

Newsletter 116 March 2004

Description

Dear Friends,

It seems that the hot spell in February caused the second year plants of the target weed, Caper Spurge, to wilt badly and many of its seed heads failed to develop. This was a pleasant surprise so we were able to channel our energies into pulling all the new plants, some 500+ in the regular spots. Hundreds of small Genista plants were pulled from the two sites on the Howlong Road and all were struggling in the dry period but no doubt a good fall of rain would have ensured their survival. We gathered quite a lot of rubbish from the roadside although we did not register for the clean -up day this year. I think most members see this as an ongoing task on roads through the park.

Birds were scarce at Bartley's Block, several Turquoise Parrots were seen and small flocks of Little Lorikeets were feeding noisily in the Box Mistletoe, Amyema miquelli, which is flowering profusely. While the weeding was in progress Betty and her friend searched the dams for aquatic life but reported there was little of interest.

Chiltern Valley No 1 Dam provided a pleasant shady lunch venue with lots of interest on the water. Pelicans, Large Black and Little Black Cormorants, a Yellow-billed Spoonbill and 2 Great Egrets and a raft of Australasian Grebe which ducked for cover as the Whistling Kite flew overhead. Tiny Australian Dotterels picked their way along the shoreline, noisy little groups of Red-rumped Parrots came to drink and Crested Shrike-tits foraged noisily on the loose bark of the Red Gums above our lunch table. The roadside plantings on the Pit Road approach to Valley 1 Dam are now in their fourth year and along with the private land plantings have really improved this area.

Our next stop was Chiltern Valley No 2 Dam where we listed Yellow-billed and Royal Spoonbills, White-faced Herons and 20 Masked Lapwings standing in the shallow water. Also in the mud close to the water's edge was a huge Red-bellied Black Snake and after admiring it and watching it slither off into the Tall Sedge we decided to deviate from our chosen route. The vegetation at this dam has regenerated very well since the removal of the sheep. However the Sweet Briar is in need of control once again as it has taken hold on the slopes of the mullock heaps. On the positive side we noted the healthy growth of the eucalypts we planted on the southern edge of the dam about six years ago.

White-breasted Woodswallows were perched on the dead trees in the water. These lovely Woodswallows come in small numbers to both dams each season. Phillip spotted a Masked Woodswallow at Valley No 1 as well as Tree Martins and a Fairy Martin.

Little Friar-birds, Restless Flycatcher, Willie Wagtail and Black-faced Cuckoo Shrikes were among other birds seen.

The larval cases of either Dragonflies or Damselflies were found on the lower trunks of the red gums. Pretty blue Damselflies were seen over the water in the shallow inlets. Damselflies are much smaller and finer in structure than Dragonflies and generally when at rest hold their wings pressed together over their backs, while Dragonflies hold their wings flat on either side of their body. An excellent guide for anyone interested in freshwater invertebrates is "The Waterbug Book" by Gooderham and Tsyrlin. Yellow flowers of the waterplant Water Primrose (also called Clove Strip), Ludwigia peploides ssp montevidensis, were seen where the waterline had receded. It is a summer flowering prostrate native

perennial with dark green leaves and floating or creeping stems. The seeds of this plant are a food source for water birds.

Our day was rounded off with a visit to Barambogie Dam. This less frequented spot yielded some interesting sightings. Four well camouflaged Latham's Snipe offered us great views and a Hoary-headed Grebe entertained us by carrying its two tiny striped young on its back. Occasionally they fell off and clambered back onto the adult's rear end and made their way to the safety of its back. The bird survey lists for the three dams have been sent to the Victorian Atlas Database. It was a great way to end a most productive and interesting day.

Around the Park: The water levels in the dams are holding up very well, especially Chiltern Valley Nos 1 and 2 and the Barambogie Dam. The interpretation board at Honeyeater Picnic area has been removed for updating.

Rainfall: Very little! 1.2mm falling on 2 days! Making the yearly total 23.8mm over 7 days. The autumn break will be welcome.

Owl Gets The Gift of Sight: A Great Horned Owl found starving in the wild because it had gone blind could be released this spring after having new eye lenses implanted. The owl, named Minerva by medical personnel, underwent two hours of eye surgery on January 22nd, and Dr Chris Murphy said she was in good condition during the follow-up exam. Minerva was found emaciated in early December, after someone told wildlife rehabilitators that an owl had been sitting on a fence for three days. The owl was found to have cataracts! Good things do happen for the animals and this one is marvelous.

NEXT MEETING SUNDAY APRIL 4TH

Meet at Chiltern Post Office at 9.00am. Tagging White Cypress Pines, Sweet Bursaria and other fire prone species in readiness for an eco-burn. Venue: Donchi Hill. Lunch at Lappin's Dam.

BYO morning tea, lunch etc. Afternoon walk. Organiser: Eileen Collins 03 57 261 484

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