

MOGGILL CREEK CATCHMENT GROUP

www.moggillcreek.org



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NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2012



◀ Snake-Skink (see p 7)
Photo: Nic McCaffrey



▲ Jacky winter (top) & grey-crowned babbler (see Changing avifauna p.7)
Photos: Jill and Ian Brown

▲ What is it? (see Creek Health p. 3)
Photo: Anna Greig

▶ Volunteers on the job
(See Deehurst Park, p.6)
Photo: Dale Borgelt



Editorial

There are so many things which we would like to do but can't, because not enough of our quite large membership will put up their hands when we call for volunteers. They are inclined to say that they already have other things to do. Perhaps so, but think about what our activities usually offer. They are contributions to the community at large. They are interesting. They are an opportunity to learn something new, which at least for many people is a pleasure. And finally, the company of other participants. (This latter has proven to be so important among our nursery volunteers.) Examples of successful groups are reported elsewhere in this issue; Creek Health Monitoring Program and Deerhurst Park / Gap Creek Bushcare.

Your Editor always prays that the next issue will receive an unexpected, interesting contribution; usually without luck. This time fortune has smiled on him, with two such. The discovery of skinks in his garden is a reminder of the great pleasure which comes to the amateur naturalist from sighting something new within his interests. Remember, we have some special interest groups here which you may care to join. The other article on changing occurrence of bird species is at least comforting to us older residents who were starting to worry that our memories were failing.

If you have seen or think or know something which could be of interest to others, do tell us about it.

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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MARK THIS ON YOUR CALENDAR

**Monday 30th July 7.30pm Brookfield Hall
MCCG MID-YEAR PUBLIC MEETING**

Guest Speaker: Cathryn Dexter, Senior Research Ecologist at Griffith University

Topic: Sealing their fate: Implications of the Gap Creek Road up-grade

We hope you can come

Chairman's Report - 2011

Another above average wet season and a relatively cool Autumn should see good soil moisture levels in the catchment carry through to Spring at least. This is good news for planting and also a warning to be prepared to control those vigorous weeds. At the moment the weather forecasters are currently hedging their bets on the general rainfall forecast for Summer 2012.

As a consequence of the review of the Moggill Creek Catchment Group (MCCG) released in 2011, the Management Committee has identified a number of potential projects for which we are now seeking funds. For example, we all know that Cat's Claw is a dangerously invasive weed in our catchment and is overwhelming the ability of local landholders to control it. This project aims to target major infestations with the most effective control methods in order to allow the native vegetation to regenerate. Another project proposal is focussed on working with local landholders to remove invasive weeds and improve riparian health in one sub-catchment. Submissions have been made to local, State and Federal governments and the outcome of those processes should be known in the near future.

Governments are currently the major source of project funding for the MCCG through a variety of environmentally focussed programs. Our submissions have to compete on merit with thousands of others and hence we are not always successful in obtaining financial support for a project. The 2011 review recommended that we "should actively seek commercial sponsors". We have conducted a successful project supported by Moggill Constructions P/L and we are keen to more fully exploit other opportunities for partnerships with the private sector in the future. We are always open to ideas on how we might best achieve this. It is worth remembering that funds used by organisations such as the MCCG leverage the very considerable inputs from our volunteers. In other words, a little investment goes a long way.

Malcolm Frost

Creek Health Monitoring Program

The Creek Health Monitoring Program (CHMP) is now in its second year of surveys with approximately 25-40 community volunteers participating in each survey. The program's objectives include assessing current aquatic and riparian conditions throughout the catchment, monitoring trends through time, identifying reaches of Moggill Creek which require particular attention and increasing community awareness.

Tim Howell and Camille Percival from Ecosure analysed and interpreted the results of the surveys (April & November 2011). These results have revealed that water quality in Moggill Creek is variable but generally reasonable and there is a good diversity of both macroinvertebrate and fish species. Fish species diversity did decline between April and November surveys; however, this could be attributed to a wide range of factors including instream scouring before the April sample reducing structural habitat and making the box traps more appealing as refuge or seasonal changes in water temperature. Low dissolved oxygen and slightly high pH were observed at a small number of sites in both surveys but appeared to have varied in regards to which sites between the surveys. However, it is still too early in the program to identify any particular spatial and temporal trends in aquatic ecosystem health. For further information and survey results see the MCCG website.

In order to maximise the outcomes of the CHMP program it is important that we continue carrying out the surveys twice a year. Each year that data is collected we gain a better understanding of the processes affecting Moggill Creek (including threats to aquatic and riparian ecosystems), seasonal cycles and changes in species distribution. While we continue to maintain a good standard of data and with repeated surveys we are also in a better position to inform land managers and bring about positive change. This requires an ongoing commitment from MCCG and its members to keep the program alive through participation in surveys on an ongoing or occasional basis. Feedback from volunteers suggests that it is an enjoyable and interesting experience and a great social occasion with some groups even opting for a get-together after the survey and a few glasses of wine! It also gives members and volunteers a greater understanding of the processes affecting their catchment and direct observation of changes at their sites over time.

The first survey for 2012 was due to be held in April. However, a rain event the day before the survey would have influenced the survey results and it has been postponed until Sunday 17 June 2012. This year we are grateful for the assistance of up to 30 students from the University of Queensland who have volunteered to give a hand on the day. (See photo on p.1)

So if you feel inspired by the great work that is being done and want to help, either on an ongoing basis or once-off, please contact Stacey Hodge or Anna Greig, Moggill Creek Rangers, on 3407 0052 or stacey.hodge@brisbane.qld.gov.au or anna.greig@brisbane.qld.gov.au.

Embu panic, a major grass pest along Moggill Creek

For quite a long time I have been puzzled by a strongly invasive grass weed along Moggill Creek, particularly noticeable near the Showground (see photo on p. 5). Clearly the species is *Megathyrsus maximus* (previously *Panicum maximum*). Unlike the forms known as green panic and typical Guinea grass, the form along Moggill Creek tends to root strongly at the nodes, even above the soil surface. Thus, once established, prostrate stems or ones flattened by flooding will root into the creek bed, forming trailing plants several metres long.

Closer inspection of the spikelets (the basic unit of a grass seed head) showed that it is not the common green panic, which has hairy spikelets (see photo on p. 5). Also, according to '*Suburban and Environmental Weeds of South-East Queensland*', it appeared not to be Guinea grass, described as „Along-lived (i.e. **perennial**) grass with short underground stems (i.e. **rhizomes**) forming tufted clumps and aboveground stems that are usually upright.“ Taking a specimen to the Queensland Herbarium, there was considerable interest, and it turned out to be the cultivar Embu, originating in Kenya and described as a form of Guinea grass with „Culms decumbent, rooting at nodes“. This cultivar has not been released in Australia for pasture purposes (although it has been studied in field experiments as early as the 1960s). It has rarely been collected in the wild in South-East Queensland. How it got to be so abundant in our Catchment I do not know.

The species *Megathyrsus maximus* was introduced to Australia from Africa for pasture purposes and is a useful species for that purpose. However, all forms are potentially weedy and need to be controlled where the objective is to restore natural habitat. The species is distinguished from native species of *Panicum* by its broad leaves and robustness and (from local *Panicum* species) by the whorl of branches at the base of the flower head (see photo on p. 5).

Control of all varieties of *Megathyrsus maximus* is best done by hand if the area is manageable, as this allows the identification and protection of natives, particularly where the weed grasses do not provide a complete cover. Alternatively actively growing plants may be sprayed with glyphosate, preferably after cutting them back, to reduce bulk and to promote active growth. Make sure to treat plants before flowering, to reduce likelihood of re-contamination by seed.

Bryan Hacker

Some herbicides have an undesirable persistence effect

A number of readily available herbicides persist in the soil for months, adversely affecting germination of desirable species. *Picloram* is the main active ingredient to avoid in overall or broad-scale foliar application of herbicides used to control woody weeds etc. where **Natural Regeneration** of broad-leaf native seedlings is expected. This is because when seeds of broad-leaved plants germinate they take up any remaining residual *picloram* in their root zone. The effect can be lethal, especially if the dose rate has been high enough or insufficient time has elapsed for microbial break-down to sub-lethal levels. Germinating legumes are particularly susceptible to *picloram* - Symptoms include cupping of the cotyledons [i.e. initial seed leaves] which can occur 6 months after application of the herbicide.

Therefore, *picloram* based herbicides should be avoided where germination of desirable broad-leaved species is anticipated. They include *Grazon Extra*, *Tordon Double Strength*, *Tordon 75-D* and *Fightback* as sprays; and *Tordon Granules*, *Access* and *Vigilant Gel* for stem application.

Suitable herbicides for the control of broad-leaved (dicot) weeds which do not damage grasses, and do not have undesirable persistence effects, are readily available in four categories of active ingredient:

2,4D amines, e.g. *Amicide*
Metsulfuron-methyl, e.g. *Brush-Off*
Fluroxypyr, e.g. *Starane Advanced*
Dicamba, e.g. *Kamba 500*

For further advice, carefully read herbicide labels, also see *Weeds of Southern Qld*, (reviewed in the Summer 2011 issue of this Newsletter)

Please note that Glyphosate, Metasulfuron-methyl and Fluroxy-pyr are the only herbicides that are authorised for use by volunteers on public land. Individuals wanting to use these chemicals on public land must have undertaken the relevant herbicide training. Brisbane City Council (BCC) offers free herbicide training through the Habitat Brisbane Program to registered volunteers. For more information, please contact your relevant BCC officer working in the Habitat Brisbane or Creek Ranger Programs.

Trevor Armstrong
Weeds Agronomist



▲
 Hairy alectryon - leaf and seedling (see p. 8)
 Photos: Bryan Hacker



Green panic flower head (above)
 Spikelet (below)



▲
 Embu panic invasion (see p. 4)
 Photos: Bryan Hacker



Learn by my mistakes

We put much planning, hard work and at times despair, in to the problems posed by some of our weeds; not least by climbers such as Cat's Claw, Madiera vine, asparagus and glycine. And rightly so. As climbers, they smother and kill trees, without which we don't have the essential skeletons of forests which we seek to save and restore. But these skeletons are fleshed out with many species of lesser stature. This article is concerned with the smallest of these, often making up more or less a ground cover of herbaceous species. And it about my experience, attempting to put back dry rain forest, as are many of our members.

I started with treeless land, and via some tree planting and much natural regeneration, which is largely of trees which are more abundant and whose seed is readily moved by birds or wind, I have a fairly satisfactory tree population. But the small species which should be here are few, some having perhaps been lost through past land management practices, or are rare and not readily moved by natural processes, or are not available from our nursery because we don't get seed. Thus there has been more or less bare ground which has been eagerly pounced on by the numerous (and increasing) escaping exotics, mainly horticultural introductions. These are hindering natural regeneration and displacing some desirable species which may have been there. My message here is that had I taken notice of new arrivals and removed them before they spread, I may have avoided my current dreadful infestations. If you see something unusual, give high priority to learning its identity and immediate removal if it is a weed.

Graeme Wilson

Advice on bush regeneration

As with other activities, bush regeneration has a national association, the Australian Association of Bush Regenerators, AABR. Accreditation is required for membership of AABR in order to ensure a high standard of practice amongst members. Generally new members are taught „best practice“ by existing experienced members, but it is also possible to be granted membership through an examination procedure. Following a three hour field assessment, covering principles of natural and assisted regeneration, ecology and plant identification, our Landcare Adviser, Bryan Hacker, has recently been successful in obtaining AABR membership. Bryan is available to advise on your property management problems on request (3374 1468).

Deerhurst Park/ Gap Creek Bushcare site and Wildlife Corridor

Deerhurst Park on Brookfield Road runs beside Gap Creek near Deerhurst Road. Section leader Mike Humphreys and his small team of volunteers have done a lot of work on this bushcare site so that there is a walkable track for some 800 metres or more that is well worth a visit. (See photo p 5) This is also the site of the trellis of Richmond Birdwing vines that was done as a cooperative venture between MCCG and the Richmond Birdwing Recovery Network, now Richmond Birdwing Conservation Network, RBCN. Many more birdwing vines continue to be planted throughout the site.

In April RBCN held a training day for Conservation Volunteers Australia at our MCCG Cottage and this was followed by a demonstration planting of birdwing vines at Deerhurst Park. Late April another small group of CVA volunteers spent a day at the site working on hand removing weeds (a continual problem on any bushcare site - private or public – as we all know). Mike Humphreys had collected samples of weed species so they would be recognised. The volunteers also concentrated on hand weeding around staked young plantings. They thoroughly enjoyed their work in a lovely bush setting.

You are invited to visit the park, see how far you can wander through the track beside the creek and note the work done and the work in progress.

Dale Borgelt

Changing Avifauna of Our Area

Recently I was looking through a stack of books and came across a long lost treasure, "Birds of Brisbane and Environs" This book was published in 1968 and was No 5 in a series of Queensland Museum Booklets. It was written by Donald P Vernon and illustrated by Mary E McKenzie and Susan M Hiley.

It is interesting reading the distribution and abundance of some species when the book was written compared with today. Obviously, Brisbane has grown and land use, especially in the outer suburbs, has changed.

These are direct quotations from the booklet, the italics are mine:

BRUSH TURKEY – "It was common close to the city years ago and is still common in rainforest areas at Mt Nebo and Mount Glorious. *Occasionally it is reported in outer urban areas where properties have suitable trees and scrub*".

GREY-CROWNED BABBLER – "This resident species is probably one of our most gregarious birds, for it is always seen in company with up to a dozen others. Parties often hop along the ground spreading their tails, and follow the leader as they run up bushes seeking insect food under leaves or bark. *Common in outer Brisbane suburbs such as Brookfield, Upper Mt. Gravatt or The Gap*" (See photo p 1)

JACKY WINTER – "This friendly flycatcher is well-known because of its habit of sitting on fence posts, or on the end of a dead branch from which it flies out seeking winged insects. This sedentary species is usually seen singly or in pairs, and appears to be more common in winter. Its numbers seem to have fallen off in the Brisbane area in recent years and this may be due to the use of pesticides on crops. *It is fairly common in suburbs like Moggill and Brookfield*". (See photo p 1)

The loss of the Babblers and Jacky Winters is disappointing; but hopefully we have improved our land management practices and will not drive any more species away.

Dawn Beck

Yolk-bellied snake-skink – Caught in Garden Modernisation Drama, Kenmore!!

Upon turning over some soil in the front recently, I unfortunately sliced through with a shovel, what I thought looked like a peculiar earthworm. Good intentions to create a veggie patch failed, but thankfully there were a few more unscathed. Upon further examination I knew this was probably some sort of legless lizard. So I searched looked through reptile identification books and helped narrow down the possibilities with the aid of a geographic search of the fauna recorded within 10km using the amazing online tool Atlas of Living Australia. *Et voila!* - a Yolk-bellied Snake-skink *Ophioscincus ophioscincus*. (Photo p 1) A very distinctive skink and unlikely confused with another species.

This skink is completely limbless, silvery white to pale brown with 4-6 lines of dashes on top and bright yellow to orange underside, giving rise to its name. They grow to about 130mm (97mm body length without tail) and have a blunt-tipped tail. As it is a burrowing skink, it has small eyes and a rounded snout with a waxy cuticle to protect it from abrasion from having to push through typically damp soil and compost.

It is confined to south-eastern Queensland where it can be found in rainforest and adjoining wet sclerophyll forest. Our front yard is anything but native; it has a typical contingent of introduced garden plants such as Foxtail Palm, Golden Cane Palm with an assortment of planted shrubs and environmental weeds. The garden edges are a row of small boulders which may be useful for the skinks to attain warmth. The skinks were found in dryish soil about 15cm below the surface, which also has a layer of old pine bark. Directly above that was a thick layer of environmental weeds such as Zebrina, Mother-in-law's Tongue, Fishbone Fern, Purple Succulent and Creeping Inchplant. Perhaps plants such as Zebrina may help to retain soil and litter moisture content, suitable enough to reduce the chance of desiccation of the skinks? And there were plenty of invertebrates including earthworms which the skinks feed on.

But now it comes to the crux of the matter – whether or not to continue the veggie patch into weedy territory which is also habitat for this little skink. I'm not advocating the retention of environmental weeds in gardens, but when one is faced with the prospect of destroying micro-habitats in our yards, then decision-making becomes a little difficult. Whatever the case, it is amazing and refreshing to see such a delicate and seemingly susceptible species persisting in an urban garden.

References:

A Complete Guide to Reptiles of Australia, Wilson & Swan (2010)
What lizard is that? Introducing Australia's lizards, Wilson & Swan (2009)
Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia, Cogger (2000)

Nic McCaffrey

Should we plant or sow our seeds?

I once thought that sowing was the correct word for putting out seeds, but planting was not. I was wrong. Sowing is the broadcasting of seeds by hand. Long ago it was the standard agricultural procedure for many crop species. Planting means placing (of anything) in required positions. Modern mechanized agriculture plants seeds, albeit by machinery.

At our nursery, we plant seed of some species by placing them individually in the mix. Most are sprinkled over the surface, more mix then being sprinkled over that. I doubt that the initial step qualifies as sowing, and therefore I am prepared to call this planting, for want of another term.

That leads to another question. Most of us depend greatly on “natural regeneration” in our forest, and refer to plants so arriving as “self sown”. The seed is certainly not planted nor is it sown in the strict sense of having been broadcast by us. Let’s leave this in the “too hard basket”!

The conclusion is that I am prepared to regard whatever we do with seed at the nursery as being planting. And meanwhile reflect that virtuous though it may be, some time can be lost in wondering whether we are using the correct words in communication..

Graeme Wilson

Hairy Alectryon

It always pays to keep your eyes open. As a general rule, hand weeding is far better than using herbicides, at least for lower growing plants and there are major advantages to developing an understorey comprising native grasses rather than exotic grasses. This last few months I have been delighted to spot six or eight seedlings which were instantly recognizable as the hairy alectryon, otherwise known as the hairy bird’s eye (*Alecryon tomentosus*). Even as tiny seedlings, they could clearly be identified, with their leaves with an even number of leaflets, these progressively larger towards the end of the leaf stalk (see photo on p. 5). These seedlings were only evident where there was no competition from competitive exotic grasses.

Hairy alectryon is quite common in our district, although not present on my ridgeline property. It is a small rainforest tree up to 15m tall, the young stems and leaves softly hairy. Leaves are up to 20 cm long, the evenly-numbered leaflets with irregularly toothed margins (see photo on p. 5). Flowers are small and are followed by hairy 1-3 lobed fruit about 10 mm long. Lobes open when the fruit is ripe to reveal a black seed partly covered by a bright red aril (hence the common name „hairy bird’s eye”). An aril is an expansion of the seed stalk, commonly edible and developed to attract birds as dispersal agents. Evidently there had been a fruiting tree not too far away which had attracted birds as the fruit ripened, the birds subsequently perching on my trees and leaving their droppings. The recent good seasons, combined with low competition, have contributed to the seedlings’ success.

Bryan Hacker

MCCG Annual Photography Competition: New Prize & Diary Dates

2012 will be the 14th year for the MCCG competition which encourages both adults and young persons to share their favourite photographs of native plants, animals, and people in the Brisbane catchments. The special themed category, with a prize donated by Steve Parish, this year challenges us all to capture an image of “My Favourite Place in the Catchment.”

Prizes to the value of over \$2,000 (over \$1,500 in cash) include the launch of a new award to be presented to an entrant who has not previously won a 1st, 2nd, or 3rd prize in the competition. Entry fees remain unchanged at only \$5 per photograph entered by an adult, and only \$2 for each photograph entered by a young person.

Entries must be submitted on Saturday 1st September (10am-2pm) at the Trustees’ room, next to the rear of Brookfield Hall, Brookfield Showgrounds (entry forms are now available on the website). Photographs will be displayed at Kenmore Village the following week.

Community events such as the MCCG photography competition thrive due to the involvement of local businesses and other supporters. Sincere thanks go to 4 MBS Classic FM, Breeze Photos, Brisbane College of Photography & Art, Brookfield Produce & Pet Pavilion, Ingredients Deli, The Local Bulletin, Judy Mackay Hair Design, Mitre10 Kenmore, Moggill Constructions, Pet Health Products, Steve Parish, The Pet Chalet, The Print Shoppe, Water Solutions, Cr Margaret de Wit, and Workout Indooroopilly.

Students, teachers, and parents are also reminded of the special competition for local schools, with the Lord Mayor’s Perpetual Shield going to the best school entry. Plus, the winning school also receives \$100 donated by Dr Bruce Flegg MP to go towards environmentally focused material for the school library. This competition is open to all schools in the Pullenvale Ward. Make sure your school gets full details available from MCCGPhoto@gmail.com

Dale Borgelt