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Friends of Morwell National Park Inc.

Newsletter February 2003

Website: <http://morwellnp.pangaean.net>

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Welcome to the latest edition of our newsletter. There is very little to report this month, as no correspondence has been handed my way and nobody has been telling me any good yarns lately. Ken has been busily doing his usual rounds of various tracks in the Park and has collected some Varnish Wattle and scarce Silver Wattle seeds for us, as they would probably have already dropped by our scheduled seed collection activity on January 19. He has also found some more unusual weeds on the Jumbuk Road boundary, which will need removal. Bluebell Creeper (*Sollya heterophylla*) is a member of the Pittosporum family, native to Western Australia and is considered a serious environmental weed threat in the eastern states due to its capacity to set large amounts of sticky seed in succulent pods that birds love to disperse, and its habit of twining through existing vegetation to form dense thickets, which are difficult to remove. It is also a very popular garden plant. Ken also found a few plants of Variegated Aloe, a succulent that is also popular in gardens, but should be easier to control.

February Activity

We are pencilled in for our annual Weir Walk Weed Removal at 10am on Sunday, February 16. We will meet at the Braniff's Road gate for transport to the weir. For those who aren't too keen on stumbling their way down the creek, dodging bities and pricklies, I'm sure Rob will have other, less vigorous activities available, such as potting up seedlings in the nursery. For those who don't mind the rough stuff, solid footwear and robust clothing to ward off the unwanted is the order of the day. You will need to bring your own lunches and refreshments.

Seed Collecting in the Sun

On Sunday, January 19, we were just about on time, as we listened to the 10am news on the radio as we followed Rob and Ken along Braniff's Road to the car park. Rob reported that he had left Dorothy and Wendy pricking out seedlings at the propagation shed. He also reported that he had left his keys at the same place. Our aim was to collect Blackwood seed first and then head up to Reidy's Road to our favourite Blue Gum seed tree. While Rob rounded up his keys, Ken, Cathy, Zack and I wandered a short way down to the eastern bank of Billy Creek where we had noticed a couple of Blackwood heavily laden with seed on our travels last month. Sure enough, the trees were absolutely loaded with pods, which had just split open prior to dropping their contents, all within easy reach of the ground. It is pleasing to observe trees that our group planted years ago providing the resource for the next generation. We filled our bags in no time at all and strolled back up the track to wait for Rob. Waiting, waiting, waiting, while butterflies danced around us in the sunlight.

Rob eventually returned from the other direction, having expected us to exhaust seed supply at our first location and continue on to the next spot in the gully coming down from Tebb's Terrace. We all piled on board and headed for the hills, taking in the views as we climbed up to Jeeralang West Road, marred by smoke from the fires to the north (although not as bad as it was to become later in the month!) and the magnificent crops of ragwort growing in some of the paddocks. A beautiful, little tiger snake greeted us at the entrance to Reidy's Road, sunning himself in the middle of the road. We admired its lovely light creamy, brown colouring with vivid darker brown bands as it meandered off into the grass at the roadside, becoming invisible only inches into the brown stems.

We continued onwards through the gates as a goshawk cruised past overhead, to be greeted by a paddock full of thistles, which, Rob informed us, would be added to the Park shortly. Thankfully, they had all been sprayed via helicopter, as had a lot of the ragwort mentioned earlier, through a cooperative effort with local landowners and the Jeeralang Landcare Group. Down the hillside we went to the stand of Blue Gums below Blue Gum Hill and our favourite seed tree, with its main branch at a convenient level to reach from the ground. Again it was loaded with fresh capsules and we soon collected enough for our requirements, with extras coming from nearby trees. Lunch was due, so we completed the climb onto Blue Gum Hill and dined while checking out the view from the seat at the top. Our resident eagle floated in the air currents above the ridge opposite.

With the worms satisfied, we decided to have a look at the trial plots while we were in the area. A quick saunter down the hill had us gazing expectantly into the clayball plot for any sign of growth, but apart from two deceased Blue Gum seedlings, nothing could be found. Taking the lack of recent rainfall into consideration, the trial has so far produced no beneficial result and unless a reasonable germination takes place next time it rains, clayballing seems to be an unpredictable waste of time and seed. Ken decided to walk down Blue Gum Hill to check out the availability of Prickly Currant-bush seed, while the rest of us drove back the way we came. Rob ended up on the receiving end of Cathy's back-seat driving as he managed to drive into the gutter on the goat-track up to Reidy's Road, as he was paying more attention to the view ('of dead grass and blackberries' according to Cathy) than the track. Better him than me! We managed the rest of the trip without further incident and collected Ken at the bottom of the hill with no currant-bush seed, but a little bit of Varnish Wattle seed that hadn't dropped yet and a newly hatched butterfly. I can't remember which one Ken said it was, but it was one of the Brown's or Zenica's.

Meanwhile, back at the propagation shed, Wendy and Dorothy had been hard at it all day and were just finishing up their 16th tray: 8 of Blue Gum and 4 each of Silver Wattle and Blackwood. That is a total of 768 plants, a great effort. Rob managed to get another earful from Wendy on the trials and tribulations of the day and a few suggestions for improving workplace amenity. We all helped in finishing off the final few chores, cleaned up and went our separate ways.

Postscript

One of the trays of seed wasn't quite ready on 19/1/03, yet may have been overdone on 16/2/03, so a few of us decided to spend a morning on 2/2/03 sorting it out. Ken, Wendy, Ray, Reg, Cathy and I turned up at the appointed time and spent an hour potting up 2 trays of Swamp Gum, 2 trays of Varnish Wattle, 1 tray of Prickly Moses and replacements for the Blue Gum and Blackwood that hadn't survived the intervening fortnight.

Since it was still only 11am when we had finished, Ray and Reg decided to join Cathy and I on a Sunday drive around some of our old haunts in our younger days. Cathy wanted to take a trip up the Middle Creek Road, behind Yinnar South, to Calder Junction on the Jeeralang West Road, and then down Traralgon Creek Road to home. Off we went, dodging potholes, rabbits and wallabies as Middle Creek Road deteriorated once we had passed the settled areas. I can remember spending a lot of time as a lad fishing for trout and ferreting for bunnies in these parts, but it is now just a weed infested gully, full of blackberry, tutsan, thistles and fireweed. Access to the creek was restricted to the few forestry or old farm tracks that still crossed over, unless you were willing to brave the weeds. In some places the creek was completely covered by blackberries. Still, it was interesting to listen to Ray and Reg as they described where all the old residences used to be when they were kids, and the things they got up to. Above the College Creek Bridge, the Middle Creek Road improved considerably, apparently being maintained for plantation and logging access from Jeeralang west Road.

We stopped for lunch at Calder Junction, where we were serenaded by at least three lyrebirds, all competing for supremacy. There is nothing like the symphony of a lyrebird at full volume, echoing his full repertoire around a Mountain Ash forest, with the smoke of distant fires wafting in a red haze through the treetops. The trip down Traralgon Creek Road was in stark contrast to Middle Creek. The road was in much better condition and the weeds were less prevalent, although the fact they were no longer scraping the side of the car may have bolstered this impression. The sight of some lovely, rocky creekscapes had me wishing I'd brought along a fishing rod, but no doubt I was not the first to be so afflicted, and the trout would be wary and hard to entice. A thoroughly enjoyable way to spend a Sunday.