

# NEWSLETTER

# Spring 2006



 Native bees and a honeybee have a common interest in this flower. (see Stingless bees, p. 4) Photo: John Klumpp

A juvenile male Rose Robin; a welcome visitor from the south. (see Winter migrants, p. 6) *Photo: Brian O'Leary* 





Was this fellow included in the Community Consultation process? (see The upgrade of Gap Creek Road, p. 8). *Photo: Penelope Hacker* 

# Editorial

Such is the volume of material that there is little space for this. What we have depends substantially on requests and it would be nice if we had a little more on the initiative of members at large. That includes small contributions for the You Said section. They can be quite diverse; see in this issue that one person has seen something, another thinks something and a third appreciates something we did.

The only qualification about articles is that the author should discuss it first with the Editor to see if the subject is suitable, does not conflict with another of similar subject which has already been accepted for the next issue, and to discuss length and possible accompanying photographs.

This issue has, for the first time, an international contribution! But we did have to send the Chairman overseas to get it.

Graeme Wilson

# Chairman's Report

Writing my Report from Ireland, after visiting Crete and England, Brisbane's drought seems a long way away. However, it is good to know that our active Committee together with Greg Siepen are looking after MCCG's interests while I am overseas.

A week ago, in England, I was impressed by some of the activities of local administrations and thought that lessons could be learnt in Queensland. In Essex, reserved areas alongside new roads have been extensively planted with local trees. I also particularly liked an area in Somerset, where roadside margins had been sown to a mixture of native herbs, including cowslips and ground-orchids, and were being managed to promote their persistence. Perhaps Queensland administrations could follow those examples?

I will look forward to hearing about MCCG activities on my return, particularly the 'Life in a Creek' day, which I am sure would have been a great success.

Bryan Hacker

# **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Mark the date in your diaries;there will be an excellent guest speaker and refreshments provided

When: Wednesday 15th November, 2006 Where: Brookfield Hall When: 7.30 pm

Enquiries to Christine Hosking, Ph.3374 3453

Moggill Creek Catchment Group is a volunteer action group aiming to conserve and improve the natural environment of its catchment on both private and public land.

**Chairman**: Bryan Hacker **Secretary**: Gaynor Johnson

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#### **INTERACTIONS 4**

Coconut ants, several closely related species of *Papyrius*, are so called because, when crushed, they have an odour resembling coconut. They occur throughout mainland Australia and in some islands to the north. They are readily displaced by some exotic ant species including the common household brown ant and have thus become scarce in bushland near cities. They build nests from twigs and debris to make tunnels and channels on branches, stumps and posts. (See photo on p. 5.) Under this cover they tend not only their own brood but also various other species. There are two such associations with butterflies which are described here.

One is with the Fiery Jewel (*Hypochrysops ignitus*) whose females lay eggs at the bottom of wattles and some other small species infested by the coconut ant. After hatching, the larva are carried by the ants into their nests and tended during the day, emerging at night to feed on the leaves of the host plant. The ants stimulate the larvae to secrete substances which are eaten by the ants. In return, the larvae-and subsequently the pupae-are protected from predators and parasites until the butterflies emerge.

That is a clear case of mutually beneficial association. The other is not. The Small Ant Blue butterfly (*Acrodipsas myrmecophila*) does not require plant leaves as food for its larvae. The adults lay their eggs at the edge of the ants' nests, and the newly hatched larvae are carried by the ants into the nests in the mistaken belief-based on their odours-that they are stages in the ants' development. Meanwhile, the larvae prey on the ant brood until they pupate, then crawl to light and emerge as butterflies, searching for flowers on which to feed for their nectar. There is nothing in the whole process for the ants. This is one of the numerous examples of one species deceiving, by way of an odour, colour, morphological feature or some other physical characteristic, another species to do something favourable to itself.

Don Sands

#### You said -----

On 17 June a Square-tailed Kite was seen soaring over paddocks near the intersection of Greentrees Avenue and Rafting Ground Rd. The status of this species is given as rare by Qld. Nature Conservation (Wild.) Regs 1994. Also seen on the same day at the end of Gold Creek Rd. were a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles and a solitary White-bellied Sea-Eagle.

Dawn Beck

My grandsons and I wish to thank the organizers of the Family and Fun Day at the Brookfield Hall on 18th June. The function provided both fun and information. It was a wonderful way of showing the community at large what the Moggill Creek Catchment Group is all about. The children reacted with enthusiasm [and they enjoyed the sausage sizzle too]. Max [5] gave a lively presentation to Grade 1 about LIFE IN A CREEK using your pamphlets to illustrate his talk. Thank you all.

Brigid Shanley

Last week someone walked down our road slashing the tops off wild tobaccos, which prompted us to consider the pros and cons of this weed. On our land we leave quite a few as shade for newly planted and young trees and shrubs in summer, and as food for birds in winter when there is much less fruiting by other species. At present we have brown pigeons and satin bower birds feasting daily on wild tobacco berries. Compared with the villainous Glycine, Morning Glory, Maderia Vine, Cat's Claw and other smothering weeds, wild tobacco is comparatively benign. In the longer run our revegetation efforts may lead to increased food for wildlife but in the meantime perhaps people should be looking more favourably on wild tobacco.

Jan & Gordon Grigg

#### Senna acclinis - a native cassia to be encouraged

*Senna acclinis* is an attractive shrub growing to about 1.5 m tall. It is rare in our catchment, and we are especially promoting it as it is the food plant for the uncommon yellow migrant butterfly *Catopsilia gorgophone*. We usually have seedlings, available free to members, in our nursery.

*Senna acclinis* is easily confused when young with the common exotic weed Easter cassia, *S. pendula*. However, the native species flowers continuously over the summer, rather than just in May, and is much less robust. *S. acclinis* flowers are a little smaller than those of Easter cassia and lack the two prominent 'mammoth tusk' anthers (see photo p. 5). The pods are very different too, being flat and about 5 mm wide, as compared with those of Easter cassia, which are rounded and about 9 mm wide.

Senna acclinis appears to like a fairly sunny spot, moist conditions and a reasonably fertile soil. It is an ideal plant for suburban gardens and on acreage landholdings too.

Bryan Hacker

# Plant Families 9-Rubiaceae

The family Rubiaceae is one of the largest, with some 500 genera and 7000 species, occurring worldwide, mainly in the tropics and subtropics. It takes its name from the genus *Rubia*, one species of which was for thousands of years an important source of a red dye extracted from its roots. (*rubia* = red.) Other famous products are quinine (the only effective treatment for malaria until 50 years ago) and coffee. Widely grown ornamentals are Gardenia, Ixora, Rondeletia and Mussaenda.

Included in our catchment are one medium sized tree (*Hodgkinsonia ovatiflora*), two small trees (*Canthium odoratum* and *C. coprosmoides*), the shrubs *Ixora beckleri*, *Atractocarpus chartaceus*, *Pavetta australiensis*, *Psychotria loniceroides*, *P. daphnoides*, and the woody climbers *Coelospermum paniculatum* and *Morinda* spp.

Graeme Wilson

#### **Stingless Bees**

Yes, there are bees that cannot sting and Australia is home to about 12 species of them.

"Sugarbag" bees as they are sometimes known were important in Aboriginal culture; not only for their honey, but also because their building material (a mixture of wax and tree resins) was used for medicinal, ceremonial and everyday practical purposes. Spearheads were affixed with it and genuine didgeridoo mouthpieces are still fashioned from this dark brown substance.

Our stingless bees are contained within two genera and range in size from the tiny *Trigona clypearis* that has to stretch to make a length of 3.5mms to *Trigona hockingsi* which, while still a diminutive 4.5mms long, is our largest. Like the introduced honeybee, stingless bee colonies consist of a single fertile queen, many hundreds of female worker bees and a few males (drones). They collect honey and pollen in the same way as honeybees, albeit in far smaller quantities. However, in other aspects such as hive building techniques, brood rearing and hive reproduction, they are significantly different.

*Trigona carbonaria* (see photo on p. 1, in which its size can be compared with that of a honeybee) is the most widespread and cold tolerant stingless bee. It is the one most likely to be found in the greater Brisbane area. Its range of extends from the Atherton Tableland in Queensland to coastal areas around Bega in southern NSW. Stingless bees cannot tolerate the colder climates of Victoria, Tasmania , South Australia and the southern part of West Australia.

Because of their abundance, all species of these native bees are important in pollination

While stingless bees can be kept in natural logs, an artificial hive offers certain advantages, including colony reproduction by splitting them. Even in ideal conditions stingless bee colonies grow slowly. It usually takes two years or more before a beekeeper can split an artificial hive into two. Still, this is to be preferred to the removal of colonies from our bushland where hollow trees are the natural apartment blocks. They are home to all manner of creatures and the felling of each one depletes and degrades our natural heritage.

Detailed information about Australia's social bees (and the solitary ones that can sting) is available from Dr Anne Dollin's Australian Native Bee Research Centre. Website: *http://www.aussiebee.com.au*. Mailing address: PO Box 74 North Richmond NSW 2754.

John Klumpp

## Which way to go?

(This is written in early June when we are tightly in the grip of severe drought and there is no useful soil moisture in at least the root zone of small plants. If meanwhile we have had useful rain, the question remains frequently relevant.)

I have an excellent site-except for soil moisture-where I wish to introduce some understory plants, and I can do some hand-watering. As I water them, their roots will grow out into the wetted zone. However, the roots of existing plants from many metres around will grow into this zone, extracting water at an enormously greater rate than the new plants. I don't have the water, time or energy to maintain a sufficient supply. Do I give up and wait for good rain? No, I will try this: Move the seedlings from their too-small pots for further growth, to substantially larger pots and place them all together in a shade environment similar to where they are to be used eventually but close to the water supply. They now need only infrequent watering and sufficient for them alone. And I won't have to trudge around from plant to plant, meanwhile doing some soil damage. The time and effort saved can be put in to better preparation of sites than occurs in the usual course of planting, while that can be carried out much more quickly when suitable conditions return.

Graeme Wilson

## WANTED

The MCCG is in need of a volunteer to coordinate the ordering and selling of our merchandise; for example, MCCG shirts, hats and winter vests. If this is of interest and you have a little time to spare, please contact Greg Siepen on Ph: 0408 774 631 Email: greg.siepen@brisbane.qld.gov.au



Photo: Bryan Hacker

Cultivated Madiera Vine!

(see Who would have guessed ... , p. 8)

Hypoestes phyllostachya

(see Weeds of Shady Places, p. 7)

Rivena humilis



Photo: Bryan Hacker





Flowers of *Senna pendula* (left) and *S. acclinis* (right). (See *Senna acclinis*, p. 3)



Nest of the coconut ant. (see Interactions, p. 3)

Photo: Bryan Hacker

#### LIFE IN A CREEK DAY

A wonderful array of reptiles was produced by Martin Fingland of Geckoes Wildlife Presentations, to fascinate and inform mums, dads and grandparents, and of course, the kids, on this fun environmental day with a creek theme.

In addition, a rare spotted tailed quoll made an appearance and everyone adored Martin's sugar glider. Dr. Kev Warburton and two of his students from the University of Queensland also received much interest with their display and information about conditions in our local creeks and the native and exotic fish that inhabit them.

A special appearance in the afternoon by Ranger Stacey capped off the day.

The MCCG gratefully thanks the participants; Pullen Pullen Catchments Group, THECA, Brisbane City Council, The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, Healthy Waterways Indy, Course who supervised the Art



Waterways, Judy Gower who supervised the Art A rapt audience Photo: Christine Hosking Competition, and Councillor Margaret de Wit who was kept busy helping serve the hungry hordes at the sausage sizzle.

The combined effort made it another successful environmental awareness event for the local community.

Christine Hosking

### **The Winter Migrants**

The migration of wading birds from their nesting sites in the northern tundra to our beaches in summer is well known and documented. Also, the summer arrival of some species of cuckoos from their northern wintering range is proclaimed by their loud raucous calling.

Every winter less obvious changes to populations occur among some of our familiar bush birds. During winter there is regularly an influx of birds that are often referred to as the "winter migrants". In general there appears to be a movement northwards from the southern states to the north and an altitudinal trend from highland areas to lower coastal plains and riparian areas. This movement is probably related to food supplies; more insects in the warmer north and the flowering of different food trees.

Within Moggill Creek Catchment several of these winter migrants can be seen by a careful, alert and aware observer.

**Golden Whistlers** occur here throughout the year but in winter the numbers are greatly increased by movement into the area from southern areas and highlands. More females and juveniles are recorded than males. In autumn the charming **Rose Robin** (see photo p. 1) moves north after breeding in Victoria, NSW and ACT. It returns south in late winter and early spring. **Yellow-faced Honeyeaters** are resident all year round but the numbers increase markedly during winter. These birds gather in flocks and travel by day. Their cheerful "chickup-chickup" call is characteristic of winter bird song. The stunning **Scarlet Honeyeater** is also a year round resident but with numbers augmented by a northward dispersal. These small tree-top dwelling birds are most often located by their high pitched, melodious tinkling calls. **Grey Fantail** numbers show a marked increase during autumn and winter as they move north. This friendly, active bird is very conspicuous as it flits about in bush clearings or the outer foliage catching small flying insects.

The above birds are examples of a northward migration; there are others that disperse from highland to lower areas. **Spotted Pardalotes** are more often seen here during winter for that reason. Some spectacular examples of this altitudinal movement are the sightings of **Pittas** and bowerbirds under the denser undergrowth along Moggill Creek.

Dawn Beck

## **A School Connection**

One hundred Brisbane Boys College Year 10 students spent time in our catchment spreading mulch and removing weeds as part of their Careers Week. Mulch was spread at Bundaleer St. and near Brookfield Produce, while weeds were attacked along McKay Brook near Kenmore High School, all under the guidance of Damian Egan (Section 4 Leader) and Catchment Coordinator Greg Siepen. "Normally, the work done by the students would take Section volunteers days to do. We hope to continue this relationship next year." said Damian.

# Can the Platypus hold on here?

The main cause of loss of native wildlife species is destruction of their habitats. The appalling degradation of the creeks in our catchment does not bode well for species dependent on them.

So many things have happened-and continue to happen-to spoil the waterways, and almost without exception result from our activities. The more or less unprecedented failure of decent wet-season rain over the last several years is the main reason why our creeks have stopped year-round running, although bad land management has contributed. Then there is pumping from the creeks.

Runoff from slopes carries more than water. Soil comes from earthworks, clearing and overgrazing. Undesirable chemicals are provided by fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides and improperly maintained septic systems; the latter adding harmful micro-organisms. The ingress of all these is greatly hindered by a reasonably wide band of mixed vegetation, from trees to ground cover; and this has often been removed. The banks collapse when stabilizing vegetation has been removed and livestock given access. Between that and soil runoff from slopes, most of our creeks have silt bottoms where not so many years ago there were rocks and gravel. And to add to the mess, there is wholesale invasion by aquatic weeds.

The summation of all these detrimental factors is an environment hostile to at least most of the animals dependent on the waterways for their survival; not simply as individuals but as species, because it is necessary that they breed. The platypus is a species which comes particularly to mind. How are they getting on? The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland, with assistance from our Group, has taken an interest in this. In 2005 and 2006 we have conducted a survey. This year six were seen, five scattered along Moggill Creek from well upstream down to lower reaches, and one in Gold Creek.. That does little more than show that some remain, but is good news in that there is a base for survival if the condition of our creeks improves, that depending on landholders; which is you!

Chris Hosking

## Weeds of Shady Places

Generally, when revegetating an area with the goal of creating a closed forest, weed problems diminish as the shade level increases, but this is not the case with coralberry (*Rivena humilis*) and freckle face or polkadot plant (*Hypoestes phyllostachya*). (See photos p. 5). Both species are often locally dominant in the understorey and both are likely to have been purposefully introduced as ornamentals.

Coralberry (not to be confused with *Ardisia* spp., also popularly known as coralberry) is a week-stemmed shrub to about 1 m tall, and, like many of our weeds, is a native of tropical America. Flowers are small and white, are carried in axillary racemes, and are followed by shiny red berries. If you don't already have coral berry in your shaded areas, you are likely to have it soon, as birds are attracted to the fruit and distribute the seed. Coralberry is readily hand-pulled, but make sure you catch it before it fruits!

Freckle face is an erect herb to about 1 m tall, with attractively spotted leaves and with inconspicuous purple flowers about 10 mm long. Leaves up the stem are progressively smaller and more sparingly spotted. There is also a native species in the genus, *H. floribunda*, which is readily distinguished by its non-spotted leaves Freckle face was listed by the Queensland National Weeds Program as a potential environmental weed in Australia in 1998 and is certainly now a threat in some parts of our Catchment. It is native to southern Africa and Madagascar. Freckle face can be controlled with glyphosate at 200ml/10L, with a surfactant, or by hand-pulling.

Bryan Hacker

### Mistletoes may be Good!!

At the recent Vegetation Futures Conference, David Watson (Charles Sturt University) showed results of a four year study which indicates mistletoe plants actually increase the faunal biodiversity of an area. In heavily fragmented euclaypt dominated landscapes, they provided food for possums and gliders and served as host plants for butterflies and other insects. Additionally, there was twice the woodland bird richness.

He stated that removal of mistletoe is only treating a symptom of environmental decline, the underlying causes of which may be related to property and stock management, and too frequent burning.

Thus some mistletoes may be useful in a woodland/forest.

Greg Siepen

# Gold Creek Dam Winter Ramble

Eighteen people attended the Winter Ramble on Sunday July 16th. Brian Leahy gave us a potted history of early timber getting. The recently upgraded track made walking easy and pleasant while the cloudy weather made walking cool and enjoyable. Pheasant Coucals and a Brown Pigeon were notable bird sightings, and many native plants were investigated. The area has many weeds (mostly lantana) and BCC is undertaking a Weed Management Strategy for Gold Creek, Enoggera and Manchester Dams.

Members will be emailed when a future walk is organised.

NB: Permission is needed to do walks in this Water Reserve managed by Brisbane Water.

Greg Siepen

# The Sealing of Gap Creek Road: Environmental Implications

To seal or not to seal Gap Creek Road has been the question for many years. Some people who reside in this road remember when it finished at the Gap Creek Recreation Reserve and from there was simply a closed dirt fire road through Mt. Coot-tha Forest Park.

Back then, Mt. Coot-tha Forest was still very much connected to Brisbane Forest Park, and formed part of what is a truly precious bushland gem on Brisbane's doorstep.

Even now, despite the fact that Gap Creek Road is being used as a cut-through from the north, red-necked wallabies, long-nosed bandicoots and even a breeding koala population are just some of the species regularly seen in the area; what a privilege. This is in part because sections of the road have remained unsealed and traffic, particularly at night when many of our nocturnal native animals are active, has been kept to a minimum.

Brisbane City Council has now decided to seal and straighten the road, and declare it a 50 km/hr rural road. It also comments that the volume of traffic is unlikely to double in the next 10 years. It seems very likely that the volume will increase well beyond prediction, especially at night. It is fanciful to believe that it will keep to the speed limit. As a consequence, Mt. Coot-tha Forest to the east of this road will be substantially isolated ecologically from the rest of the forest. It will become an 'island' patch, suffering from fragmentation, loss of connectivity and edge effects; in short, an environmental disaster.

Road kills, as nocturnal wildlife attempts to cross Gap Creek Road will increase and there will be a significant reduction in the area's biodiversity. (See photo p. 1)

This is yet another shining example of the environmental cost of Brisbane's burgeoning population.

Christine Hosking

## **Birdwings in Brisbane's Western Suburbs** More Historic Information from the Community

We know from early records that the Richmond birdwing was sometimes very abundant in Brisbane. It was reportedly seen in hundreds in the City in 1870 but by the 1920s was becoming less abundant even in the outer suburbs, probably the result of clearing of rainforest and riparian patches containing the food plant *Pararistolochia praevenosa*. From then on the decline in adults observed has been steady with the loss of breeding colonies near the Gap and at Bardon (both in early 1980s), and near Mount Cotton in the early1990s. The nearest breeding colonies remain to the north on the D'Aguilar Range.

Information coming from Members of the *Richmond Birdwing Recovery Network* has helped develop the picture of decline in Brisbane's Western Suburbs. Peter Hughes observed birdwings near Gold Creek Dam, below Boscombe Road and possibly near Mount Elphinstone in the mid to late 1940s. I once observed a male near Gold Creek in the mid 1980s but did not regard the observation as very special as they continued to breed in gardens near Chapel Hill. Finally, in the Western Suburbs between 1997 and 2001, breeding of the birdwing ceased completely and only occasional larvae have since been seen on vines. This was probably due to small size of the remaining colony and its isolation resulting in inbreeding depression.

Efforts now being made by residents may rectify this shortage of food plant vines as they are being planting in private gardens and on Council-owned reserves. Dr Brian Lowry stated at a recent gathering of RBRN Members, that the only hope for returning the Richmond birdwing to Brisbane's Western Suburbs will come from concerted efforts to restore corridors with sufficient vines as food plants for the larvae.

Don Sands

# Who would have guessed?

It is well known that many of our environmental weeds were introduced as ornamentals – morning glory, lantana and cat's claw, to name just a few. But I have often wondered how (and why!) Madeira vine was introduced. Hardly an ornamental, you might say, and (relying on tubers for propagation), unlikely to have been introduced accidentally.

Imagine my surprise to have just seen Madeira vine in the pretty Cretan village of Loutró, carefully tended as a pot plant, alongside geraniums and bougainvillea! (see photo p. 5) There's no accounting for taste. Who would have guessed that it could become the rampant weed we know in Queensland?

Other pot plants being grown in this Mediterranean environment included climbing asparagus and lantana. None of the plants mentioned appeared to have 'escaped'. The only Queensland environmental weed species I recognized as being problems in Crete were castor oil and giant reed (*Arundo donax*). However, both species are apparently native to the region and the latter species has performed a useful role in the past as a source of cane for basket-making.

Bryan Hacker