

Tarcutta Valley Landcare



Landcare
Murrumbidgee

Committee's report

Peter McCallum, Acting Chair and Treasurer, Tarcutta Valley Landcare Group

Welcome to our first newsletter for 2015. In view of costings, newsletters will be published only for the Autumn and Spring periods.

We must give Jenny Cowie and her team a big special thank you for their effort in the development of the Tarcutta Walking Track. Jenny has found it very difficult in dealing with Wagga Wagga City Council and the Lands Office. Now it would appear part of the proposed track has been transferred to the Aboriginal Lands Council. Included in the transfer area is the town water tank.

Funding has been obtained through Murrumbidgee Landcare's Cross Property Planning project for a fox baiting program. See page 2 for more information, and keep an eye out for flyers in your mail box.

Call for new members

We are still looking for new members for our Landcare Group. Some of us are getting a bit long in the tooth, and an influx of new members would be great for the area and the environment.

Some of the benefits of being a Landcare member include:

- Access to group funding opportunities, to assist you with on-ground works on your property;
- Opportunities to learn from others in the area about ways to improve the sustainability and production capacity of your property;
- Invitations to get involved in free field days, workshops and social events
- Information and assistance from Murrumbidgee Landcare officers on NRM, pest and weed control, revegetation and sustainable management;
- Free access to the Landcare library.

If you would like to learn more or get involved, please contact Peter McCallum (Acting Chair of Tarcutta Valley Landcare Group): (02) 69 289 563. You are also welcome to come to our monthly meetings, held on the third Tuesday of each month at Tarcutta RSL, from 7pm.



A good night was had by all at the Tarcutta Valley Landcare Group and Cross Property Planning project Christmas dinner, held at the Humula Sports Club

Fencing demonstration day

In conjunction with the Cross Property Planning project, Waratah will be hosting a fencing demonstration day in the area, featuring fencing expert Neville Prince.

Practical demonstrations will include alternative fencing solutions, labour saving ideas and some handy tips and tricks.

The day will be held in the week commencing 11th March. For more info, please contact: Jacinta Christie: 0431 953 778, or jchristie@mli.org.au.



Fox control - Legally it's time to get on board

Jacinta Christie, CPP Project Coordinator, Murrumbidgee Landcare

In December 2014, the NSW Government officially declared the European Red Fox a pest species in NSW. This means that there is now a legal requirement for public land managers and private land holders to control foxes on their land. Failure to comply could result in a fine of approximately \$8,500 from the Local Land Services. (LLS)

Foxes are endemic in the Riverina LLS region, and assuming there are 4 foxes per square kilometre in a 5 kilometre radius of any farm house, there could be up to 312 foxes.

Toby O'Brien, Senior Biosecurity Officer with the Riverina LLS, says the best way to comply with the new Pest Control Order is to participate in a coordinated group control program.

A group control program is where land holders in a region get together and undertake fox control at the same time, to reduce the fox population on a larger, landscape scale - the more participants, the more effective the control.

Says Toby, "Participation in a group program is also the most cost effective way to reduce fox numbers".

Landscape scale control programs aim to ensure a maximum impact on fox populations, and reduce the chance of re-invasion or immigration from other areas.

1080 baiting is the most effective way to reduce fox numbers. To receive 1080 fox baits, land holders must have a valid chemical users card (AQF3), or have

undertaken a 1080/Pindone training course conducted by the LLS or LHPA within the last 5 years.

To this end, the Tarcutta Valley Landcare Group and Murrumbidgee Landcare's Cross Property Planning project are coordinating a group fox control program for land holders in the Tarcutta and Humula areas. Land holders who are involved can receive up to 100 free or subsidised baits. See the box below for more information.

To register your interest, please contact:

- Peter McCallum: (02) 69 289 563,
- Ainsley Wolter: 0410 724 231, or
- Jacinta Christie: jchristie@mli.org.au, or 0431 953 778.



Managing foxes and rabbits in Tarcutta and Humula

The Tarcutta Valley Landcare Group, in conjunction with the Cross Property Planning project, is offering land holders the opportunity to participate in a whole of landscape baiting program across the Tarcutta/Humula area.

FREE and subsidised baits

Free baits will be provided to land holders who are members of the Tarcutta Valley Landcare Group or the Cross Property Planning group. Baits can also be purchased at a **50% discount** by other land holders in the area.

The number of baits is limited to 100 per property, with the baits to be distributed on-farm at the end of March to land holders who have registered their interest.

Registration: To register your interest, please contact Peter McCallum: (02) 69 289 563, or Ainsley Wolter: 0410 724 231.

FREE chemical accreditation

Free 1080/Pindone chemical accreditation training will be offered through the Riverina LLS, for land holders who require accreditation. Limited to 20 land holders.

FREE rabbit control workshop

A free workshop on current rabbit management options will be presented by Dr Tarnya Cox from the Invasive Animals CRC. Topics will include Pindone, 1080 baiting, the new strain of Calicivirus, follow-up control, and burrow/harbour destruction.

Date: Thursday 26th March

Time: Chemical accreditation training: 9.00 to 12.00 pm
Rabbit control workshop: 1.00 to 2.30 pm
Free BBQ lunch from 12 noon

Venue: Humula Sports Club

RSVP: By March 24th, to Jacinta Christie: 0431 953 778, or jchristie@mli.org.au.

Addressing gully erosion at “Clearview”

Jacinta Christie, CPP Project Coordinator, Murrumbidgee Landcare

Bob and Nareen Schofield farm their 735 hectare property, “Clearview”, at Westbrook. In 2013 they applied for funds through Murrumbidgee Landcare’s Cross Property Planning (CPP) project to stabilise an eroded gully area on their property.

The CPP project, which commenced in mid-2012, supports land holders to implement a range of on-ground works including: fencing and planting wildlife corridors, fencing and planting to stabilise gullies and creek lines, planting scattered paddock trees, creating biodiverse dams, and fencing and enhancing existing remnant native vegetation patches.

The gully on Bob and Nareen’s property was rapidly becoming more degraded with each heavy downfall of rain, so their aim was to stabilise the area.

They began by fencing it to remove stock, which would allow regeneration of native grasses. They also introduced several new species into the area, including Golden wattle, Blackwood, River She-oak, phragmites, couch, kikuyu, phalaris, ryegrass and clovers.

With the help of family, approximately 3.5 hectares were fenced, with plain wire used for the top wire (rather than barb) to make the fence ‘wildlife friendly’.

Since the removal of stock from the area, Bob has witnessed a gradual improvement, with good ground cover and regeneration of native grasses. In 2015, through the assistance of the CPP project, Bob hopes to address further areas of erosion on “Clearview”, to continue his good work.



The eroded gully area on Bob and Nareen Schofield’s property, before any works



Family help to fence off an area of around 3.5 ha around the eroded gully



The gully area after it has been fenced off, to control stock access



Native grasses are already regenerating in the fenced-off area

Conserving reptiles in agricultural landscapes: Are we making a difference?

Dr Damian Michael, Conservation and Landscape Ecology Group, Fenner School of Environment and Society, the Australian National University

Reptiles in Box Gum Grassy Woodlands

The Box Gum Grassy Woodland (BGGW) in south-eastern Australia is a nationally important agricultural region, but it is also a highly threatened ecological vegetation community. This type of woodland community grows on the deep fertile soils along the inland slopes of the Great Dividing Range, and is home to various iconic woodland animals, many of which are threatened with extinction due to habitat loss.

With over 80 species, snakes and lizards are a major group of animals that occur in the BGGW. Several species are well known, such as the bearded dragon, goanna and brown snake, but the vast majority are secretive, only come out at night or spend the majority of time sheltering beneath logs, rocks or in loose soil. Over the past two decades, our group has been conducting research on snakes and lizards in farming landscapes to better understand their distribution, habitat use and response to habitat restoration and native vegetation management.

Finding reptiles in agricultural landscapes

How exactly do you study animals that are notoriously hard to find? One method we use is to place artificial refuges, such as sheets of tin, railway sleepers and roofing tiles in woodland remnants to attract different species. As most farmers would know, snakes will readily use scrap iron, but seldom seen species such as the curl snake and tunnel-dwelling lizards such as the tessellated gecko will shelter beneath railway sleepers, and the olive legless lizard and hooded scaly-foot are easily detected using roof tiles. We periodically inspect the refuges and record information on species presence and surrounding habitat features.

To compliment this method, we actively search for reptiles by scanning logs and tree trunks for basking



Artificial refuges of sheets of tin, railway sleepers and roof tiles are placed in remnants to attract different reptile species

animals and carefully lift rocks in search of sheltering species. Even though we have over 10,000 railway sleepers, roof tiles and sheets of tin spread across our studies, reptile detections are often low and it can take decades to build up a picture of what is going on in this group.

Do tree plantings help reptiles?

One of our key findings is that reptiles use habitats in very different ways than birds or possums, and strategies to improve 'biodiversity' do not necessarily benefit all reptiles. For example, over the past 20 years a huge amount of restoration work in the form of tree plantings has created key habitat for threatened woodland birds - and population numbers of many bird species have steadily grown. However, we found that only a small handful of reptiles use tree plantings. Most reptile species that use plantings are habitat generalists, capable of moving through cleared pasture, or species that were present onsite before restoration works commenced.

However we do find more species of reptiles in tree plantings if other key habitats are available or included in the plantings, such as dead trees, fallen timber and native tussock grass. We also find that dense tree plantings on rocky hill tops can reduce lizard populations because of the increased shade levels caused by canopy cover, which potentially changes the thermal environment and reduces basking areas. Based on these findings, we recommend that plantings are widely spaced in rocky areas and incorporate more low growing shrubs instead of all eucalypts.

The value of granite outcrops

Recognising that rocky areas provide important reptile habitat on farms led us to explore in more detail the ecological values of granite outcrops. In many agricultural



Granite outcrops support more reptile species than similar sized areas of remnant vegetation

(article continued from previous page)

areas, these islands of rock are completely surrounded by grazing and cropping land. Our surveys identified that granite outcrops, or inselbergs as they are often called (which means island mountain), support more reptile species than similar-sized patches of remnant vegetation.

Many of the species that live on granite outcrops live entirely on rocks, including several species of gecko and the tree crevice skink. Other species such as the iconic inland carpet python, rely entirely on rocky outcrops for winter hibernation and as a source of rabbits (one of their primary food items in the absence of medium-sized native mammals which once roamed the landscape). Rocky outcrops also provide important ecological services which have production benefits, including contributing minerals to the soil, providing ephemeral springs and cycling nutrients and providing shelter for stock.

However, outcrop vegetation is often degraded by over-grazing and competition by invasive weeds. Fencing out livestock is one way to help improve outcrop vegetation and reptile habitat. Unfortunately, fencing is expensive and the small size of many outcrops means that they are not suitable for inclusion in land covenants or native vegetation management incentive programs – the focus of our recent long-term monitoring programs.

Ongoing research to help conserve reptiles

Across the BGGW, we are comparing reptile numbers in areas that are excluded from livestock grazing, or receive only winter grazing to reduce annual grass biomass, with areas that are set stocked throughout the year. Although results are preliminary, we found that some species such as small nocturnal snakes increased as a result of changes in grazing pressure (probably due to reduced trampling and vibrations), and some species such as Boulenger's skink and the ragged snake-eyed skink increased as a result of fallen timber retention.

However, for the majority of reptile species in the BGGW we are yet to see any significant changes. We believe this is partially due to the very specific habitat requirements of many species and gaps in the understanding of how to improve critical habitat for this diverse group. For example, some species are associated with shallowly-embedded surface rocks (eg the threatened pink-tailed legless lizard), or flaking bark of large eucalypt trees (eg arboreal geckos), or flaking rock in contact with bedrock (eg rock-dwelling geckos and snakes). Indeed, bush rock collection and the loss of large paddocks trees continues to have a major effect on reptile populations in the BGGW.

We hope that our research will in the future be useful for developing financial incentive schemes that target critical resources used by reptiles before any of these species are added to the threatened species list.



Top: Olive legless lizard (Delma inornata)

Middle: Dwyer's snake (a small nocturnal snake)

Bottom: Boulenger's skink (Morethia boulengeri)

Tree planting calendar

Jayfields Nursery

Successful preparation is the key to successful planting

Summer

Order your trees and shrubs

- Order plants early to guarantee supply - December/January is best
- Select species which are local to your area, and/or suitable for the situation.

Autumn

Rip tree lines

- Rip before the Autumn break, while the ground is dry, to get deep shattering of the soil
- Rip lines 4 metres apart, at a minimum depth of 45 cm
- Don't rip under the drip-line of existing trees
- Mound in wet areas
- Break up large clods, as they can cover phalaris plants thus reducing winter spray effectiveness.

Spray herbicide

- Spray any couch grass areas with Glyphosate before frost and 10 days after rain
- Spray phalaris and cocksfoot one month after the Autumn break, when plants are actively growing. These plants are very hard to kill so seek appropriate advice on sprays and rates.

Winter

Knock down weeds and apply residual herbicide

- Spray at least 3-4 weeks prior to planting, to control competition throughout Spring
- For normal annual weed and pasture species, spray with Glyphosate, plus a suitable residual herbicide. Glyphosate alone will not achieve adequate weed control
- Simazine, a residual herbicide, has been used extensively with great success in weed control in the past (note: plant back period on Simazine is a minimum of 3 weeks)
- Please refer to product labels or a reputable chemical advisor for rate and use details.

Control rabbits and hares

- Do this before planting, to avoid the need for labour-intensive and expensive tree guards
- Coordinate with neighbours if possible.

Inspect rip lines for regrowth

- Do this one week prior to planting, and respray if needed with Glyphosate only.

Winter/Spring

Plant seedlings

- Plant mid-July to mid-September, depending on rainfall and soil type
- Plant one month after spraying
- Plant seedlings at least 4 x 4 metres apart for a combination of trees and shrubs, up to a maximum of 625 seedlings/ha.

Check plants

- For the first week after planting, make sure you check your plants for vermin or stock damage, or stock entry to planting areas
- Watch regularly for grasshoppers, particularly in dry years - spray if they are causing damage. Use suitable methods to control, and seek advice if necessary
- Through Spring and early Summer, check your plants regularly to make sure there are no weeds within half a metre of the plants
- Weed control throughout the first Spring and into Summer is the single most important element affecting tree survival and growth.

Further information

For further information, contact Jayfields Nursery: www.jayfieldsnursery.com.au, or (02) 60 367 235.



Fascinating facts about bats!

Australasian Bat Night is a series of events occurring throughout March and April, aimed at showing people the fascinating world of bats and promoting their conservation. It is organised by the Australasian Bat Society, a non-profit organisation which aims to promote the conservation and study of bats in Australasia.

To celebrate Australasian Bat Night, we thought we'd share some fun facts about bats. These facts are taken from the Australasian Bat Society's website, which is full of interesting information and resources on everything to do with bats. Check it out at: www.ausbats.org.au.

- **All species of bat found in Australia are native** - none are introduced. There are approximately 90 species of bats in Australia, and around 1,200 species around the world, in every environment except the poles.
- **There are two kinds of bats:** large flying-foxes (or fruit-eating bats), and small insect-eating bats (often called microbats)



- **Bats are the only mammals that can fly.** Their wings are modified hands; they have the same arm and hand bones as humans, but with greatly elongated fingers. They have a thin, elastic membrane that stretches between their fingers and is joined to their body and legs
- **Microbats use a sonar system called echolocation.** They emit ultrasonic pulses of sound, and use the echoes to 'see' a clear picture of obstacles to avoid and insects to catch. The echolocation calls of most species of microbats are well outside our hearing range
- **Flying-foxes don't echolocate.** They use their good eyesight and sense of smell to find their food. They do, however, make a lot of social calls when they interact with each other during the day in the camp and at night while feeding
- **Bats can fly large distances.** Flying-foxes migrate thousands of kilometres to find areas with fruiting or flowering trees, and some cave-roosting microbats migrate hundreds of kilometres to special maternity caves
- **Microbats eat a lot!** Flying takes considerable energy. As a result they eat up to three-quarters of their own body weight in insects in a night
- **Bats are natural aerial acrobats!** While most bats catch insects in their mouths, they can also catch insects in their wing membrane, flick them into the tail membrane, and then grab them with their mouth, all while in flight.

Left: A Gould's long-eared bat (Nyctophilus gouldi) in flight showing the 'hand-wing' (photo by Terry Reardon)

Autumn climate outlook for the Tarcutta Valley and region

Robbie Lennard, Wagga Bureau of Meteorology office

Temperatures: Autumn days and nights are likely to be warmer than normal, with a 65% likelihood of maximum temperatures being above the long-term median, and an 80% likelihood of minimum temperatures being above the long-term median. For more information: www.bom.gov.au/climate/outlooks/#/temperature/summary.

Rainfall: There is an equal likelihood of Autumn rainfall being higher or lower than the long-term median of around 116 mm (Tarcutta) or 136 mm (Humula). For more information: www.bom.gov.au/climate/outlooks/#/rainfall/summary.

El Niño: The tropical Pacific Ocean has eased away from the borderline El Niño observed during late 2014. Overall, the tropical Pacific region remains neutral. However, the late summer to early autumn period is the time of year when ENSO events naturally decay. Beyond May, international models surveyed by the Bureau indicate that El Niño-like ocean temperatures are likely to return. For more information: www.bom.gov.au/climate/enso.

This seasonal outlook is based on data available at the end of February 2015. For further info, and regularly updated predictions, check out the Bureau of Meteorology seasonal outlook web pages provided.

Coming events

Tarcutta Valley Landcare Group meetings

Landcare group meetings are held on the third Tuesday of the month, from 7.00 pm, at the Tarcutta RSL. All community members are welcome to attend! For more information, please contact the group (see contact details at right)

Fair Food film screening

Wednesday 11th March, 6.30 pm, Elements (Wagga Botanic Gardens restaurant). This film has been produced by the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (ASFA). Nick Rose, ASFA Coordinator, will also be coming to talk about the local Riverina food movement. Cost is \$15pp, including food prepared by chef Adam McLean using food sourced from Eat Local Thursday. RSVP to Pennie Scott: 0427 441 107

Fungi: An introduction to a curious kingdom

Wednesday 18th March, 10.30 am to 4.30 pm, Tumut Racecourse. This workshop will introduce the diversity, ecology and curiosities of the fungi kingdom. It will include an interactive and illustrated seminar, featuring fungal specimens from the local area, followed by a foray to search for species of interest. Cost for Landcare members is \$25pp (\$45pp for non-members). Places are limited. RSVP to Cherie White: (02) 69 411 402, or cherie.white@lls.nsw.gov.au

Free 1080/Pindone chemical accreditation training

Thursday 26th March, 9.00 am to 12.00 pm followed by BBQ lunch, Humula Sports Club. Free training for land holders who require accreditation (see p 2 of this newsletter for more info). Places are limited to 20 land holders, so registration is essential. RSVP by 24th March to Jacinta Christie: jchristie@mli.org.au, or 0431 953 778

Free rabbit control workshop

Thursday 26th March, 1.00 pm to 2.30 pm (BBQ lunch from 12 noon), Humula Sports Club. This free workshop will cover current rabbit management options, including Pindone, 1080 baiting, the new strain of Calicivirus, follow-up control, and burrow/harbour destruction (see p2 of this newsletter for more info). RSVP by 24th March to Jacinta Christie: jchristie@mli.org.au, or 0431 953 778

Fencing demonstration day, featuring Waratah's Neville Prince

Week beginning 11th May. In conjunction with the Cross Property Planning project, Waratah will be hosting a fencing demonstration day in the area, featuring fencing expert Neville Prince. The day will feature practical demonstrations including: alternative fencing solutions, labour saving ideas and some handy tips and tricks. For more info: Jacinta Christie jchristie@mli.org.au, or 0431 953 778

Key contacts

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If you have any questions or comments about this newsletter, or would like to contribute any ideas, please contact Nicole Maher (Newsletter Editor): nmaher@mli.org.au, or (02) 69 310 981.

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