



Toodyay Naturalists' Club Inc.
THE TNC NEWSLETTER
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wheatbelt
natural resource
management

*Photo: Elachbutting Rock, Shire of Westonia
Photo Wayne Clarke*

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

FOUR Toodyay Nat's members attended 'The Tipping Point Conference', presented by the WA Natural Resource Management (NRM) and Regional Development Australia Networks held at Busselton 7 – 9 May. Following an interesting listing of speakers the final presentation was given by eighty four year old environmentalist, Harry Butler, with his opening words "*Conservation is possible with proper management*". Harry has given much of his life, as an environmentalist, to Barrow Island and emphasised that industry *can* work with conservation. He cited a story of his strict environmental policy on the Island. With the comings and goings of FIFO staff a pair of soil-caked slippers in a New Zealand newcomer's luggage was confiscated. Much grumbling occurred because "*in New Zealand we don't have these checks*". Harry stated he would wash the soil from the slippers and preserve it. Three weeks later he found five introduced weeds growing that had been imported on the soles of the slippers!!!!

An excursion in May to the Wongamine Nature Reserve was led by fungi guru, Kevn Griffiths. It was a great day with visitors from Dowerin and Perth joining the Nat's members with interesting education and finds by Kevn and attendees.

The June long weekend excursion had 14 members and supporters visit the area of magnificent rock formations within the Shire of Westonia such as Beringbooding, Elachbutting and Yanneymooning Hill. What incredibly interesting areas with an enormous water collection wall begun in 1937 to give work in the great depression, rock pools, trees, shrubbery and grasses growing in rock valleys, tadpoles, dragons, beetles and lots of wallaby scats – the rock formations were absolutely full of life!

The 40th Anniversary of the Darling Range Branch of the WA Naturalists Club was held in Midland on Saturday 14 June with Toodyay Naturalists' Club representation. The gathering included the two foundation members who described the beginnings of the Branch.

The Nat's were involved with the Bendigo Bank Litter Pick-up on June 15 along the Toodyay/Northam Road resulting in a massive joint result of 155 bags plus tyres and other trash. It was a truly 'community effort' with a big thank you to Toodyay Bendigo Bank.

The June 21 meeting welcomed two founding members of the Helena Aurora Range Advocates (HARA) group, Shapelle McNee and Brian Moyle, to give a presentation on the precious state asset which is found in the Great Western Woodlands. A threat of ore mining is constantly mooted and HARA, with support from the Wilderness Society, WA Labour Party, the West Australian Wildflower Society, Great Walk Network and the Toodyay Naturalists' Club, is working to raise awareness of the valuable asset that Australia has. On the 15 October 2013 a proposal was put to the Government to register the Helena Aurora Range as a Class 'A' National Park.

TNC member, Greg Warburton, is organising his walk from Buckland to the Range, a distance of nearly 400kms, to raise awareness of the beautiful area and its ongoing threat.

An ANCAC meeting was held in Drummond Reserve on June 29. There had been a past significant rain event which deposited many tonnes of litter, sheep manure, weed and weed seed, in two areas of the Reserve, from a broad acre farm across the road. There was much discussion on a series of remedies of the current problem and also ideas on decreasing problems from future occurrences.

The Shire of Toodyay invited the community to a facilitated workshop to develop a Toodyay Environmental Strategy on July 1. It was a very well-attended meeting with much community interaction which should result in an excellent strategy for the Shire.

'Judgement Day' of Toodyay Tidy Towns was held on Tuesday July 2 with an excellent contribution from the environmental groups of Toodyay demonstrating the great importance in the environmental well-being of this Shire.

A second facilitated meeting was held Saturday 12th July to push forward on the proposed publication project for the 2018 Anniversary of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club. A Steering Committee was proposed to be ratified at the forthcoming General Meeting Saturday 19th July.

Nat's members were guests of Eva and Don Smith for the Annual General Meeting (AGM), followed by the General Meeting, Saturday 19th July. Mike Griffiths set sensor cameras in place the previous Saturday on both Don and Eva's and Brian and Robyn Foley's properties, collected them on the day of the AGM, and gave a wonderful educational session on the cameras.

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HELENA AURORA RANGE ADVOCATES

SHAPELLE McNEE, Guest Speaker, at the June 2014 General Meeting of the Nat's Club, gave the following introduction.

"I first visited the Helena and Aurora Range in 2003, and felt a very strong conviction that this range should never be mined. In 2010, I decided to put together a website for Helena and Aurora Range. My Boss said that I needed to form an association, as the website needed to belong to an association not an individual.

"Thus, a group of us formed the Helena and Aurora Range Advocates (HARA) in May 2010. It was never my intention to be Chairperson of this group; however, this is how it turned out. The formation of this group and the people that have contributed has been invaluable for both increasing people's awareness and towards protecting the Helena and Aurora Range.

"I have worked in the Great Western Woodlands (GWW) as a botanist for about eight years. I am now working for Birdlife Australia, assisting Liz Fox as Project Officer for the Birds of the Great Western Woodlands Project. My work has mostly been either with rare plants or rare birds. My first awareness of the 'Great Western Woodlands' was through the media and I truly wondered what it was all about. It felt, at the time, like a concept that had descended on WA out of the blue. I have since learnt a lot more about it and its international and national significance which is quite profound".

Notes compiled from Shapelle's presentation.



*Photo above: Viewing the Great Western Woodlands
Photo at right: Part of the Helena Aurora Range
Photos by Greg Warburton*



The Helena Aurora Range is found in the Great Western Woodlands east of Mukinbudin and north of Southern Cross and Koolyanobbing. Its length is 13kms of convoluted banded ironstone formation (BIF) and the largest range in the central Yilgarn with the highest species conservation and landform values. It is Kalamai Kapurn people's country, a people who hold the emu as an important totem; their range is called Bungalbin.

The highest hill is 704 metre of this estimated 2.6 million years of age land with various picturesque peaks caused by softer materials eroding leaving a porous, weathered landscape resulting in caves that are the resting places of Euros. Many birds are found in the area including the Little Woodswallow, who utilises the rocky outcrops for nesting, as do the Peregrine Falcon and Wedge-tail Eagle.

The Range is home to many endemic species of plants including *Dryandra arborea*, *Tetratheca aphylla* subspecies *aphylla*, *Leucopogen spectabilis*, (which often grows with the *Tetratheca*), *Lepidoperm ferricola* (iron loving), *Mirbilio ferricola*, *Malaleuca leicarpa*, *Acacia adinophilla*, *Acacia begiulin*. The beautiful White Gums (*Eucalyptus capillosa* subsp *capillosa*) are very tall for the area growing up to 15 metres in height which is possibly because of the moisture-holding landscape.

HELENA AURORA RANGE ADVOCATES cont...

380 plant species, in total, are known with:

- 5 endemic flora species
- 2 declared
- 14 priority
- 10 BIF dependent
- 1 priority one ecological community



Fauna known in the area are the Pygmy Possum, Little Long-tailed Dunnart, Mitchell's Hopping Mouse, Varanus Gouldii, Varanus parenti, Crested Dragon and the threatened fauna are Malleefowl and a trapdoor spider.

The first proposal for protection of Bungalbin was in 1979-1980 following a biological study by the Western Australian Museum and the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). In 1994 CALM recommended the Range to be protected.

In December 2005 it was vested as a Conservation Park with a major review in 2007.

On the 15th October 2013 a proposal was put forward for the Helena Aurora Range to be vested as a Class 'A' National Park.

To support the proposal members are invited to:

- track the proposal;
- raise awareness of the precious asset that we have;
- gain support for the National Park proposal; and
- give support for the inaugural 'Spring into Bungalbin' Festival

The 'Spring into Bungalbin' Festival will be held on the long weekend in September, Friday 26th through to Monday 29th, 2014. The aim of the event is to encourage appreciation of the Great Western Woodlands. Its aim is to bring together local communities, artists and writers, Traditional Owners, naturalists and conservationists.

If you think you would like to take part, further details can be obtained from the Wilderness Society, at wa@wilderness.org.au or telephone 08 9420 7255 or at sarah.vannsander@wilderness.org.au

PRESIDENT'S REPORT... cont from Page 2

As I have completed a three year term as President I am grateful for the incredible support of all Club members and give special thanks to my husband, Wayne, for his untiring help over that time.

Elections were held with a great welcome to Dr Michalie Foley as the 2014 President of the Club. Congratulations, Michalie, and welcome!

Australian Wildlife Rehabilitator's Conference Tasmania 26 to 30 May 2014 by Brian Foley

THE NINTH Australian Wildlife Rehabilitator's Conference was a landmark conference as there has now been a conference held in every state and territory. The 2014 conference had in excess of 280 delegates from Australia and overseas!

The Hon Peter Underwood opened the Conference with a reception at the Governor's residence which is a magnificent early stone building with wonderful furnishings and a beautiful building to visit.

A total of thirty five papers were delivered covering most aspects of wildlife care. Some of the more interesting ones were:

Conservation prospects;

- ecosystems impacts and spread of Devil Facial Tumour Disease;
- turtle shell repair by 'filling in the cracks';
- trial treatment of Sarcopotic mange in wild wombats in Victoria;
- the role of carers in the National Wildlife Health Network;
- post Traumatic Stress Disorder in kangaroos;
- the Tasman Isolation Project (Devils);
- nutritional considerations for hand rearing possums;
- echidna Survival Strategies for Successful Rescue and Hand rearing;
- cat eradication programme on Tasman Island; and
- post Traumatic Stress (PTS) disorder in kangaroos.



*Left: Tasmanian echidna (hairy for warmth).
Right: Common Wombat*



The Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) disorder is also called *Captive Myopathy*. We know that these macropods are very prone to stress, so if an animal comes into care anything can cause this. It could be a minor case of diarrhoea or in the extreme case total shut down of major organs.

The tiny babies seem to handle the loss of the mother if handled properly but if an older joey comes in we give medicines to help the PTS, when moving animals through the various stages of hand raising they are given various medicines to help this PTS. The talk given, gave examples and studies of PTS in various-sized marsupials and how they were treated; they seemed to have good success in the way they treated their animals.

There were a number of papers on the plight of the Tassie Devil. In most areas the loss is 95% of population over 85% of its range. The ones left in the affected areas are the young ones, the cancer is only transferred by contact from one devil to another and this happens during mating. At other times there is very little contact; the animals will growl and posture at each other but the smaller devil will always run away. It is interesting that, as the adult devils are dying out, the breeding age is dropping. The baby devils do not have the disease.

The disease started from one female in the north east in 1996. The disease has not reached the south west and a few pockets in the middle of Tasmania due to the terrain which does not allow the devils easy travel as the area is either mountainous or fast flowing rivers. It appears that they only come into contact during the mating periods; they do not fight over food or territory, so this has slowed the disease.

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Australian Wildlife Rehabilitator's Conference ...cont

Copies of the program, presenters and presentations can be downloaded from the AWRC website <http://www.awrchobart2014.org/>

The next conference is in Victoria in two years so if people are interested - start saving now!



Above: How could you call this cuddly looking creature a devil? The largest carnivorous marsupial in the world, relative to size, it has the strongest bite force of any living mammal, which is right up there with the giant salt water croc, and above the great white shark.

Where do you keep your fingers in a cuddle?



Cradle Mountain road, overlooking Lake Cethana

Photographs: Brian Foley

BUCKLAND to BUNGALBIN 1861-2014

by Greg Warburton

DURING JULY, Toodyay Naturalists' Club member and WA Individual Landcarer award winner Greg Warburton walked 400kms from historic Buckland House in Irishtown (near Northam) to the Helena and Aurora Range located about 100km north east of the town of Southern Cross. Pulling a trolley loaded with supplies, water and equipment and camping all the way, the trek took 12 days. Being mid-winter there were the expected icy mornings and rain. Greg got a real sense of history by visiting many of the expedition camp-sites and features along the way.

While overnighing at Baladje Rock, Greg met a caravanning couple who were prompted to visit the beautiful area of Elachbutting Rock, in the Westonia Shire, after reading the Nat's article in the local community paper, the Toodyay Herald.

Representing Helena Aurora Advocates and the Toodyay Naturalists' Club the aim of Greg's walk was to not only to commemorate the first expedition to reach the Helena and Aurora Range, but also to draw attention to the threat of mining to this beautiful and unique area.

The Helena and Aurora Range is in the Kalamai Kapurn Nation's country, and they call it "Bungalbin".

The European members of the 1861 expedition were all young first generation Australians from the Toodyay district. Charles Dempster was the unofficial leader with the other expedition members being Charles' brother Andrew, Barnard Clarkson, Charles Harper Jnr and Correll, a Noongar man. It is an intriguing coincidence that their departure date, 3rd July 1861 to explore the unknown country to the east was the same time Burke and Wills lay dying at Coopers Creek.

Making their way eastwards along a route now close to the Great Eastern Highway the explorers passed through pristine country they described as 'heavily vegetated'. They travelled from one rocky outcrop to another seeking springs and water holes. Their journals recorded encounters with wildlife that has since become extinct, like the Pig-footed Bandicoot and the Stick-nest Rat.

Their route took them past a chain of salt lakes to reach the Helena and Aurora Range which they named Mt. Kennedy. Charles Harper, an amateur naturalist, noted not only the beauty of the range but the great variety of plants to be found there. He took specimens that he would deliver to Toodyay settler James Drummond, WA's great pioneering botanist. We now know that there are species of plants on the range that are found nowhere else in the world. Harper also collected geological specimens in the hills describing an ore that is 'unknown to us'. Those specimens would later be identified as iron ore.

After the explorers' safe return they went on to conduct further expeditions and establish pastoral properties throughout the state. The Dempster brothers are well known for pioneering the Esperance district. Barnard Clarkson would establish his Mt Anderson farm in Toodyay and out stations as far east as the Yilgarn. Charles Harper was the son of the Rev. Charles Harper the first Anglican minister for the Toodyay district. He would go on to create stations in the Murchison, embark upon pearling ventures in the North, establish three newspapers including the *Western Mail*, build Woodbridge House (now a National Trust property) and start Guildford Grammar School.



Above: Greg leaving Meckering on a cold, misty morning



Above: The Great Western Woodlands and Bungalbin

Excursion with Kevn Griffiths Wongamine 'A' Class Nature Reserve by Georgina Steytler

WONGAMINE is an 'A' Class Nature Reserve about 15 kilometres east of Toodyay along the Goomalling Road. It is predominantly wandoo bushland with smatterings of casuarinas and gravelly clay soil. In other words, it's packed with potential. Unfortunately, there had not been a lot of rain in the weeks leading up to our excursion, so many fungi may have been disinclined to make themselves visible.

On the upside, it was nice weather to be out and about in such a beautiful and peaceful environment. Our group, which numbered twenty-five in all, assembled at 10am for a 10.30 start. We were delighted to have members of the Darling Range Naturalists club join our excursion, including our special guest and star attraction, Kevn Griffiths, and his wife Peg. Kevn is a tall, quietly spoken and incredibly humble man with a passion for fungi (and a talent for drawing them!). He is the author of '*A Field Guide to the Larger Fungi of the Darling Scarp & South West of Western Australia*', which has 110 species illustrated and described on a family basis, as well as keys and guides for both the amateur and the practising mycologist.

Our youngest participant was Samuel, a 12 year old from Perth on a weekend visit with his grandparents, who started off with a somewhat sceptical 'I can't believe you got me out of bed to look at fungus' look about him.

After a few predictably bad jokes from some male members of the group about what 'fun guys' they really were, Kevn took some time to tell us how to find fungi (up trees, under logs, on the ground and under leaf litter), the basic types of fungi, such as puff balls, amanitas, fans and brackets and how to take a spore print!

Armed with our 'mycologist', a small garden hoe, cameras and beady eyes, we set off to hunt down some fungi.

One of our group soon found a brown, slightly banded 'Horse Hoof' fungus growing on the trunk of a tree and Vicky Warburton an Earth Star fungus under an old brick. Fungi found on the ground and amongst leaf litter included *Buellia* (Lichen) which showed as a 'white splash', Cream skinned fungus, *Tulostoma* (Stalk Puff Ball), convoluted cap (bursting through clay) and *Amanita* fungus (like a mushroom with pale gills). Whilst we were all busy stuffing our mouths with lunch a couple of hours later, Sarah also found a beautiful orange Bracket fungi (*Picnoporus coccinea*).

Other highlights of the day included finding two different species of orchids, the bunny orchid (*Caladenia drummondii*) and the winter spider orchid (*Leptoceras menziesii*), a residential development of Shield-backed Trapdoor Spider (*Idiosoma nigrum*) burrows and a barking gecko (found under a piece of tin).

At the lunch break we also had a short club meeting.

After lunch members wandered around the reserve, seeking those elusive fungi.

It was a great 'fun' day. Even Samuel had a great time photographing everything he could find and was especially delighted at getting a shot of the barking gecko. Who knows, maybe in 40 years time he will be leading his own excursion through Wongamine Reserve... we can only hope.



Above left: Georgina employing her camera skills



Above right: Kevn interacting with a spell-bound audience, imparting some of his wealth of fungi knowledge

TOODYAY TIDY TOWNS UPDATE

by Beth Frayne

THE TTT Committee met in May and June to plan our Submission (28 projects were sent 30 May) and how we were going to impress the Tidy Towns Judges, who came to Toodyay on 2 July.

Our Supporter Group has increased to a Fabulous Forty-Five, with the Toodyay Baptist Youth Group joining our group.

The 15 June Community Clean-Up of 7.2kms of the Northam-Toodyay Road was a great success, with 25 volunteers collecting 155 bags of rubbish and other stuff. The event was organized and sponsored by our Community Bank, with Nats' members helping with the organization and on the day.

The TTTC Sustainability Audit response provided 88 sets of data for our Submission. .

Many thanks to the 24 Supporters who turned out to welcome the two Tidy Towns Judges, Joanne Gray and Gail Dodd, to the Display in the Memorial Hall Foyer on 2 July. All had chipped in to help put up the displays, which included a super spread of Toodyay District High School activity panels and some creative and crazy art works made from recycled paper.

Chairman Greg Warburton presented his usual colourful and inspiring PowerPoint summary of TTT Supporter activities, which included the Nats' Bird Hide. Interesting noises from a corner laptop display attracted Judge Jo to view the Clarkes' sensor camera footage of birds and animals on their property.

Greg, Wayne, Beth and Kim whisked the Judges around the town in the sunshine to show off our beauty spots. The very next day Chairman Greg set off on his 'advocacy against mining' 400 km walk from Buckland to Bungalbin (Helena and Aurora Range, north of Southern Cross), in the steps of local Toodyay explorers in 1861. Well done, Greg, for reaching your goal!

We are looking forward to the Regional Awards Ceremony, held at Kellerberrin on 12 September.

You can still vote online for TTT Chairman Greg in the National Landcare People's Choice Award (closes 17 Sept.). Go, Greg!

BUCKLAND to BUNGALBIN ... cont

All of these men became members of Parliament at various times during their careers.

Today, a century and a half later, the landscape through which the expedition travelled would be unrecognizable to the explorers. Ninety-five percent of the native vegetation has been cleared from what we now call the Wheatbelt. Rising salt has affected much of the land and wildlife has suffered with many species now extinct. Rainfall averages have declined and feral animals and weeds have come to dominate the ecosystem.

Helena and Aurora Range is now under immediate threat of mining. Already other Banded Ironstone Hills in the Yilgarn with their unique landscape, heritage and indigenous values have been lost to mining. The once spectacular Windarling Peak only 50 km from Helena and Aurora is just one example.

Iron ore mining in the Yilgarn accounts for only 2% of WA's iron ore production and costs are much higher than they are in the Pilbara. Are we prepared to lose so much for such little gain? Would we allow the iconic Karijini National Park to be mined? Not one of these amazing Banded Ironstone Ranges is protected from mining. What will our children think of the destruction? Developed as a tourism destination Helena and Aurora would bring on going economic benefits while preserving this priceless natural asset for generations of Australians to enjoy.

In 2007 the Environmental Protection Authority reported: **'This Range should be protected as an 'A Class' Nature Reserve for protection of the high concentrations of endemic rare flora and priority ecological communities; exceptional landforms; threatened fauna habitats; mature eucalypt woodlands and Aboriginal heritage. This range is one of the more significant bio-diversity assets in WA.'**

Groups such as the Wilderness Society and Helena and Aurora Range Advocates Inc. (HARA) are campaigning to have the Range protected within a National Park. One of the best approaches is to raise public awareness of this crucial conservation issue for our state.

Help protect the Helena and Aurora Range by visiting:

www.wilderness.org.au/bungalbin and www.helenaaurorarangecomm.au

PHOTOGRAPHER'S PAGES



Photographs clockwise from top left:
A Male Splendid Fairy Wren in full breeding plumage, by Dawn Fitzgerald; Female Splendid Fairy Wren and a Non-breeding Male Splendid Fairy Wren by Desraé Clarke; a sloughing Juvenile Gwardar in the Wongamine by Georgina Steytler; and an Owlet Nightjar by Ginny Barnett

DID YOU KNOW...

THAT Strophurus wellingtonae is a gecko that inhabits the arid areas of Western Australia?

Discovered in 1998, the Western Shield Spiny-tailed gecko was first named by Dr GM Storr, as *Diplodactylus wellingtonae*; it was updated in 2002 to *Strophurus wellingtonae*. This gecko was named after Mrs Betty Wellington, a resident of Wundowie, who did much work with analysing the body contents of reptiles.

On Wednesday 9 June 2014, I had the very great pleasure of meeting this 93 year old lady who had worked in the WA Museum with Dr Storr, Ron Johnstone, Brad Maryan and others.

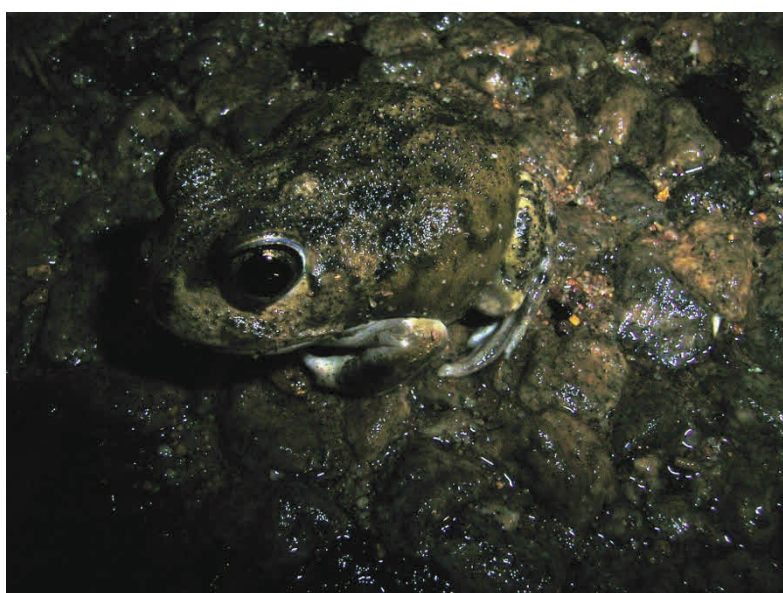
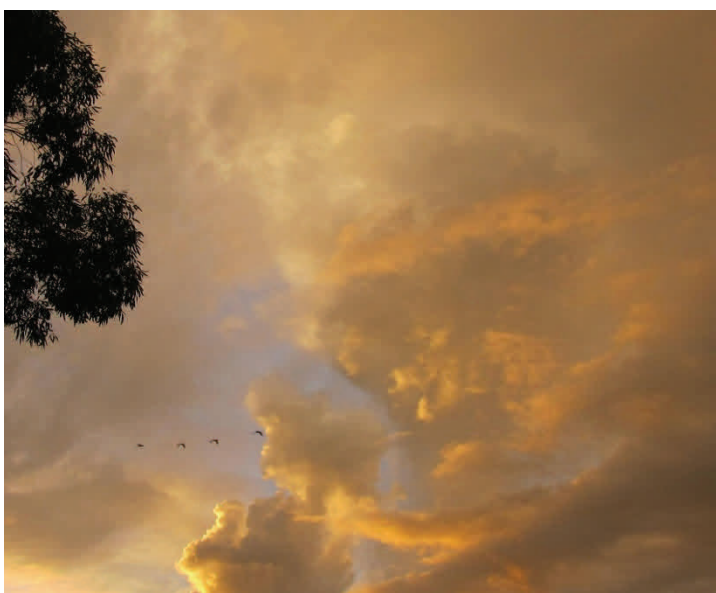
What a delight to meet this beautiful little lady and how she enjoyed discussing the pros and cons of reptiles with another 'reptile' person!

Desraé Clarke

PHOTOGRAPHER'S PAGES



Photographs, clockwise from above: Bracket fungi (by Georgina Steytler); Western bearded dragon (by Sharon Richards); Kunapalari frog (*Neobatrachus kunapalari*) (by Lyn Phillips); Toodyay sunset with four swans in flight (by Wayne Clarke)



ENVIRONMENT MATTERS



Left: Photo of a 'Wheel Cactus' found in Dowerin by Lyn Phillips. Lyn has been on a number of Toodyay Naturalists' Club outings. She is a farmer's wife, and a keen environmentalist.

If Lyn had not noticed this unusual cactus, it could have become established, adding many thousands of dollars in weed control measures.

Photograph is by Lyn, taken at Ejanding.

Article below by Jacquie Lucas

THE WHEEL CACTUS, *Opuntia robusta*, related to the prickly pear is considered to be a Weed Of National Significance [WONS] and has recently been discovered in Dowerin. *Opuntia* originate in North America, the West Indies and South America.

The problem with cacti such as wheel cactus is that they compete with native plants, impacting on the growth of small shrubs and groundcover species. The spines can cause injury to stock and native animals. Opuntoid cacti feature glochids - fine, hair-like detachable barbs which are difficult to remove and cause skin irritation.

Studies have shown that opuntoid cacti can survive adverse conditions for several years and still germinate. Plant segments were kept in sealed containers indoors for three years, without soil or water. These still grew when soil and water were returned to them. It has been found that they can grow in a range of soil types, in areas with above 150mm of rain annually.

Plants have jointed stem segments, also known as pads or cladodes. These segments contain the green tissue of the plant where photosynthesis occurs. Opuntoids often have large, colourful flowers that are white, yellow, orange, pink, red or purple. Most produce fleshy fruit which ripen to red, purple or yellow.

Some species produce viable seeds that are bird and animal dispersed. Cactus spines provide protection from predators and heat.

The wheel cacti can be spread through seeds or vegetative reproduction. The most common form of spread is vegetative. New segments grow from the fine hairs. Due to these fine hairs, segments will readily detach from the plant and attach to people's clothing and animals fur, enabling dispersal. The cacti is also spread by water movement, so it is often found along waterways and flood plains.

While there are several options for managing opuntoid cacti, the most appropriate method will depend on the size and age of the infestation, site access, and resources. For large infestations, integrated weed management approaches will be necessary, using a combination of biological control (if available), herbicides and or/manual removal. Hot fires can kill plants, although regrowth may occur. Burning can also assist in providing access to sites so that other control activities can take place.

Any sightings of suspected wheel cactus should be reported to the Agricultural department's Pest and Disease Information Service on freecall 1800 084 881.

Information: DAFWA Press Release 23/4/14 and <http://www.weeds.org.au/WoNS/opuntoidcacti/> .

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