COOLEMAN RIDGE PARK CARE GROUP

Newsletter June 2017

Previous Meeting Sunday 21 May Mt Arawang

Mt Arawang, along with most of the rest of Canberra, received a good soaking (about 50 mm) on the Friday before the weeding working party. This, and another beautiful Autumn Sunday afternoon, made for very pleasant conditions as seven of us (Linda, Alan, Doug, Rohan, Jenny, Malcolm and Rob) scoured the southern slopes of Mt Arawang. It was very satisfying to see that the big blackberry patch has largely been eliminated and kept under control through the Group's efforts and commercial spraying over many months. Rohan's spraying and tagging experiment may have been compromised by the commercial spraying but the overall effect is that very few shoots survived and so were easily dealt with. Others dug out Verbascum rosettes and de-headed, dabbed and bagged St John's Wort and Fleabane.

In other news, Linda handed out new sets of sturdy riggers' gloves which were gratefully received, as were the compliments the Group received from a number of people walking on the Ridge who paused to ask about its work. As part of efforts to address the first aid needs of the Group, Linda also handed out new compression bandages and encouraged everyone to carry them whenever they are working on the Ridge. They will be useful in the event of snakebite and twisted ankles. These and the gloves were generously donated by Conservation and Parks Services.

Rob Lundie

Next Meeting Sunday 18 June Kathner St

Time: 1.30 pm – 4.00 pm

Meet: End Kathner St

Bring: hat, gloves, secateurs, doover-dabber, hacker, drink, raincoat if it is wet

Task: plant identification, weeding

Contact: Arminel 6231 7392

Exotica coming up on Plant List

The exotic grass *Polypogon monspeliensis* had been noticed previously on the Ridge, but hadn't been added to our Plant List. Webmaster Rohan is also enhancing the List, so that exotics and natives may be searched separately or together. The List is accessible via our Web-Page *www.coolemanridge.org.au.*

Vandalism

Not unlike dogs marking their territories with Wee-Mail, we're seeing our Ridge damaged and defaced by *Homo sapiens*. Trees have been scarred and graffitti has appeared on rocks. The culprits must be some of our 2-legged Users (I use the capital letter advisedly).

Take only photographs! Leave only footprints! The Group would welcome information leading to the apprehension of these malefactors.

What's around
**Cortaderia spp.*
Common Name - Pampas Grasses
Environmental Weeds in Southern Australia (ACT, NSW, Vic., Tas., WA, SA & Qld.)

Photo: Mark Imhof (http://vro.agriculture.vic.gov.au)

There are two other naturalised species (not pictured). ****C. jubata*** Pink Pampas Grass and ****C. richardii*** New Zealand Pampas Grass (native to NZ, but naturalized in Tas.)

We found a juvenile, as reported last month. It was probably ****C. selloana*** Common Pampas Grass (pictured here) - the species most likely to be encountered.

It is a C4 - prohibited pest plant in the ACT (ie propagation and supply prohibited).

Michael Sim from the Mugga Mugga Park Care Group tells us there is *C. selloana* on Mugga Mugga and Isaacs Ridge too. He has removed some smallish plants but finds the big ones hard work.

What's the problem? Introduced as ornamental garden plants, Pampas species are now a threat to wetlands particularly, but a weed of almost any ecosystem. The leaves dry on the plant, affording shelter to many pest animals as well as providing fire-prone fuel. Pampas grasses reduce the aesthetic values of conservation areas, limit recreational access along tracks, produce large amounts of wind-blown pollen that may exacerbate allergic conditions such as asthma and hay fever, and are potentially serious weeds of forestry plantations. In many cases, garden plants are the seed source for infestations. Pampas grasses also have the ability to reproduce from rhizomes (underground stems). The edges of their leaves are sharply toothed and can easily cut human skin, leaving irritating welts.

Genus *Cortaderia* = derived from the Argentine name, 'Cortadera' meaning cutting. **Species *selloana*** - named after Friedrich Sellow, the German Botanist and Naturalist who collected specimens in South America.

Individual plants have the ability to produce vast quantities of windborne seed – up to 100,000 per flower head – which can infest areas within a 25 km radius. Seeds may also be spread by water, machinery and in dumped garden waste. Flowering stems grow up to 6 metres tall, but are usually 2-4 metres in height. They carry plumes of white to silvery florets, fading to straw-colour with age. Flowering occurs mostly during late summer and autumn. The bluish-green leaves are very large (60-200 cm long and 3-20 mm across) with a prominent mid-vein.

This grass is gynodioecious ie there are separate female and hermaphrodite or bisexual plants. Both types vary slightly in their appearance. The female plants are prolific seeders if pollinated by a hermaphrodite plant. It is commonly thought that many of the cultivated plants in Australia are female clones, and fail to produce seed because of the lack of hermaphrodite plants to pollinate them. This could be why pampas grass has failed to naturalise in many parts of Australia where only individual plants are cultivated.!

References - many online, but also in encyclopedias, most gardening guides and weed books.

Removal - Pat and I wore protective clothing and used a 2 step process for our juvenile, which was growing in the cut-off drain above Chapman. First, I cut off and removed the leaves. As they remain savagely sharp even when dry, I decided they should not be left about. (If flowering, the plumes should be bagged to catch the seed, then cut off and removed from the site.) The second step was for Pat to dig up the base. He used a mattock to break up the clump, then a hoe to ensure all the roots and parts of the plant were found. We left these exposed at the side of the base track, to be killed by sun and frost.

Arminel Ryan