



COOLEMAN RIDGE PARK CARE GROUP

Newsletter
June 2020

Cooleman Ridge and COVID19

Just after the May Newsletter was published, restrictions were eased so that the number of people who could meet at any one time was increased to 10. So, it was terrific to have 18 people turn up for the weeding party, no doubt aided by the 'any excuse to be allowed out' factor and the glorious afternoon. With so many people we divided into three groups, sprayed our equipment with alcohol-based spray, and donned our gloves before heading out over the Ridge above Chauvel Circle. Those present were: Linda, Paul, Malcolm, Chris, Doug, Rohan, Lyndal, Gosta, Brigitte, Jenny, Natasha, Claire, Caleb, Jacob, Alan, Arminel, Helen, Rob. (18)

Linda's team manually removed *Patterson's Curse* and *Solanum nigrans* from under the Mealy Bundy (*Eucalyptus nortonii*) grove.

Jenny's group weeded Reet's patch.

Alan worked up from Darrell Place on *St John's Wort*. Arminel removed *Patterson's Curse* rosettes and *Prickly Lettuce* at the Kathner St dam wall. Rob and Doug tackled *Verbascum* and *Briar Roses* at the Olympic site, so-named after the Federal Government provided money to plant trees in 2000 as a part of its promotion of the Sydney Olympics as the Green Games. Sadly we had the fires in 2003 so very few trees survived. Other weeding during May/June has mainly targeted *Chenopodium alba* (Fat hen) which has appeared in places along the Ridge. After the April rains there has been vigorous growth in many patches of *Patterson's Curse*, *Mustard weed* and *Solanum nigrans*. *St Johns Wort* is not obvious at this time of year, but spring will probably see it springing!

Linda Spinaze and Rob Lundie

Next Meeting

Sunday 21 June

Darrell Place

Time: 1.30 pm – 4.00 pm

Meet: Darrell Place

Bring: hat, gardening gloves, small digger, water to drink.

Task: Weeding of invasive, exotic plants. Native plant identification.

Contact: Linda Spinaze 6288 6916

July meeting: Sun 19, Lincoln Place

Reet Vallak: some memories

Reet Vallak, who died on 1 May aged 83, has been described as "Trekker, Bushwalker, Cross-country skier, Folk Dancer, Painter, Potter, Astronomer, Traveler, Translator, Conservationist and botanist." For Cooleman Ridge she was a friend and tireless worker. Arminel remembers she did more than anyone else to control Great Mullein - her declared enemy! She remembers Reet showing us how to wield a scythe which she found was the best way to fell the tall-growing introduced grasses. Jenny remembers how diligent and faithful Reet was in her work on her part of the Ridge which is still known as Reet's Patch. Doug often thought of Reet when he went up the track from Kathner St and walked past her patch. He remembers her showing some of the Group the host of orchids and other interesting flora that flourished in what looked like a desolate rocky outcrop.

Arminel Ryan, Jenny Horsfield, Doug Tinney

Wood Ducks

One of the joys of the rains that partially filled the dams on the Ridge has been the return of some wood ducks. As a regular walker on the Ridge, I had the pleasure of seeing the arrival of a family of two adults and five ducklings at the Old Dam at the end of April.

Unfortunately, within a day or two the family was reduced to one adult and two ducklings. I have no idea what became of the others. Taken by a fox? Happily, at the time of publication, the current family survives and the ducklings are growing strongly. For a long time, my friend and I assumed the adult was a female but we later discovered it was a male, presumably the father. The ducklings appear to be females as evidenced by white lines above and below their eyes. We've enjoyed seeing them splashing in the Old Dam, feeding around the edges and noticeably increasing in size. One afternoon we witnessed an alarming then amusing scene. The father was leading the ducklings up the bank of the dam when there was a flash of lightening and a very loud thunder clap. The chicks, who'd probably never heard thunder before, jumped half a metre in the air, then scuttled down to the water rather than to the protection of their father. We wondered if heading for water when 'threatened' was instinctive or learned behaviour. The father is quite protective and once saw off a crow who was harassing the chicks. The chicks are becoming more independent each day and now the family allows us to get quite close. We look forward to seeing them and are always relieved when we arrive at the Old Dam and can spot our Angus, Betty and Gladys.



Betty, Angus and Gladys

Photo: Rob Lundie

Deirdre McKeown

Vegwatch

For the past five years a couple of Group members have been monitoring two patches on Cooleman Ridge under the Vegwatch

Monitoring Program: Mt Arawang and Darrell Place. Ecologist, Sarah Sharp, initiated this program in 2011 and has continued as the driving force. She recently collated the data from 2011 to 2018. Results show that there was a small increase in native species richness and groundcover at both patches. The Arawang patch also showed a decrease in the abundance of Serrated Tussock, which was the reason that site was chosen. This site also showed a significant decrease in introduced groundcover. It will be interesting to see the results after the drought of the past two seasons. Last year the Arawang site had minimal vegetation, neither native nor introduced. It was virtually bare. I suspect that our monitoring in November later this year will show completely different data. Hopefully Sarah will be able to continue to collate the resultant trends.



Arminel Ryan at the Mt Arawang patch in Nov 2019

Linda Spinaze

Riders, Runners, Ramblers and Rovers

The Ridge has continued to experience more visitors than usual. Organised running events conducted by Sri Chinmoy and the Hash House Harriers, mix with casual runners, riders and walkers, and with them, Rover the family dog who must love the freedom of Cooleman Ridge. However, not all dogs are on a leash as required by law. As Tina Hollis, photographer, says, unrestrained dogs are a threat to native wildlife. So, how to reconcile allowing a dog to explore the Ridge with the need to protect local wildlife. Tina's solution: retractable leashes which restrain the dog, but allow five metres (or more) of freedom. Leashes range from \$11 to over \$100, but are commonly about \$25 (online).

Rob Lundie