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~FEBRUARY 2005 NEWSLETTER~

MEETINGS AND FIELD TRIPS

We meet on the third Thursday of the month at 7:30 pm. General meetings conclude by 8 pm and are followed by a guest speaker beginning at 8:15 pm. There is time for a cuppa between the meeting and the guest speaker. The venue for the meeting is Marrara Christian School, on the corner of Amy Johnson and McMillan Drives.

All welcome. Bring plants to swap, sell or have identified.

~ NEXT MEETING ~

Thursday 17th February 2005 7:30 pm

"Why evergreen in Australian tropical savannas?"

Dr Lynda Prior

In comparable wet/dry savannas around the globe, the woody vegetation is typically dominated by deciduous species. This talk will address the intriguing question as to why Australian savannas are different from their overseas counterparts. Dr. Prior works for Charles Darwin University in the Key Centre for Tropical Wildlife Management and the Co-operative Research Centre for Tropical Savannas and brings with her years of research experience as to how plants tick in the savanna landscapes of northern Australia.

~ FEBRUARY FIELD TRIP ~

Sunday 20th February 2005 9 am

Black Creek Rainforest in Black Jungle Conservation Reserve

Can we track down a rare fern? *Vittaria ensiformis* is a clumping epiphyte known from the Tiwi Islands, Channel Point area and some other isolated locales in the Top End. Come prepared for a 2km walk to the jungle as the access track is likely to be wet and too boggy to drive. Insect repellent a prerequisite! Meet 0900 at the gate at the south-east corner of the Reserve, accessible via Lambells Lagoon Road. Come to the meeting to get further details.

~ FORTHCOMING FIELD TRIPS ~

Sunday 6th & Sunday 13th March 2005 at 8 am

These trips have been scheduled to examine the *Nervilia peltata* plots at Charles Darwin National Park with Dave Liddle. There are also trips scheduled for 3rd and 10th April at 8 am. Please contact Dave on 8945 6809 if you plan to attend, so we can juggle numbers to avoid too many participants on one trip and too few on the next. Also, we can advise participants if we have to cancel a trip at short notice due to wet weather. *Have a look at the April 2004 Newsletter for a story on the survey work done late last wet season:* <http://tenpsnt/newletters/nervilia.pdf>

~ MARCH MEETING ~

The guest speaker will be Piers Barrow, "The ecology of Leichhardt's Grasshopper: when life is dependent upon a select group of plants"

Coolinga Plant Sale October 2004

Photos by Raylene Chandler

A successful venture for the TENPS and members who had plants to sell.



Pat Rasmussen showing interested members of the public how she pots out seedlings



Marj King contemplating the plants remaining to be sold.

~ Submission from TENPS to the Draft Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan for the Northern Territory ~

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Draft Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan for the Northern Territory. We are concerned however at the limited opportunities for community feedback on the Plan and the apparent need to decide on investment priorities in advance of the deadline for community submissions.

In our view the draft Plan covers most of the important issues in NRM but we encourage you to further consider the implications arising from several key issues affecting the Territory's vegetation which is our major area of interest. In this regard we would like you to include some statement acknowledging the inherent value of vegetation to human existence; the pleasure attained through observing its variety, beauty, the study of it, and the satisfaction gained by people through growing plants on their own properties. Further to this, key issues that the Society wishes to raise are:

1. Condition trends of vegetation.

Page 15 of the Appendices, states that 'there is no comparable broad-scale monitoring of biodiversity' (compared to that for land condition on pastoral lands); reference is also made to a study of rain-forest patches

indicating severe disturbance by fire and feral animals.

We also note from Page 82 of the Appendices that 'the overall condition of wetlands across the NT is not currently known. There has been a decline in condition due to ...weeds and feral animals'.

We note with approval that vegetation resource condition targets are proposed (under the heading Native Vegetation Communities Integrity).

Clearly current monitoring is inadequate and we urge that land condition targets receive an appropriately-high level of priority in the implementation of the Plan, which require adequate resource provision for monitoring and action to reduce disturbance of threatened vegetation communities. We also consider it most important that the outcomes of this monitoring should be publicly available.

2. Inadequate representation of vegetation in reserves.

Under the heading 'Conservation of habitats and species' from Page 43 of the Appendices, it is recognised that there is limited representation

of vegetation in formal reserves and there is a need to protect biodiversity hotspots.

We urge that an appropriately-high level of priority is given to the identification and protection of important vegetation types in reserves if not already provided, and that biodiversity hotspots and areas of high endemism are given a special focus. Specifically we recommend that at least 15% of each vegetation type is protected within the reserve system by 2010.

3. Vegetation clearance

Although the Territory has the lowest proportion of native vegetation cleared of all Australian jurisdictions, it is of concern to us that (as stated under 'Issues and Threats' on Pages 17-19 of the Appendices) that 'current (clearing) controls do not specify thresholds for acceptable limits of clearing at a regional level or for particular environments.....

Vegetation types that are being heavily affected by development need to be managed so that they can be represented in their natural environment in the future'. In this context we draw your attention to the need to undertake more research on data-deficient plants, of which there are many in the Territory, as some of these may be particularly affected by clearing and other negative impacts on plant communities.

We urge that clearing controls are promptly introduced that specify thresholds for particular environments where clearing has been identified as having major negative effects on key environmental indicators.

4. Unsustainable extraction of water.

We note from Page 87 of the Appendices that little is known about the extent of this threat in the Northern Territory, but we have concerns about the effect on the water tables in the Darwin rural area from the likely increased demand for extraction of water from the McMinn's bore field.

We support the Territory Government's response to the COAG Water Reform Framework that inter alia states 'surface water and groundwater extraction licences are granted within assessed sustainable yield of

regional water resources', however it seems likely that lowered water tables in the Greater Darwin area are already having a negative effect on the remnant rainforest patches; as this leads to the drying out of the vegetation, especially affecting in particular the threatened Darwin Palm *Ptychosperma macarthurii* which has become more exposed to fire. Once a rainforest canopy is opened by fire there exists an increased risk of further fire occurring due to the invasion of grassy weeds.

We urge monitoring of the water table in Darwin Rural and the subsequent effects of the lowering of the table on vegetation. We strongly recommend that this topic is given appropriately-high priority in the implementation plan, and additional measures be taken to limit any negative effects.

5. Weeds.

While 'Weeds and Invasive Plant Species' are recognised as threats to the environment and rural primary industries, there is a lack of specific management actions that address this issues. For example, the spread of Gamba Grass in the Darwin Rural area is a major threat to native vegetation communities and specific measures are required to reduce its impact.

We are also concerned that Management Action MA4-51 refers to the development of guidelines and protocols for the use of exotic pasture plants. As currently stated this MA condones the ongoing spread of introduced grasses throughout the landscape and consequent degradation of our natural resources.

In view of the environmental disasters caused by many previous plant introductions for pastoral purposes and the very questionable economic return compared with the true cost of ongoing control, we urge that the deliberate spread of exotic pasture plants be discontinued completely.

Case Study: Litchfield Shire.

Litchfield Shire represents a valuable case study of the impact of development on biodiversity.

The Top End Native Plant Society has in the past been active in drawing attention to the negative impact of sand mining on the sand sheet vegetation communities of the Howard River catchment, and has had some success in minimizing this. Recently we have also been active in surveying remnant populations of the Darwin Palm *Ptychosperma macarthurii* in several rainforest patches in the Shire and it is apparent that this species is threatened by all the factors referred to above. Initial damage by feral buffalos and pigs has been followed by uncontrolled wildfires, exacerbated by increased fuel loads due to grass weeds, the spread of which is exacerbated by land clearing in the Shire.

~ 2005 POWER AND WATER ENVIRONMENTAL EXCELLENCE AWARDS ~

The Power and Water Environmental Excellence Awards were established to recognize outstanding achievements by community groups, businesses and individuals in environmental excellence. Environmental Excellence Awards were developed to encourage industry and the community to work together to protect the environment.

There are six categories; community and local government; commercial and industry; domestic (urban/suburban); rural and remote; small business; and environmental grants.

The last category encourages groups or individuals to present innovative ideas or projects that help preserve the environment. Examples suggested in this category include a community group project such as a Landcare

However, a more fundamental change appears to be the drying out of the rainforest habitat due to dry season drops in the water tables resulting from bore-field activity.

There is an urgent need to protect the mosaic of rainforest patches in the Shire through an integrated approach to the numerous land management issues involved and which includes the implementation of a reserve system as referred to above.

We commend the above feedback to your attention and action, and request that in the spirit of transparency you provide feedback to us on your response.

site rehabilitation project or a community education program.

Details of the categories and the awards, information on how to enter and an application form are available in a brochure by phoning 1800 245 092 or by visiting the Power Water website at www.powerwater.com.au.

Entries close on 16 May 2005; category winners will be presented with their award at the Power and Water Corporation Environmental Excellence Awards ceremony on 9 June 2005.

TENPS members who are interested in nominating someone might like to raise the subject at a general meeting. It may also be appropriate for TENPS to nominate itself under the environment category. Submitted by Geoff Gaskell

~ What's the TENPS Committee up to? ~

The Committee met twice between general meetings to discuss tabled issues. These included the submission to provide comment on the Draft Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan for the Northern Territory as detailed above.

The TENPS bank balance was in excess of anticipated operating expenses over the coming months and it was decided to transfer

some funds to a higher interest earning account.

Plans for upcoming events include a plant identification workshop over the Easter break. The workshop will be aimed at the needs of participants, with no expectation of pre-existing plant identification skills. A keenness to learn is the only prerequisite. We are hoping to run the workshop at Woolanang near Litchfield

National Park, which is ideally located for excursions into the field.

Later in the year it has been suggested that Ian Brooker a Canberra based Eucalypt expert be invited to Darwin for a talk on Eucalypts. Funding sources and activities for Ian to be involved in were discussed.

Various sources of funding for new equipment were discussed. A decision was made to purchase a printer suitable for label printing for plant sales and to purchase web space to expand the website.

TENPS now has an ABN and is liable for GST. This was done to allow submission for grants to be made.

Geoff raised the possibility of TENPS becoming involved in adult education through plant courses at Casuarina secondary college. Various subjects were discussed. Members with skills in plant identification, propagation and planning were identified.

Raylene has suggested that the garden of a house purchased by NT Carers as a elderly day centre or accommodation for remote visitors be the subject of a TENPS make over.

~ What's in flower this month? ~



Leea rubra in flower. There were three or four specimens in this cluster of *Leea* that was growing near the Shoal Bay navy facilities. (By Mark Raines, January 2005)



Geodorum neocaledonicum, a ground orchid found in various Top End locations, including Charles Darwin NP. This specimen was spotted in flower by Denise Goodfellow who submitted the photo.



Above and right, a *Melaleuca viridiflora* in full bloom near Royal Darwin Hospital on Rocklands Drive in January 2005



NEXT MEETING THURSDAY 17TH FEBRUARY 2005

GUEST SPEAKER

~ Dr Lynda Prior ~

"Why evergreen in Australian tropical savannas?"

**SENDER: TOP END NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY
PO BOX 135 PALMERSTON
NT 0831**

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