



COOLEMAN RIDGE PARK CARE GROUP

Newsletter
May 2020

Cooleman Ridge during the Coronavirus Lockdown

It's an ill wind ...! There has been a huge increase in the number of walkers and cyclists on the Ridge since the COVID-19 lockdown began in March. People, many of whom have never visited the Ridge, have been enjoying the beautiful Autumn weather, the verdant state of the Ridge following welcome rain, and the magnificent views from all parts. Malcolm reported that on one mid-April Sunday, cars were parked all over the place at the Kathner St entrance. He noted that there has been an unusually high call on Ridge pamphlets. As evidence that many of these people were new to the area, quite a few have been observed taking photos of the Ridge entrance board and availing themselves of the pamphlets. Apparently Kathner St is now advertised on the web as a starting point for walks.

While Chris was doing a spot of informal weeding on the Mt Arawang saddle, he received a lot of interest in his activity. He was able to show people the sort of weeds we target. One group thought he was preparing a veggie patch, and another assumed he was harvesting *St Johns Wort* for medicinal use. Rob enjoyed telling people they can use *Verbascum* leaves as toilet paper and that they can stockpile as many as they like.

Over a number of days, Chris and Rob attacked two patches of *Cobblers Peg* on either side of the Mt Arawang saddle track. Chris left a small patch, as this weed is much loved by local chooks. So too, *Fat Hen* which has also been targeted. Linda, who regularly surveys the Ridge, recently walked up to Mt

***Next Meeting
Sunday 17 May
Chauvel Circle***

**MEETINGS CANCELLED UNTIL SEPT
DUE TO COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS
INDIVIDUAL WEEDING WELCOME**

Arawang from Lincoln Place. She was pleased to note there was hardly any *Verbascum*. On the other hand, there were some huge patches of thistles, all crowded in and thick, but not yet with flowers. Too big to dig out by herself.

Further on, and about 50 metres under the Arawang trig, she marked a few blackberry patches onto Collector, and dug out a few huge *Verbascum*. Always on the lookout for *African Love Grass*, she dug out a dense patch on the Arawang saddle track.

One advantage of so many people using the Ridge is that it gives us an opportunity to explain what we do and point out the weeds we are targeting. Most people have heard of *African Love Grass*, but it is much easier to show people the difference between it and other grasses rather than relying on photos which rarely do grasses justice.

A young family were picnicking and poking around near the Kathner St dam while Jenny was working on the hill above. There was Mum with a toddler and a pre-schooler. They came over to the fence to see what she was doing. The pre-schooler asked if he could have a 'spear' (*Verbascum* stalk) as he was a hunter. Later he told her he was really pretending to be Ned Kelly! Before they left they told her they had found a tiny animal hidden behind a layer of bark in a black stump

above the dam. Jenny later found a tiny bat hiding in the crevice.

A downside of the increased usage of the Ridge has been that some new tracks have been established, presumably by young trail bike riders. The cairn also grows in height each weekend but then is quietly reduced again during the week by Rob and Deirdre. A NSW friend who has walked in many ACT parks said she was very impressed by the high standard of park care on Cooleman Ridge.

Bathurst Burr

Above Lincoln Place, at the base of the path going up to Mt Arawang, Linda found a Bathurst Burr! Malcolm has also noticed an outbreak around the new housing development on the Darwinia-Kathner-Percy site. Various locals have been pulling it out or spraying it. It would appear that the seeds have come in with imports of soil. Doug reported that when the drain and maintenance track above Lincoln Place was revamped a few years back, a heap of Bathurst Burr came with the supposedly sterile soil. David Mackenzie spotted the little plants when they appeared and raised the alarm. Malcolm also noticed the emergence of the burr during this time at the Kathner St end. A fair bit of time and effort to eliminate the pest was made by those doing the track. But clearly not 100% effective and definitely a weed to be kept on top of.



Bathurst Burr

Photo: Linda Spinaze

Managing Rabbits and Erosion on Fencepost Hill

Some years ago, Arminel, Mike Morriss and I were supervising a Conservation Volunteers Australia team around Pauline's Patch. Arminel persuaded us to drag some fallen branches over the bare ground as a way to

deter rabbits digging. The tangle of branches is still there with no evidence of rabbit activity. Furthermore, on a steep, bare patch sloping down to the track (facing the big house), there has been a steady run off from recent rain. The branches have trapped soil and now moss is growing in the crevices. Much of the bare soil is being colonized by a small creeping annual which Arminel tells me was known as *Chenopodium* but is now known as *Dysphania* - an annual in the ACT in disturbed or overgrazed areas after summer rain. The hillside looks beautiful and healthy.

Jenny Horsfield



Huge white toadstool below Natasha's Patch
Photo: Linda Spinaze

Native Grasses on the Ridge

Have you noticed the amazing native grasses which have sprung up on the Ridge recently? There are large swathes of Redleg grass (*Bothriochloa*) everywhere, and also the usually shy Cotton Panic Grass (*Digitaria*) on the western side of Cooleman Trig. Remnant Panic grass flower-heads can still be seen, and the beautiful white-silky tops of Queensland Bluegrass along the Cut-drain Path above Monkman St. Black Nine-awn grass, with its dark flowering-heads, is also very obvious in various clumps. If you have good eyes, you can see the nine awns on the "seed", which reminds me of a sea-anemone. Graceful, tall sporobolus grasses line the edges of some paths. And of course, we can't forget the Kangaroo grass which is always evident around Cooleman trig.

Linda Spinaze

Vale Reet Vallak: a true friend of the Ridge