during the day and can be very elaborately patterned. These patterns can be used as a warning signal – e.g. red means danger – or for camouflage. Some even use their colours and patterns in courtship rituals.

The males of peacock spiders have beautifully coloured and intricately patterned abdomens. These are used to great effect in a courtship dance. As well as having a patterned back, they also have flaps of skin that can be extended to the sides and form a larger display.

When a male moves within visual range of a female, he raises his abdomen, so that it points straight up, and extends his flaps of skin. This makes him look very much like a male peacock displaying his tail.

While moving side to side and keeping his raised abdomen displaying towards the female, he waves his white tipped third pair of legs and 'dances' for the female. If he dances and displays well he may have the chance of fathering her offspring. If he fails he may become lunch!



Peacock spider, *Maratus mungaich*



Banded orb-weaver, *Argiope trifasciata*



Christmas spider, *Austracantha minax*