

Newsletter 093 February 2002

Description

Dear Friends

Welcome to the year 2002 and I trust it will be a rewarding year for everyone. Please find enclosed your programme for this year.

As we sweltered through the 36+ degrees first days of February I thought perhaps the Olives on Mt Pleasant block would survive a little longer. Not to be. The welcome change came and we worked in a pleasantly warm 31 degrees. Ten of us turned out to survey the results of the last cull and seek out any new plants. Nineteen new plants were removed or cut and pasted plus several Peppercorn Trees and a Cootamundra Wattle. There was no evidence of life on any of the previously treated olives so it appears that our strategy is sound. The western section of the block will be targeted next. Interestingly olives seem to be absent from the Ironbark areas, favouring the Grey Box areas, perhaps due to the deeper soils.

Everyone remarked upon the degradation of the forest floor and understorey plants by the kangaroos. Large bare and disturbed areas were common with scrapes under and around many trees. The bark of many stringybarks was chewed up to 2 metres up the trunks. It would appear that kangaroo numbers are such that some form of control is desirable.

Several plants of Rough Wattle, *Acacia aspera* were seen. This is now an uncommon wattle for this area. Birds recorded in the Mt Pleasant block included Dusky Woodswallows and young, Restless Flycatchers, Choughs, Rainbow Birds, White-browed Babblers, Common Bronzewing and Grey Butcherbird.

As we searched for olives someone drew our attention to the loud buzzing around us. This was traced to a large fast flying fly which was captured in a plastic bag and transferred to a glass jar for all to inspect. The closest identification we could come up with was some kind of Robber Fly. It was a truly impressive insect four and a half centimetres long with large eyes, a head covered in golden hairs and an iridescent blue-black body decorated with buff, orange, white and black hairs. The legs, particularly the rear ones were very long.

Thanks to Ken Walker of the Melbourne Museum we know that this insect was indeed a Robber Fly, also known as an Assassin Fly, and its scientific name is *Phellus olgae*. Thanks to a digital camera the image was quickly relayed to Ken for identification. The reply said "This is one serious fly!!" According to the literature they prey on any insects they can catch in flight, buzzing loudly as they move. The prey is held with the long legs and enzymes are injected to the prey which reduce it to a liquid which the fly then sucks. Care is required when handling these monsters of the fly world as they will try to impale human flesh. Information source: *Insects of Australia*, J Goode.

Cyanide Dam in the evening provided a most pleasantly relaxing atmosphere. Watching a Black Wallaby come in to take a long drink while being quite aware of the presence of watchers proved interesting.

Birds were calling all around, particularly noisy and numerous were the Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters. Some female and juvenile Turquoise Parrots were observed through the telescope while Peaceful Doves, Cuckoo-shrikes, Black-chinned Honeyeaters and a Yellow Robin provided the birds chorus.

Our tea was a fitting finale to an afternoon in the bush. For those who remained after 8.00pm the sunset was a memorable sight, Cyanide Dam was bathed in glorious colours of pink through to red and the drive out of the park at 8.30 was stunning. And we didn't have a camera!

Around the Park: Many of the old logging tracks have been covered with forest debris to facilitate regeneration, particularly of grasses and understorey plants. Damaged signage has been replaced.

Our request for basic camping facilities at Depot Dam has been refused. However we will continue to press for these facilities.

Water levels in all the dams in the park are very low with Cyanide Dam again dividing into two pools.

NEXT MEETING SATURDAY MARCH 2 9.00AM AT THE CHILTERN POST OFFICE

BARAMBOGIE BUSHLAND RESERVE

We will assess the needs of this block, begin flora and fauna lists and tackle either rubbish or weeds.

BYO lunch, gloves, secateurs, saw and energy. Lunch at Cyanide Dam.

Contact for activity: Eileen 0357 261 484

Category

1. Newsletters

Date Created

2012/06/21

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