

THE GECKO



Edition 49
October 2025

Welcome to the October 2025 edition of The Gecko.

Wasn't it great to have a winter like in the good old days? For those of you too young to remember, or newly arrived, Queens Park and East Cannington would flood every winter. Some remember times when they could canoe through the suburbs.

This winter wasn't quite that wet, but it was enough to bring back memories. These were the conditions our native plants grew up with. No wonder they are suffering now with short and relatively dry winters followed by long, hot and ever drier summers.

Hopefully this winter, and the soil trial below, will help turn things around.

July to September 2025

Soil trial

Over the years, we've seen our once vibrant bushland slowly decline. The last two summers have been particularly hard, during which we have lost some of our much-loved trees. At the same time we have seen weeds become resistant to herbicides and start to crowd out the native plants.



An *Allocasuarina fraseri* in declining health.

In an attempt to arrest, and hopefully reverse, the decline, the City of Canning arranged for Brent and Dylan, from Bio Soil Solutions, to treat an area of bushland with a 'biological brew'. The hope is that by boosting the natural micro-organisms in the soil the native plants will be better able to withstand adverse conditions. It should also make the soil conditions less suitable for weeds, thereby reducing the need for herbicides.

Bio Soil Solutions make their own biologically active compost, from which they brew a liquid. The brew is so full of microbial life that it only took 1,000 litres to cover the 7,200m² trial site.



Dylan from Bio Soil Solutions sprays the trial area.

The timing of the spray was perfect as it rained the following day, meaning that the microbes were washed into the soil profile – right where they need to be.

As part of the trial, no herbicides will be used in the treated area. Herbicides are known to ‘lock up’ nutrients in the soil, making them unavailable to the plants. The biological brew will help to break those bonds and release the nutrients.

According to Brent we should start to see results with the onset of warmer soil temperatures in spring. With warmer conditions, both the micro-organisms and the vegetation will become more active. We certainly look forward to seeing our ailing trees bounce back stronger than ever.

Fox trapping

After signs of fox activity were noticed in our bushland (turtle nests were dug up and the distinctive odour that only foxes produce) the City of Canning engaged Eddie from Feral Invasive Species Eradication Management to investigate.



A turtle nest that has been dug up and the eggs destroyed.

In early August Eddie found that all of the fox dens in the bushland had been freshly dug out. This is behaviour typical of breeding female foxes that prepare back-up dens in case the primary den is disturbed.



A fox caught on a camera trap.

Eddie conducted some trapping and caught an adult male and young female fox, which were euthanised. As juvenile foxes are still leaving their parents’ territories at this time of year, he expects that the prepared dens will soon be taken over by a new fox or two. We will now be keeping our eyes open for more signs of fox activity.

Nature walk

On 10 August we held a nature walk with members from the Armadale Branch of the Wildflower Society. The day started with showers but that didn’t deter 15 people from coming along.

We started at a block of bushland that is completely different to anything else in the area. Some of the species in this patch are usually described as growing along the coast and in association with limestone. While we’re not exactly coastal (the nearest beach is 20km away), we do have something resembling limestone in the soil of this block.

We have removed most of the weeds from the block (thanks Jackie & Ian) and now have large open areas to fill. What we wanted to know from our guests was whether they had seen bushland similar to this area so that we could reintroduce the correct species and fill the open areas. Unfortunately, our guests were as amazed as we are at what they saw and couldn’t point us to anything similar. It seems we have something unique and precious on our hands.

One of the plants growing in this area is a type of liverwort. Liverworts are small plants, often no more than 20 mm across that could be mistaken for moss or lichen. Ours is an undescribed species in the genus *Riccia*. Until it is formally described it is going by the name “*Riccia* sp. Cranbrook”, after where it was first collected.



Riccia sp. Cranbrook with a newly germinating *Drosera glanduligera* in the centre of the ring. Photo courtesy of Sophie.

Our next site to look at had a more standard suite of plants for the area. However, that didn't make it any less interesting. Although being early in the season, there were some flowers out, including a species of orchid. But one of the biggest excitements of the walk was brought about by the sighting of a male Banksia Peacock Spider, *Maratus mungaich*. This tiny spider, only 4 mm long, uses its brightly coloured abdomen to attract a female.



Banksia Peacock Spider, *Maratus mungaich*.
Photo courtesy of Sophie.

A bit later on there was another diversion from the flowers when we came upon a turtle hatchling walking across the path in front of us. No sooner had this turtle made it to the safety of the nearby lake then the call went up that another had been spotted. As these two were found so close to each other, both in space and time, it is almost certain that they emerged from the same nest.



You can see in this turtle hatchling how this species got the common name of 'snake-necked' turtle.
Photo courtesy of Sophie.

Southwestern Snake-necked Turtles, *Chelodina colliei*, are normally found in freshwater lakes. But the females come out of the water to lay their eggs. Up to 25 eggs are laid at the bottom of a hole dug out of the dry ground. After hatching, the baby turtles dig themselves out of the nest and make their way to the nearest body of water – that's when we saw them. If they are male, they will probably never leave the safety of the lake again. If they are female, once mature, they will need to make the perilous journey onto dry land every year to lay their eggs.

It is when the turtles are out of the water that they are at most risk. That risk comes in many forms – attacked by dogs or foxes, being hit by cars if they find themselves on a road or dehydrating if they can't find their way back to the lake. Our babies have managed to avoid the first two high-risk periods of their lives. Their nest wasn't dug up and, after hatching, they made it to the water without being eaten. We wish them both a long and safe life.

With so many places to choose from, we thank the Armadale Branch of the Wildflower Society for including our area in their itinerary of walks.

Bird watching

BirdLife WA held a bird watching walk in our area on 24 August. Unfortunately, the weather was poor (and the forecast worse) leading to only four people turning up.

The walk went ahead and, although there were a few light showers, we felt very lucky with the weather. We saw or heard 27 species of birds, including a Splendid Fairy-wren and had a very good look at a male Rufous Whistler.

There were both Carnaby's and Red-tailed Black Cockatoos on the walk and this photo was taken of a pair of red-tails with a rainbow in the background.



A big THANK YOU goes to Alex, Clare, Darren, Debbie, Greg, Ian, Jackie, Joshua, Katie, Kim F, Kim S, Michael, Roger, Sian, Simon, Sophie, Tim, Zac, Bryce from SERCUL and the City of Canning's Natural Areas Team and other environmental staff for helping out with these and other activities in the bushland.

A special thank you goes to all who donate containers to support our fund raising efforts.

An extra special thank you goes to the staff at the Containers for Change depot at 53 Felspar Street, Welshpool, where we are always greeted with a smile and friendly conversation. Keep up the great work!

Water, water everywhere!

As mentioned earlier, it rained quite a bit this winter. The rain, and the regularity with which it fell, meant that it couldn't drain away as fast as it was arriving. That led to temporary flooding in places. Some areas will have enjoyed the water and plants will be making the most of the bounty.

The *Eucalyptus rudis* woodland pictured below will be one of those places.



Photo courtesy of Jackie.

However, there are other areas that will have suffered due to the overly wet conditions. This includes at least one of our revegetation areas (above right) that was underwater for several days. Some of the plants will survive, but there are others that either drowned or were buried as the surrounding soil shifted. We helped as many seedlings as we could but only time will tell if it was enough.



Photo courtesy of Jackie.

Vale Bev Price

It was with great sadness that we learnt of the passing of Bev Price. Bev was a very active member from 2015 through to 2019 when ill health started to take its toll. Although no longer an active participant, she was very appreciative of the group's activities in looking after the bushland and took a keen interest in our quarterly newsletter.

