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~JANUARY 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 20th January 2005 ~
"Attributes of NT threatened plants" by Dave Liddle

A question that many people have asked in various parts of the world is do threatened plants display biological characteristics that differ from plants of least conservation concern? The hope is that with an understanding of the characteristics of threatened plants, planners and land managers will be in a much better position to conserve these species. The talk will focus on a comparison of 70 threatened and 800 non-threatened plants in the NT.

~JANUARY FIELD TRIP: Saturday 22nd January, 2005 8:30 am ~
"A native garden in the suburbs"

In April 2006 Willy Burgess will open his garden as part of the "Open Garden Scheme". Willy has kindly offered for the Society to be involved, providing a fantastic opportunity to encourage the use of native plants in an urban setting and to promote the Society. This visit provides a preview to Willy's garden and the chance to brainstorm ideas as to what can be done to fill gaps and improve the presentation. There is plenty of scope for Society members to assist in achieving a spectacular garden display in 2006. Meet at 7a McArthur Court, Leanyer. Please park in McArthur Court and walk down the lane at the end.

~ Forthcoming Field Trips ~
Sunday, 6th February 2005 at 8 am

These trips have been scheduled to examine the *Nervilia peltata* plot at Charles Darwin National Park with Dave Liddle. Maybe we will be lucky enough to see this ground orchid in flower this time. Dave has also scheduled trips for 6th March and 3rd April at 8 am. Contact Dave for further details. *Please note the time change from previous advice.*

Late last wet season members set up study plots to investigate the life history of the "data deficient" ground orchid Nervilia peltata. Two primary questions were posed 1) how the species responds to different fire regimes and 2) what are the changes in the population over a wet season? This information will assist in future Herbarium surveys. Having done the work of establishing the plots, this wet season provides the opportunity to track the population. The species flowers before the leaves appear above ground. As of the end of November no flowers or leaves had yet appeared in the plots. Hopefully by the second week of December there will be some flowers to be seen, though of course there is no guarantee. If we do see flowers, this will be a first time members have had the pleasure. This study provides an opportunity to find out new information about the life history of a little known orchid. Come along expecting to do some simple measuring, though no prior experience is required. Have a look at the April 2004 Newsletter for a story on the survey work done earlier this year: http://tenpsnt/newletters/nervilia.pdf

~ Saturday 29th January, 2005 ~
"Weeding around the *Citrus gracilis* at Sayer Road"

Meet 9am on Sayer Road, near the junction with the Stuart Highway, bring gloves. In association with the Litchfield Shire Council the Society has been maintaining a population of Citrus gracilis beside Sayer Road, McMinn's Lagoon. The initial task of removing Gamba Grass has been already completed, however, there is need for regular maintenance to remove new clumps of grass that invade the site. A task where many hands make light work. So please come along to help and see how the *Citrus* has responded to our previous weeding. Have a look at the June 2004 Newsletter to see what TENPS have done to date at the site. Follow the link: http://tenpsnt/newletters/June2004.pdf

~ Our Rural Block ~

We moved to Humpty Doo 4 years ago after a long process of house and land searching. We eventually settled on a block which was 50% cleared, with Tall Open Woodland dominated by some towering *Eucalyptus tetrodonta* and *Eucalyptus miniata*. Unfortunately the previous owner's horticultural interests extended mainly to growing illicit crops among the spear grass and planting an avenue of Weeping Rosewoods along the driveway. After much discussion the Weeping Rosewoods remain, only because they provide a cool green tunnel during the hottest part of the year. I really wanted an avenue of smooth barked eucalypts but I couldn't bring myself to cutting down so many healthy trees.

Front section of block from house

We inherited some great trees and an even greater number of weeds. You name it we had it, Mission grass, Gamba grass, Green Panicum, Snakeweed, Hyptis, Rattlepod, Calopo, Centro and Wild Passionfruit to name a few. The house had been unoccupied for a while and the weeds extended right up to the back door. We moved in during February and a whole wet season's growths of weeds were only held back by the lawn around the house. It took several months of brush cutting just to get the weeds down to a height that could be dealt with. Imagine my surprise when several months later I found a bath tub less than 20 metres from the house hiding in a clump of grass. Looking back now it's hard to picture how bad the weeds really were.

1-year old Acacia dunni

My first decision was to break the block into sections and to concentrate on 2 weed species initially. I focused on Mission Grass and Gamba Grass because of their bulk, imminent flowering and fire potential. I started spot spraying clumps and then during the dry when they stopped actively growing, I mattocked them out. This constant assault seems to be the most effective and the overall population of these two weeds is now a lot more manageable. Regrettably new recruits drift in every year and I have a sneaky feeling that if I totally stopped these two weeds would soon take over. The other weeds have proved less troublesome with a systematic consistent approach working the best. The exception seems to be Wild Passionfruit that enjoys the absence of fire and continues to seed all over the block. Manual removal is the only effective approach and I try to concentrate on removing those plants that are flowering.

Enough about weeds, I guess the big questions I had to address were: How am I going to manage the remnant native vegetation? What sort of native vegetation do I want? How do I manage the spear grass and fire? A quick drive up and down the street revealed there was a fair variation in the native vegetation just in my immediate area. For example, there were no Grevilleas of any type on my block, yet both *Grevillea pteridifolia*

and *Grevillea dryandi* were just a stones throw away, similarly *Pandanus spiralis* and *Petalostigma pubescens* were absent. Firstly I decided to reinstate native vegetation buffers around the block, whilst keeping the area around the house for all those exotic plants I love including some fruit trees and a large veggie garden. On the fire issue I decided not to burn mainly because I thought that enough of the surrounding blocks were clear already but I was nervous enough about that wall of dry spear grass to brush cut down large areas each year just as it started to flower. My observations about spear grass are that after four years of no fire there is no obvious difference in the distribution and density of spear grass, so much for the loves fire theory! I've also noticed that lots of birds rely on the annual spear grass seed bounty including Northern Rosellas, Red tailed Black Cockatoos and Little Corellas, and locally too many early burns are reducing the availability of this food source.

Revegetating area at rear of block

My adventures with the brush cutter revealed lots of interesting plants emerging and I started carefully marking those I hadn't ruthlessly decapitated. It soon became obvious that natural regeneration wasn't thick enough or quick enough to fill in the gaps. I started supplementary planting and this raised a whole lot of new tasks like collecting seed, raising the seedlings and getting them into the ground early enough in the Wet so that they could become established before the rain stops. The last three wet seasons I've planted about 300 per year and when you look around you can hardly see where they went. Fickle December rain means I'm often carting water all over the block until the monsoon sets in. The Dry season is spent looking for seed, collecting seed, processing seed (the boring bit) and raising seedlings. I've found *Grevillea dryandi* a bit fiddly to propagate and prone to sudden drop-dead syndrome when potted up, so I started transplanting seedlings from the roadsides and provided I wait till the monsoon sets in I found these transplant and establish with 100% success. This method also works well with Turkey Bush (*Calytrix exstipulate*), provided you don't leave it too late in the wet season. I now also scatter Grevillea seed heads into new areas and leave it to nature.

I decided to establish a monsoon forest area near the house and I started planting out any species I could gather. This area is not irrigated and its amazing how well young plants cope though I'm convinced that growth and year round appearance would be improved by irrigation. The best pioneer species I've found are *Carallia brachiata*, *Micromelum minutum* and *Breynia cernua*. I'm continuing to add monsoon species into this area with the long term plan of the monsoon species taking over from the *Eucalyptus miniata* which currently form a canopy overhead.

There is a lot more I would like to achieve and lots more species I would like to grow but for the moment my challenge is how to manage and incorporate more small herbaceous native species into the landscape and how to better manage the weeds particularly as their management is so time consuming.
I haven't mentioned all the wonderful plants we have on the block and maybe that can be a subject of a future article.

Contributed by Steve Popple

~ What's Flowering in January~

Contributed by Mark Raines & Dave Liddle

RUBIACEAE ***Aidia racemosa*** (Cav.) Tirveng. (syn *Aidia cochinchinensis*. This is a 5 m tree at the moment but may gown up to 15 m. The flowers have a heady, sweetish fragrance. The fruit are smooth and globular and edible. In the wild it grows in monsoon vine thickets. This specimen is doing well in Wanguri!

PROTEACEAE ***Grevillia decurrans*** (Ewart & O.B.Davies). This small tree was growing next to the cycle path near Wallaby Holtze. It was covered in pale pink flowers.

THYMELAEACEAE ***Phaleria macrocarpa*** (Scheff.) Boerl., previously *Phaleria clerodendron* (F.Muell.) F.Muell. ex Benth. This specimen in Wanguri seems to have at least one spectacular burst of flowers arising from the stems on an annual basis supplemented by less intense flowering at other times. In the NT, it grows in eastern Arnhemland.

VERBENACEAE ***Callicarpa candicans*** (Burm.f.) Hochr., however, on the NT Checklist there is only *Callicarpa brevistyla.* Of note the stems carry all stages of fruiting from flower buds at the tips, to clusters of delicate pinkish flowers and various stages of fruiting

ARACAEA ***Typhonium*** **sp**

The flower has an unpleasant odour; being pollinated by flies and other insects attracted to decaying matter. I'm not sure if the odour or the fence keeps the children out of the pool.

NEXT MEETING THURSDAY NOVEMBER

GUEST SPEAKER:

SENDER: TOP END NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY
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