

COOLEMAN RIDGE PARK CARE GROUP

Newsletter
May 2018

Previous meeting
Sunday 15 April
Above Chauvel Circle

Windy again this month but cool with threatening rain. Not enough to deter nine of us (Doug, Chris, Brigitte, Jenny, Arminel, Pat, Linda, Rob and Malcolm) from attacking Verbascum, African Love Grass, St John's Wort, Briar Roses, three Manchurian Pears, a thistle and some patches of blackberries. The recent burr off made them easy to locate but also revealed the extent of St John's Wort and Skeleton Weed.
Rob Lundie

Managing Eucalypt Thickets on Coolleman Ridge

In 2009/2010 there were numerous instances of natural eucalypt establishment from seed under mature trees on the Ridge. Indeed, these events were quite widespread in surrounding areas. Today thickets of young eucalypts up to about 1.5 m tall are the result. A number of eucalypt species were involved. The seedling regeneration of these woodland trees seems to be intermittent with many years, perhaps decades, between major events. The question of the management, or not, of these young thickets has arisen. It could be argued that nothing should be done because the origin of the plants was "natural". However, a counter argument is that the plants are not subject to the same controls as they were before European settlement, especially frequent fire. Another argument is that the flora and fauna are not the same as before settlement – as is easily shown by the numbers of plants of introduced species in the Reserve. The key is

Next Meeting
Sunday 20 May
Darrell Place

Time: 1.30 pm– 4.00 pm

NOTE: Meeting in the afternoon

Meet: End of Darrell Place

Bring: hat, gloves, secateurs, dableover, hacker, drink, raincoat if it is wet

Task: plant identification, weeding

Contact: Linda Spinaze 6288 6916

to manage according to current objectives. Are these eucalypts a fire problem? A biodiversity problem? A recreational problem? As these questions relate to the aims of management of Canberra reserves, they are worth considering. But what action should be taken is a moot point. Near the Kathner St entrance to Coolleman Ridge is a sage thicket (see photo) which is adversely affecting biodiversity according to those who know this fenced site well. The effects of management by mowing, mainly, can be shown informally by the photo. The lefthand side of the photo shows the treated area for the "Asset Protection Zone [from fires]" where mowing is regular; note that a couple of plants mid photo near the fence have escaped the mowing. The mowing has not led to massive deaths but the plants there are repeatedly reduced to mowblade height. The contrast is with the 2009/10 thicket under the trees on the righthand side of the picture where weed removal by hand is practiced. The selective removal of young eucalypts here, as well as

weeds, would presumably help achieve the aims of management inside the fenced area.

Photo by Malcolm Gill
Malcolm Gill

Cows and the Old Dam

The photos show the extent of the damage done to the Old Dam when cows are grazed along the western perimeter of the Ridge. The aim is to reduce the fire load, and fire hazard to nearby suburbs. However, the yearly presence of the cattle greatly upsets the ecological balance of the Old Dam by trample its edges turning them into a boggy mess and increasing the turbidity of the water. Both factors affect the ability of other animals and birds to access the dam. The group hopes PCS will decide to fence the dam such that it keeps out the cows but still provides access for smaller creatures. An alternative water supply outside the fence would be installed for the cattle.

The Old Dam February 2018 Photo by Rob Lundie
Linda Spinaze

Effective Blackberry Spraying

The recent spraying by contractors hired by PCS seems to have been pretty exhaustive, with many scattered clumps of blackberries all over the Ridge now looking very sad. Thanks to PCS for organising the spraying, and thanks to anyone who used Collector to mark where all these bushes were.

Linda Spinaze

A New Skin k on the Ridge

Boulenger's Skink

Photo by S Wishart

On 7 March S Wishart sighted a 90mm long Boulenger's Skink (*Morethia boulengeri*) on the Ridge. One of eight Australian skinks in the genus *Morethia*, aka firetail skinks, it was named after George Albert Boulenger (1858-1937), a Belgian British zoologist. The markings and coloration can vary a lot between individuals. Its back is grey or brown with coloured flecks forming longitudinal stripes. Along its side, runs a thin white stripe from mouth to groin. Above this is often a thicker black stripe. Juveniles have a distinctive red/orange tinge on the side of the tail, a distinguishing feature of the *Morethia* genus. Essentially an inland species, common from just south of Canberra but known on the Monaro, the coast and higher areas.

The Old Dam March 2018

Photo by Rob Lundie

Source: Canberra Nature Map