



MOUNT LOFTY RANGES GRASSY WOODLAND NETWORK

NEWSLETTER 1

MAY 2005

Editorial

The idea for this network evolved from a workshop I attended in Canberra in 2000 on Conservation Management Networks, which were being trialled in NSW on White Box Grassy Woodlands. Then last year I was struck by the number of near metropolitan groups working in grey box woodlands and wondered if they knew that others were working next door on exactly the same issues. Now thanks to a Wildlife Conservation Grant we have the opportunity to trial the concept in the Mt Lofties.

I have been gratified by the number of people and groups who have expressed an interest in joining the Network and trust that most of your expectations will be met. I have included a questionnaire in this first newsletter to enable you to give feedback on the newsletter and any areas/issues that you would like to see covered in workshops or future newsletters.

There will be regular features in all the newsletters – eg the Weed of the Trimester, Handy Weeding Hints and Weed/Native Lookalikes– but I would love you to write something about your site or a new technique that others would benefit from.

I also want you to feel that you can contact me about any matter – however small – my details are on the back page.

Penny Paton

Handy Weeding Hints

New Ideas about *Monadenia* (African Weed Orchid) Weeding

I am now of the view that one should take an "absolutely no more seeds" approach to weeding *Monadenia*. If time is limited [as it usually is for volunteers, private landholders, and Heritage Agreement owners] I would recommend pulling

flowering heads out vertically from the bulbs and not digging the tubers, a process that is 10 times quicker. Decide the amount of time you are prepared to spend on *Monadenia* weeding in any one year and then spend 90% pulling and the last 10% digging. If you run short of time, revert to pulling. Reasoning: If you dig the tubers as a priority and you can only spare enough time to dig 50% of the tubers, you are going backwards because of the prolific seed production of the ones to which you do not get. I make the assumption based on anecdotal information that pulling the heads will kill a few plants, will exhaust the bulbs of others over time, and as much headway can be made by pulling and the "absolutely no more seeds" approach as by digging.

Thanks to Ann Prescott – Bush Management Adviser, MLR

Bushland Condition Monitoring Manual

Many of us work to improve the condition of remnant vegetation through active on-ground work. But how do we tell that bushland weeding, for example, is having a positive effect on our precious native flora and fauna? How can we find out if we need to change our current management? How can we demonstrate to others that we are making a difference?

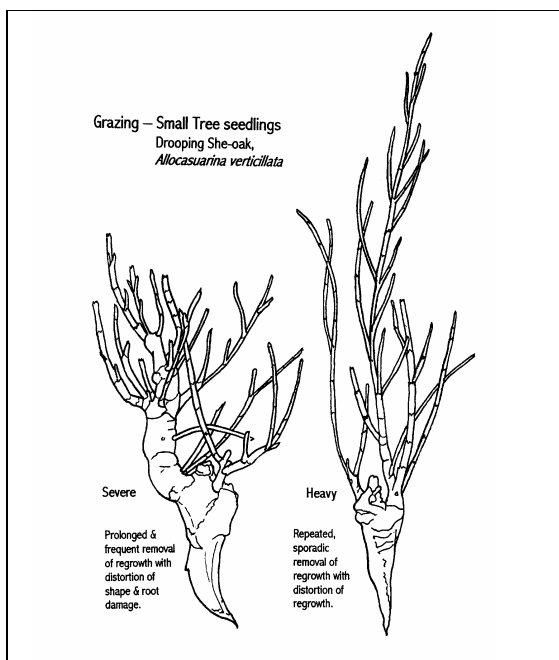
The "Bushland Condition Monitoring Manual" has been developed by the Nature Conservation Society of South Australia specifically to help answer these questions. With the aid of interpretive diagrams and text, the Manual allows the user to objectively score ten different indicators of bushland condition. These indicators are dynamic attributes of bushland such as plant species diversity, abundance of weeds, regeneration, tree health, and plant structural diversity.

Repeated assessment over time will allow bush managers to see if the condition of the bushland is improving, deteriorating or remaining stable. Learning

how to assess condition also focuses attention on aspects of our bushland that might otherwise go unnoticed, and increases our understanding of how our work is helping to protect bushland.

The Manual will be available in the first week of May from the NCSSA. However, it is recommended that users undertake a standardised training course to help them generate reliable results. These courses run over an afternoon and a subsequent day. It is hoped that, with the support of the Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resource Management Group, a series of these workshops for volunteers will be held in spring 2005 at a number of sites across the Mount Lofty Ranges.

For further details on the Manual and training courses, contact Tim Milne on 8223 6301.



The presence of stunted, woody She-oak seedlings is an indicator that overgrazing may be a factor affecting bushland condition. The Bushland Condition Monitoring Manual uses diagrams such as this to help judge the current condition of remnant vegetation. Picture by Janet Pedler.

2005 Bush For Life Workshops

Date	Location
Tues 10th May	Hilton
Wed 18th May	Noarlunga
Sat 21st May	Belair

Thurs 26th May	Morialta
Thurs 9th June	Aberfoyle Park
Sat 25th June	Mt Barker
Sat 2nd July	Salisbury
Thurs 14th July	Balhannah
Thurs 21st July	Willunga
Sat 30th July	Gawler
Wed 10th Aug	Stirling
Sat 20th Aug	Mt Barker
Wed 7th Sept	Gumeracha
Sat 24th Sept	Belair

Hurry! Workshops fill fast! These workshops are free for Trees For Life members.

To book phone 8372 0150

Handy books on native grasses

Gibbs, J. & Gibbs, R. 2001. Grass Identification Manual – for everyone. Native Grass Resource Group Inc. – South Australia.

Mitchell, M. 1996. Native Grasses. Identification handbook for temperate Australia. Agmedia, East Melbourne, Vic.

Dashorst, G.M. & Jessop, J.P. 1990. Plants of the Adelaide plains and hills. Kangaroo Press P L, Kenthurst, NSW. This book includes some native and exotic grasses; there is a later edition.

Changes in Fauna of Sturt Gorge RP – 1970-2002

Regular observation of birds in Sturt Gorge RP and surrounding open land over 30 years show a total count of 116 species and that 7 bird species have disappeared, 16 have declined in abundance and a further 4 have appeared and established. Some of the birds that have disappeared are Black-chinned Honeyeater, Zebra Finch and Brown Falcon and birds that have declined markedly include Dusky Woodswallow, most of the cuckoos and Yellow-rumped Thornbill. As well two species that an observer noted as common in a list made in the early 1970s – Brown Treecreeper and Scarlet Robin – are now extinct. Given the demise of the Brown Treecreeper population from Belair National Park several years ago, this is hardly surprising.

Changes in other fauna have also been noted over the last 30 years. Several small groups of Western

Grey Kangaroos have been noted over the last year whereas prior to this only single animals were seen very occasionally. Numbers of Eastern Blue-tongued Lizards, Shinglebacks, Eastern Brown Snakes and Red-bellied Black Snakes appear to be falling – the former two are now rarely seen. Cunningham’s Skink and a legless lizard species have disappeared. The Red Fox is still common and the occasional Hare is seen.

Thanks to Pat Bowie of the Friends of Sturt Gorge Recreation Park and several other observers for the information on which this article is based.

Weed/Native Lookalikes

Trees For Life’s *Releaf* includes articles on weeds that look like native plants and I won’t repeat these examples, except to give a reference to them here (see below). It is important to be aware of these similar plants so that you don’t pull out natives by mistake – remember the golden rule: **don’t weed out anything unless you are 100% confident of its identity**. I do want to add one example that *Releaf* has not covered yet. At my sites in grey box woodland at Happy Valley reservoir there are many (too many!) olive seedlings and when they are very small they look very like small examples of the native sweet apple-berry *Billardiera cymosa*. Several times I have had to look twice and feel the leaves to be sure that the plant I have been about to pull is an olive. Apple-berry leaves are softer and not as shiny as olive leaves. The other plant that can be confused with apple-berry is sollya *Sollya heterophylla*, a native to Western Australia that is spreading from garden plantings through the hills. Although both can have blue flowers, sollya flowers do not form tubes as apple-berries do.

Previous *Releaf* articles have dealt with the following natives and weeds that look similar:

<u>Weed</u>	<u>Native</u>
African boxthorn/	tree violet
coolatai/tambookie grass/lemon-scented and red-leg grass	
gorse/ natives with yellow-orange pea flowers	
Erica/ prickly cryptandra.	

plantain *Plantago lanceolata*/native plantains *Plantago* spp.

broom/ large-leaf bush pea

sweet pittosporum/ native apricot

rosemary grevillea/ lavender grevillea

feather grass/ brush wire-grass

South African daisy/ native *Senecio* spp.

Galenia/ berry saltbush

If you would like a copy of any of these, please let

Penny know and she will get them to you.

Weed of the Trimester

Panic veldt grass *Ehrharta erecta*

Releaf No 94 (Autumn 2005) had an excellent article on veldt grasses and control methods, dealing with three species – two perennial (perennial veldt grass *E. calycina* and pyp grass *E. villosa*) and one annual (annual veldt grass *E. longifolia*). Enid Robertson has drawn my attention to another veldt grass – the aptly named panic veldt grass - that she is concerned about. This is another perennial species with a rhizomatous nature that is used as pasture (Gibbs 2001). Enid has recorded it at H K Fry and Engelbrook Reserves as well as along Sherbourne Road at Blackwood.

How well do you know your site?

We all get great joy from working on our grassy woodland sites but how well do you know your site? For example, do you recognize all the butterflies or birds that flit about when you are on your hands and knees pulling out that weed? Do you know all the native plants on your site and do you have them listed? I believe that you can get more than just a glow of satisfaction from bushcare – it should also be an avenue for personal growth, e.g. to learn more about many aspects of natural history and/or supply you with opportunities to become environmental advocates.

How can you do this? Take the time before or during weeding to walk over your site, noting flowering plants, new weeds, fauna, feral bee hives, rabbit warrens etc. (and at the same time easing that aching lower back or knees!) Another way is to have an exercise book about your site, in which you document

* the native and weed species

- * how much effort you put in on any day & approximately how many weeds you removed
- * birds, butterflies and other fauna
- * new plants recognised with a description of where they were or a GPS recording
- * anything else that takes your fancy (e.g. I noted at Happy Valley Reservoir this year that there were large numbers of seedling golden wattles and in the early autumn huge amounts of lerp on the grey box – an unusual occurrence)

If you don't know what the animals are then invite a person with those skills to your next weeding day and get them to document them for you & begin teaching you how to recognize them. If you don't recognize a plant, take a small piece and take it to the Herbarium or take a photo and show it to an expert. Butterflies are easier than birds if you can get a good look and there are some excellent books now with good colour plates.

Armed with your greater knowledge you will be more observant about the impacts that weeding is having at your site. For example, if Superb Fairy-wrens are using dense olive patches perhaps you should be more cautious about removing the whole patch and stage it over several to many years to enable native shrubs to recolonize and provide the birds with habitat. Alternatively if you are returning a grassy woodland to its pre-European state by weeding out dense boneseed and olives and there are Noisy Miners nearby, will your weeding make the site attractive to them and lead to the exclusion of other more desirable native birds?

Penny Paton

Why are grassy woodlands important?

Grassy ecosystems were widespread in all south-eastern states and have been largely modified due to the ease with which they could be exploited for agriculture. **Of the 2.4 million hectares of temperate woodland in South Australia in 1836, only 18% remained in 1990 and most of this was in small fragmented blocks with less than 5% of the original extent formally protected** (Paton *et al.* 2000). The Mt Lofty Ranges is no exception – while 85% of all native vegetation has been cleared, grassy woodlands are

disproportionately represented in these figures and remnants are small and suffer from many degrading influences, e.g. grazing by native and introduced herbivores, weed invasion, lack of recruitment and incremental clearing.

The flow-on effects have led to the demise or decline of many animal species. Furthermore the extinction debt means that the results of clearing and degradation of habitat over the past 50 years will continue to have irreversible consequences for birds over the coming years. The situation is so grim for birds that, without intervention, we stand to lose 35-50 species of breeding birds from the Mt Lofty Ranges, many of them woodland species (Ford and Howe 1980).

So there is a need both to protect and restore existing remnants, as well as to revegetate land that once supported grassy woodlands. Even though you may feel that the site that you look after is small, these small sites are important – not just for their intrinsic value, but also because these carefully managed and restored sites give us a window into the past. These small 'gems' will become the benchmark against which we can measure restoration efforts – both in managing native vegetation as well as in revegetating large areas. Without these restored and revegetated larger areas (1000s of hectares), the fauna that depends on grassy woodlands will continue to decline, some species to extinction in the Mt Lofties.

References

- Ford, H.A. & Howe, R.W. 1980. The future of birds in the Mount Lofty Ranges. *Sth Aust. Ornith.* **28**:85-89.
- Paton, D.C., Prescott, A.M., Davies, R.J.-P. & Heard, L. 2000. The distribution, status and threats to temperate woodlands in South Australia in R.J. Hobbs and C.J. Yates (eds) *Temperate eucalypt woodlands in Australia: biology, conservation, management and restoration*. Surrey Beatty & Sons, Chipping Norton.

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