

MOGGILL CREEK CATCHMENT GROUP

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NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2010



▲ Tawny Frogmouths (see p. 3)
Photo: Paul Zimmerman



▲ Richmond Birdwing larva (see p.6)
Photo: E. Forster



▲ *Turraea pubescens* (see p.7)
Photo: Bryan Hacker



Vegetation and fire (see p.4)

▲ Eucalyptus woodland
Photo: Bryan Hacker

Rain forest
Photo: Graeme Wilson ►



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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.

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Editorial

It seems to have been a very busy three months, with our routine activities, planning and responding to things which have arisen. Our core business of advising landholders on management of their vegetation, raising seedlings of native plants and distributing them to users has gone on apace. The seedling production has a nice balance of demand, facilities and workforce (i.e. volunteers), the lack of which latter is a limitation in so many of our other activities. Demand for plants has fluctuated with weather suitability for planting, and some better wet season rain this summer led to over 3000 plants going out in January, quite a monthly record. Satisfactory as our performance has been, there are a number of things we would like to add or improve so that we do better, but it needs additional people.

The Cottage is flourishing. It has become quite clearly a headquarters, with much of our administrative work carried out there and is a regular Meeting place. Talks at the Cottage have been a success and the number will be increased; and functions of other kinds are being introduced. The associated Garden should start bringing in visitors as soon as we can develop it further, although that will be slow until we can get an adequate team of workers (as explained elsewhere in this issue). The library too is growing to a point where we can expect some use made of it by visitors. A result of this may be a need to have the Cottage open more than the present half day a week, that requiring another volunteer or two.

The whole lease area provides the opportunity for extensive plantings appropriate to our interests, and while a little is being done by one person, we badly need new volunteers (beyond the few people already occupied in our activities), to take on the job. It is a rewarding activity, one in which the result will be clear for all to see.

The large amount of work which is the responsibility of PR is referred to elsewhere in this issue, and there, as practically everywhere, the recurring thing is need for volunteers.

A rather daunting but important task is now being planned. It is referred to in the Chairman's Report. In plain words it is this: We proceed in the subjective and qualitative belief that we are doing quite well. Are we? We need a quantitative assessment of what we have done.

Going beyond activity which leads to output which members see, some people are very busy behind the scenes dealing with the many things which arise, mainly involving other bodies such as BCC and related environmental groups. For example, we have had input into the Gap Creek Rd. and Rafting Ground Rd. projects, and now are negotiating with BCC over Weed Eradication Notices.

Chairman's Report

Over recent months the Council has been issuing Pest Plant Eradication Notices to owners of acreage properties in our area. After a preliminary letter, Council staff has without further notice assessed people's properties for presence of a wide range of weed species. A document asking the landholder to remove or control the weeds and stating that fines would be imposed or the Council would do the job for them (at considerable expense) has then been delivered. There have been various responses to these notices, ranging from acceptance to anger. Most would find the tone of the document threatening and intimidating.

We understand that there can be opportunities to 'extend' the period during which a particular weed infestation is scheduled to be eliminated. Certainly, concerns can be expressed through the Council Call Centre (3403 8888) or the Pullenvale Ward Office.

Regrettably, some of our members have declined to renew their membership as they believe that MCCG is somehow implicated. We can state categorically that MCCG is in no way involved with such Eradication Notices and has at no stage been consulted. While we generally support the Council's aims to reduce weed infestations in our district, we do not believe that the current approach is appropriate. We have recently written to Council to propose a more cooperative approach to weed management that would lead to improved cooperation between the landholder and qualified Council staff, with more and realistic timeframes.

As a Catchment Group, we provide help to landholders through the provision of free locally native plants from our Nursery and through free advice on land and weed management to landholders upon request. Many of our members have found this advice to be helpful.[#] Weed control is acknowledged to be a major threat to biodiversity world-wide, and is an issue we should all address to the best of our abilities.

* * * * *

In 1997 the then Council's Catchment Management Unit published a Moggill Creek Catchment Management Plan and through this initiative in 1998 Moggill Creek Catchment Group (MCCG) was formed. In 2004 MCCG published a Review and Business Plan for 2005-2008. Now MCCG considers it timely once more to review all its activities since 1998. We wish to describe not only what MCCG has achieved but what the whole community has achieved over a range of local environmental matters. In particular we would very much like to know the work that private land owners have accomplished over this period. We also hope to review what we realistically can hope to achieve over the next few years. We would very much like to hear from any Friends of Moggill who would like to assist in this review.

Malcolm Frost

[#](If you would like advice on land and weed management, please contact Bryan Hacker on 3374 1468 –Ed.)

Creek Ranger's Report

Happy New Year! I hope you all had a relaxing festive season and you're ready for an exciting new year. A lot of new projects are starting up within the catchment group, as a result of the interest group forums last year. A few of these projects are: information packs for new residents to be distributed to real estate agents; a fauna database in progress to record native and introduced animals seen in the catchment; and planning is underway for a 'Kids Day at the Cottage' to be held on May 30th.

If you are keen to get involved in these or other projects (such as waterway protection or seed collection), please let me know. In particular, stay tuned for a survey form to record the animals you see on your land – start looking out for them now! We are also particularly looking for people to help with the Kids Day at the Cottage, from manning the sausage sizzle to running craft workshops for kids.

As mentioned in the last newsletter, "Our Place in the County: Managing your acreage property in West Brisbane" is a free booklet recently produced by the Moggill Creek and Pullen Pullen Catchment Groups. The booklet is available for free to all who are interested; if you would like a copy just drop in to the Cottage on a Thursday morning, or let me know on Shelley.dunlop@brisbane.qld.gov.au

I look forward to working with you all again this year!

Shelley Dunlop

Tawny frogmouth

The Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*) can be seen in almost any habitat type throughout Australia except the denser rainforests and treeless deserts. They often inhabit open woodlands. They hunt large insects, spiders, invertebrates, small lizards, rats, mice, cicadas, beetles and frogs during the night and rest in trees during the day. They have prominent yellow eyes which usually are not visible unless the bird is disturbed. We see them relatively frequently in Brookfield.

They are extremely well camouflaged to look like a tree branch and it is easy to overlook them as they sit perfectly still often on relatively low branches. (See photo p. 1).

In my experience, seeing four of them together is unusual. These particular birds remained in the same place all day despite people working within 10-12 feet of them. I have since spotted them in other trees in our garden, but the biggest group has been three.

Paul Zimmerman

Cottage Garden

There has been little progress in developing the Garden since the last report. That is partly because we were not prepared to extend planting until there had been sufficient rain to wet soil to depth, thereby avoiding the watering necessary to ensure establishment. We were also worried by the shortage of people who had volunteered as Cottage Gardeners, and we asked for additional ones. That has borne slight fruit but we need more. (It is no good people telling us that they welcome what we are doing unless we can do it well; and we need help to do so.)

Our general idea was that such Gardeners alone would be responsible for planting followed by maintenance, but we have reconsidered that. Good planting does not comprise digging a hole sufficient to take the roots of a potted plant. The first and very important job is to prepare the site well, which includes thoroughly loosened soil at the site. That can be substantial work. After that has been done, and on perhaps a later occasion, planting is easily carried out. The point of this is that occasionally a few competent diggers are required to do the preparation, and any other one-off jobs which require physical capability. There is no reason that they should come from the Gardening team. Therefore we must have a few names of people we can call on to achieve this; and *not* those who are already committed to other major tasks.

Will you put up *your* hand?

Graeme Wilson

Vegetation and fire

Remembering the horrendous bushfires across southern Australia in the last year, and then experiencing our recent prolonged hot, dry weather, some people were wondering about risks here.

This is written from the perspective of MCCG; asking what characteristics of our vegetation are responsible for conducting fire to our property, as built structures. It does not address the question of flammability of such property, important as that is. And it must be appreciated that MCCG insists that our major objective of maximizing the extent and biological diversity of our vegetation should be upheld.

Fortunately, climatic conditions here do not predispose to fires of the intensity of those which devastated southern regions, fires which travelled rapidly via canopies of trees. Our worries are fires which move largely through understory vegetation and accumulated dead plant material, which with careful management can be held at acceptable levels. A band of such vegetation, perhaps no more than 20m wide between full vegetation further out and an open more or less treeless strip between it and the property should be satisfactory.

Most landholdings here are suited to either dry rainforest or open eucalypt forest vegetation. A well developed canopy of trees of the former does not permit of substantial understory growth by natives but many of our increasing numbers of exotic weeds are able to establish. These have to be cleared out of the buffer strip. There is relatively little fall of branches to provide fuel, while fallen leaves decompose quickly. The photo on p. 5 shows a desirable situation. In the open forest, more light at ground level can encourage understory growth, especially of exotics including the highly flammable tall grasses, while fallen branches can be abundant. But again, a little care can give a pleasant vista as shown on p 1, where a ground cover of low growing native grasses and herbs has developed. There is just one thing to watch with the tree species in this situation; some have foliage which can catch alight when close to hot fire. Lower branches, up to about 3m should be removed.

Open space, although perhaps with a few scattered trees, between the forested buffer zones and buildings is required. This would most likely be as well mown lawn although including flower beds. But remember that even very short grass, when dry, can carry fire, so it should be watered if possible. Of course gravelled or suchlike surface is most effective.

Some landholders put faith in vast regularly mown or grazed fields. Yes, that works but is anathema to MCCG because of its many highly detrimental environmental consequences.

Readers may wonder why nothing has been said about flammable tree species. The opinions expressed above are based on the belief that our combination of climate, species and management avoids worries about flammability. There is incidentally possible confusion arising from species being described as fire resistant, which refers to ability to survive fire, whereas fire retardant means slowing the progress of fire. Here, retardance is seen as a property of managed vegetation rather than a characteristic of individual species.

Graeme Wilson

Cottage Library Growing

The aim of building up a topical reference library at the Cottage for the use of members has gained momentum thanks to Janelle Johnstone's donation of relevant books and large bookcase belonging to her late husband, Robin Johnstone.

Robin Johnstone was a native plant enthusiast who not only propagated them to improve vegetation on his own property, but also generously shared them with interested neighbours and supplied seed and plants to our MCCG nursery. His bookshelves reflected this passion and we have been given such books as Elliot & Jones 8 vol Encyclopaedia of Australian Plants and Stanley & Ross FLORA of South-eastern Queensland (3 vols). We are also grateful for the large bookcase which has given more room to display our growing collection.

Members are welcome to use the library when the Cottage is open on Thursdays 9.30am – 1pm. Drop in and check our collection of field guides to native plants, birds, butterflies, frogs and tadpoles.

Dale Borgelt



Rhodes grass Flower heads + Stolons (see p.7)
Photo: Bryan Hacker



Muttonwood Root sucker + thicket (see p.7)
Photo: Graeme Wilson



Persicaria orientalis (above) and *P. strigosa* (with the elongated inflorescence) below (see p. 8) A creek trying etc. Photo: Bryan Hacker

Disgorged seed in birdbaths

We recently published an observation by a member that currawongs had disgorged seeds in his birdbath, and on planting them he got a crop of Chinese elms. He now says that he has seeds of something else, as I have had. And other people are reporting the same thing.

So I asked the experts what they have to say.

Disgorgement by birds of indigestible material taken in with their food is widespread, and the fact that we see it in birdbaths is because it is conspicuous. It occurs to an equal extent elsewhere.

That we see so many seeds is scarcely surprising. The particular seeds are of fruits with a very thin flesh layer which is digested off, and to take in enough food requires the frequent removal of the indigestible seeds. (Birds can't chew off the flesh as most other animals can.)

Seeing so many seeds deposited at once is a salutary reminder to us. If we have rid our property of a particular weed but our neighbours have it, and birds which fly over big distances while carrying so many seeds eat its fruits, we need to keep out a sharp eye for reinfestation.

Graeme Wilson

Richmond Birdwing Butterfly Network – Phase 3 July 2010

The Richmond Birdwing Butterfly (*Ornithoptera richmondia*) is one of the few “flagship” insects of conservation concern in Australia, targeted for recovery by the community and State conservation authorities. The first butterfly conservation project started in Victoria in the 1980's to help protect the Eltham Copper Butterfly (*Paralucia pyrodiscus lucida*). The Richmond Birdwing Conservation Project, hosted by the CSIRO Double Helix Science Club, began (in 1994) to introduce school students to the butterfly, its food plants and its threats. In 2005, a second phase of the birdwing project, the *Richmond Birdwing Recovery Network Inc.* (RBRN), encouraged community members to become involved with the butterfly with educational programmes, including regional workshops. At all events the community has been introduced to the fascinating biology of the butterfly, how to identify some of the threats, and how to identify and propagate the food plant vines. (The photo on p 1 shows a larva on a leaf.)

In July 2010, in a new venture Phase 3, RBRN will amalgamate with the *Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland* (WPSQ). Under this large Society's “umbrella”, the *Richmond Birdwing Conservation Network* will add to the WPSQ efforts made by several other groups, for example, the Glossy Black Cockatoos, Quolls and Glider Groups, all working on wildlife conservation. The amalgamation will enable members to take on challenges that were previously beyond the scope of RBRN. One of the new Projects, the *Flagship Birdwing Corridor Project*, will focus on areas of extinction and fragmented habitats edging the current range of the butterfly. Corridors will be identified for substantial plantings of the Birdwing Butterfly Vine (*Pararistolochia praevenosa*), with three areas initially targeted: the northern Sunshine Coast, southern Gold Coast and western Brisbane.

Much new information has been gained by members of the community during the 5-year life of RBRN, adding enormously to the bank of scientific knowledge on the plight of the butterfly and why it has become so rare, problems with loss of wild food plants and how best they can be recovered. The success of recovery of the Richmond Birdwing in the lower Sunshine Coast can be attributed entirely to efforts by members of the community and Landcare Groups.

From July 2010, Members of RBRN will be encouraged to transfer their membership (\$10 per annum, July to June) to RBCN. There will be no additional membership fees or a requirement to join the “full ranks” of WPSQ – but of course they are always welcome to join if they are interested in the array of other WPSQ wildlife activities. The *Richmond Birdwing Conservation Network* (RBCN) will elect its own Management Committee. The Corridor Coordinators' role will be continued and strengthened and RBCN will apply for external funds when needed, to cover costs of Newsletter and practical field recovery activities such as the needs for establishing Flagship Birdwing Corridors.

Don Sands (*RBRN Liaison 2010*)

Kids At The Cottage

Young people have a vested interest in our environment and with this in mind we are planning a day for kids at the Cottage on Sunday May 30. The idea is to have a range of activities set up under marquees around the Cottage. Activities planned include such things as painting envirothemed jigsaw puzzles, a recycling activity such as paper-making and jewellery making. A special treat for young photographers from 7 to 17years old will be a photography walk with Margaret Whyte. The focus of the day will be on fun activities for young people, but parents will be welcome, indeed needed to help young children. Also, for parents it will be a good chance to find out more about the Cottage, the MCGG, and the nursery. There will be a free sausage sizzle at lunchtime. A small enthusiastic group of our members is still tossing ideas around. If you have expertise or interest in an environmental field activity please offer your idea or services to shelley.dunlop@brisbane.qld.gov.au or daleborgelt@bigpond.com

***Turraea pubescens* – native witch-hazel**

Turraea pubescens is a many branched deciduous shrub to small tree up to 5m tall, which occurs infrequently in dry rainforests in our district and extends north from the Woodenbong district to North Queensland, north western Australia and south and south-east Asia.

Leaves are simple and alternate, often slightly hairy on the lower surface and up to 10 cm long. Native witch-hazel flowers in spring to early summer, when the plant is still leafless, masses of creamy white, highly-perfumed flowers, turning to pale yellow, making an attractive display. An interesting feature is the long staminal tube in the centre of the flower, somewhat reminiscent of the 'trumpet' of the daffodil (photo p 1). The fruit is a woody capsule, splitting into 5-7 valves at maturity and revealing black seeds.

This is a hardy plant which requires well drained soil. In a garden situation it benefits from pruning to maintain shape. Up to the present, we have not been able to obtain seed to propagate this species at our Nursery, but would very much like to propagate it if seed becomes available.

According to internet sources, twigs and leaves are used in traditional Chinese medicine, especially in Taiwan, and a number of novel chemical compounds have been isolated.

Bryan Hacker

***Chloris gayana* (Rhodes grass)**

Over recent months the Council has been distributing Pest Plant Eradication Notices to acreage landholders (see Chairman's Report – page 3). Many of the species which landholders are now required to control are very widespread; amongst these is Rhodes grass, *Chloris gayana*. Requirements for this species are to 'Reduce population as part of routine maintenance' with treatment methods to 'spot spray' and 'keep mown.'

Rhodes grass is a pasture species which was introduced from Central Africa around 1900. For our district, it would arguably be the best pasture grass for livestock. Like all successful pasture grasses, it can be invasive, but in our Catchment is nowhere near as invasive as other pasture grasses such as green panic* and signal grass. In a pasture situation mowing to reduce flowering should not be too low or too frequent, or Rhodes grass is likely to be replaced by less desirable grasses such as carpet grass*. If establishing a pasture, later flowering cultivars such as Callide or Samford are less likely to become weedy than the older, prolifically flowering, Pioneer variety. As Rhodes grass is now declared an environmental weed in Brisbane, it is unclear whether or not it is illegal to sow it within the City of Brisbane for pasture purposes.

Where there is no intention to use the land for livestock and the objective is to create a lawn, frequent low mowing should reduce Rhodes grass in favour of carpet grass or the more acceptable green* or blue couch*.

Rhodes grass is readily recognised by its strong stolons (runners), with leaves appearing in 3s at each node (photos on page 5). Flowering stems are up to 1.2 m tall, with up to 17 spreading racemes (fingers) of spikelets at the tip. There are several native species in the genus *Chloris*, but they are not so robust and, if stoloniferous, the stolons are less robust and flower heads, although superficially similar, are more delicate.

* Not listed as a weed species by BCC

Bryan Hacker

Roadkill, Kenmore Hills-Brookfield Rd. 2009

We now have figures for reported roadkill in Kenmore Hills and Brookfield Rd. for 2009.

Total for the year is 42, compared with 39 for 2008 and 31 for 2007. There is a wide range of animal species but of particular interest is the mammals, which are conspicuous and have the speed which gives them some chance of avoiding vehicles which slow down. The numbers here (with those for 2008 in brackets) are possums 9 (11), wallabies 5 (10) and bandicoots 9 (8).

There is interest in figures for this and the coming years following current road work which will increase both the volume of traffic and, in spite of being told that low speed limits will be introduced, overall speeds. On the one hand this could result in greater kill, but on the other, animals may avoid the disturbance.

Munificent muttonwood

A muttonwood (*Myrsine*-formerly *Rapanea-variabilis*) tree came up on my land some years ago and after it was well established it began sending up root suckers (photo p 5) and continues to do so. Another photo on that page shows part of the consequent thicket which incidentally seems to be holding out weed invasion. Fruit is produced abundantly and over the years more plants of it are self-establishing at various locations on my land and are proceeding with their root suckering. Something for nothing like this is most welcome when so much else has to be done.

Graeme Wilson

Cottage Bad News Good News And The Calendar Of Events

The Koala talk by Christine Hosking marked on your 2010 MCCG Calendar of events for May 20 has had to be cancelled. The good news?? The May 20 talk at the Cottage will still be very special. Joseph McDowall, the judge of our annual Photographic Competition, will give tips on "Photographing Moggill Creek Catchment".

The time: 10am- noon - Thursday 20 May

Book your place early -daleborgelt@gmail.com

Remember to check the back of your MCCG fridge magnet Calendar of Events to find details for marked Events, Cottage Talks and Working Bees. By the time you get this newsletter the Cottage talks on Feb 18 and Feb 20 will be in the past, but note that Bryan Hacker's talk on Native Grasses is March 18 and Botanical Artist Margaret Hastie is on April 15. Booking is essential for all Cottage talks.

Booking is not necessary, however, for the Nursery working bees. You will always be welcome. Neither do you need to book for the Section working bees you will find detailed on the back of your fridge calendar, but it is wise to check with the contact given to confirm time etc if you are not a regular.

As for Events, you can see the dates we will be in need of volunteers. For example, week-long displays at Kenmore Village need many volunteers taking timeslots to look after the display. Fraser Trueman 3378 5447 arranges the roster for these displays and he will be delighted to add names to his volunteer pool. Give him a ring if this interests you.

Dale Borgelt

A Creek trying to repair itself

The floods along Moggill Creek and its tributaries last May were disastrous. Many small to medium trees were lost and mulch and soil were washed down towards Moreton Bay. Perhaps we can learn a lesson, though, from the way the creeks have tried to repair themselves and also from our attempts to mend the damage.

In upstream areas, such as Gold Creek near our Nursery, often all vegetation from the creek bed and banks was torn away. All that was left behind was a bed of cobbles and tangle of dead plant material, which soon rotted down to provide a seed bed for what? Perhaps the most striking plant to develop was the native *Persicaria strigosa*, growing rapidly to around 2 m tall (see photo on p. 5). This species is apparently an annual and it revelled in the full sunlight and moist conditions of the site. Another species in the same genus was the prostrate *P. orientalis* (p. 5). The native grass *Leersia hexandra* (swamp rice grass) was also trying hard to re-establish itself. Amongst the exotics that also appreciated the light and space were cobbler's pegs, blue billy-goat weed, mist flower, wild sorghum and broad-leaved paspalum. We have been trying to control these to allow the natural cycle to continue.

Further down stream, where there is a mixture of sandpaper figs (*Ficus coronata*) and Chinese elms, the floods had levelled any but the larger trees to a horizontal forest 2-3 m tall. Here the approach has been to painstakingly cut out the Chinese elms and patches of exotic Guinea grass, making sure not to damage the figs and occasional black bean tree. Once again, we have been pleased to see the native *Persicaria strigosa*, appearing, although not so vigorous in the darker conditions.

In some cases further up the banks, provided it was soon after they were flooded, we have been able to prop up flattened trees; where root damage was not too extensive, this was often successful. However, where small to medium trees had been left nearly horizontal for some months, often they have been able to shoot from near the base. Once this basal growth has developed, we have been cutting off the main trunk, further encouraging the growth from the base. We are yet to see how well such trees will develop, but so far, this approach seems promising. We would be keen to receive feedback from others who have tried this technique.

Dogs and Wallabies don't mix

This is a plea to dog owners in the Brookfield, Upper Brookfield and Pullenvale districts to ensure their dogs are safely behind a secure fence, or on a lead when being taken for a walk.

In August 2005 we rescued a little Red-necked Wallaby joey. Weighing barely one kilo, and with fur just beginning to come through, the little female had been thrown from the pouch as her mother was chased by dogs. I saw the well-fed dogs, with collars and tags, racing through our property.

Chris Hosking, one of our local animal carers, raised the joey until her feeding régime reduced to two bottles a day and then she came back to us, where 'Little Girl' lived in a purpose-built enclosure until she was old enough to venture out on her own: a soft-release. She was raised to be a wild wallaby, not a pet.

Since her release we have enjoyed her almost daily visits and have delighted in watching the development and antics of her four joeys. On the morning of Wednesday, 27 January 2010 we found the partial remains of her latest joey, who had only recently left the pouch. Since that day we haven't seen 'Little Girl'. We hope for the best, but fear the worst.

Dogs are the most likely culprits – either feral or domestic. Don't forget that your precious pooch, your cuddly canine, has hunting instincts that it cannot ignore, in particular if it teams up with a partner in crime. I don't blame the dogs, I blame the owners. Except as a temporary measure, I am not a fan of radio collar/invisible electric fences in our environment. Why? Because they do not prevent wildlife entering into the dog's territory, and a dog giving chase can break through the invisible barrier. Certainly, slower animals, such as Bandicoots and Koalas don't have a chance.

A large part of the enjoyment of living where we do is sharing it with the local wildlife. Please be a responsible dog owner.

Deb Ford