The Fort Bushland Reserve

October 2010 Notes – by John Lahey

In early August I did a trial spraying with Starane at a concentration of 3 ml per litre to test its effectiveness on Cat's claw creeper and Ochna and to check that it did not harm our native grasses and other monocots. While it took almost 8 weeks to have full effect it does seem to have been reasonably successful. About 80 to 90 % of these two weed species seem to have been killed and the herbicide appears to have had no detrimental effect on the Lomandra, Dianella and native grasses other than *Ottochloa gracillima*. The *Ottochloa* was defoliated but not killed and is now starting to grow new leaves and appears to be otherwise unharmed. Of course it may take up to six months before we can be sure that the underground tubers on the Cat's claw have been destroyed. Following these results, I have started spraying the weeds in the bushcare area below the picnic ground with a slightly increased concentration of Starane of 4 ml per litre. I'm hoping that this might give a 100% weed kill but still have no detrimental effect on the monocots.

This month *Tetragonia tetragonioides* was added to the list of native plants growing in the reserve.

Tetragonia tetragonioides (Native Spinach, New Zealand Spinach, Warrigal Greens)

This is a prostrate sprawling plant with soft stems and leaves. Interestingly several seedlings have appeared in the last month presumably from seeds which have remained dormant for many years under the carpet of cat's claw creeper.

It is a "bush tucker" plant and may be used as a substitute for spinach. It was widely used as such during the early years of European settlement in Australia. It contains a high level of oxalic acid that is leached out in boiling water. The water in which it is boiled must be discarded as it is toxic.

Oplismenus aemulus (Beard grass)

It is pleasing to see hundreds of *Oplismenus aemulus* seedlings germinating in the restoration area. This grass is now becoming more common across the cleared areas of the reserve as recovery gathers momentum. This species can be readily separated from the more common *Oplismenus imbecillis* by its much broader leaf. It is also a more robust plant.

Clerodendrum tomentosum (Hairy Clerodendrum, Hairy-leaved Lollybush, Downy Chance Tree)
Refer October and December 2007 Notes on *Clerodendrum floribundum*

In the Reserve there are a number of plants of *Clerodendrum tomentosum* and/or *Clerodendrum floribundum*. I must admit that I have some difficulty with the separation of these two species as it seems to be based entirely on the degree of hairiness of the leaves and calyx. In all other respects the species seem to be identical. The plant below, which I believe to be *Clerodendrum tomentosum* because it has hairy leaves, is high on the southern bank of the erosion gully in about the middle of the Reserve. It is flowering profusely this year and should look spectacular if it fruits well when it will be covered in black seeds each surrounded by a bright red calyx.

Aseroe rubra (Anemone stinkhorn)

This fungus is common in the Reserve feeding on mulch and other rotting vegetation and appearing after rain. This one was growing in the bottom of the erosion gully and the recent rains had washed away the surrounding soil leaving the complete fungus structure exposed. Normally only the stem and top of the fungus are visible above the ground. As the common name suggests, the fungus emits a foul odour which attacts flies that spread its spores.

Ninox strenua (Powerful Owl)

Recently when I went to check a patch of weeds that I was intending to spray with herbicide I found the foliage splashed with brilliant white bird droppings. Thinking this must be under a favourite bird roosting spot I looked up to see where that might be. Imagine my surprise when I found that right above my head, high up in the thick foliage of an *Elaeocarpus obovatus* tree, was a huge Powerful Owl. Closer inspection (through binoculars) revealed that it was hanging on to the hind quarters of a brushtail possum which can be seen at the bottom of the photo on the left. I believe that it probably ate the front part of the possum when it killed it the night before and then finished off the hind quarters the next night before flying off.

The Powerful Owl is Australia's largest nocturnal bird. It is a carnivore feeding mainly on tree dwelling marsupials such as Ringtail Possums, Brushtail Possums and Gliders. It will also take roosting birds and smaller ground dwelling mammals

The photo at the bottom of the page is of the casting that we found under the tree. Like many birds, particularly birds of prey, the Powerful Owl disposes of the indigestible parts of the food it swallows by collecting them in a "ball" which is regurgitated. Check out all the little possum bones and claws mixed in amongst the possum fur in this casting.

But wait there's more to the story of the casting.

A few days later the photo on the left below shows all that remained of the casting. The possum fur had been completely devoured by hundreds of little casemoth caterpillars. I assume that a casemoth laid her eggs in the casting while it lay for a day in the bush.

Ninox boobook (syn. *N. novaeseelandiae* Boobook Owl)

The Boobook Owl is Australia's smallest owl feeding mainly on insects and small mammals such as mice and bats. When we disturbed this one recently it flew right up to near the top of a very tall Hoop Pine where it perched amongst fairly dense foliage.

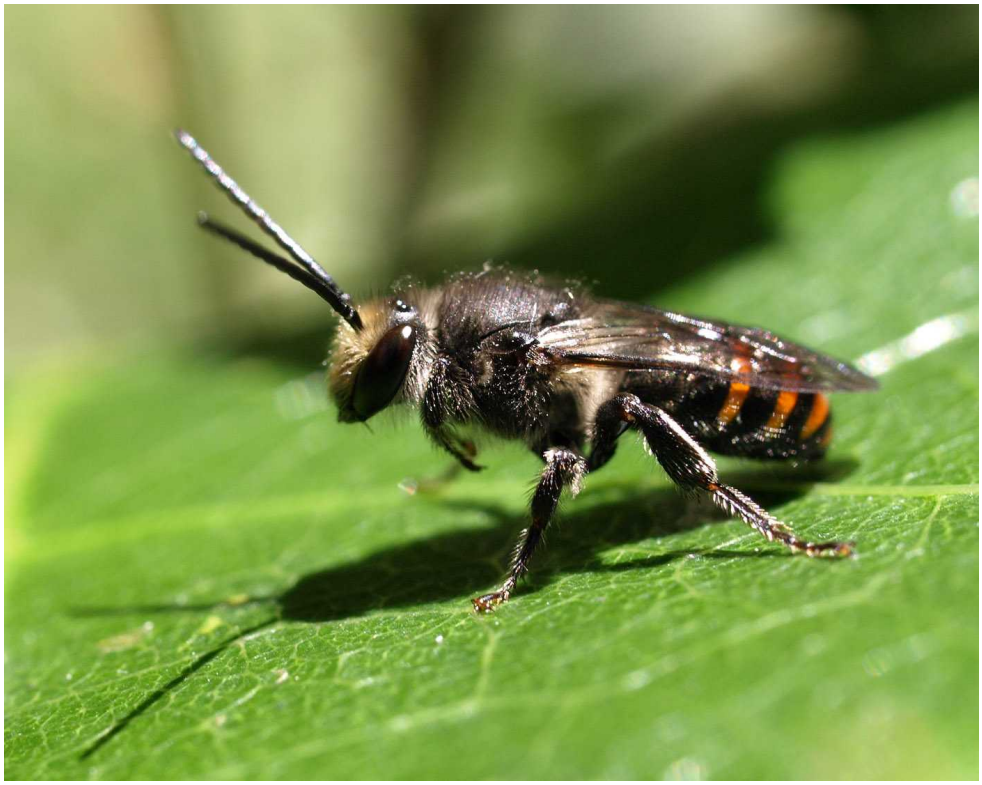
At home in summer we often hear its haunting "mopoke" call during the night.

An owl website that I found to be very informative, and which included owl calls, is www.owlpages.com.

Family Tachinidae
Subfamily Dexiinae
(Long Tongue Tachinid Fly)

All Tachinid flies are parasitoids with their larvae growing as parasites of other insects. While the larvae of most Tachinid flies feed on the caterpillars of moths and butterflies, the Dexiinae subfamily are parasites of beetles.

I found this rather large long legged beauty resting on the lichen-covered trunk of a tree.



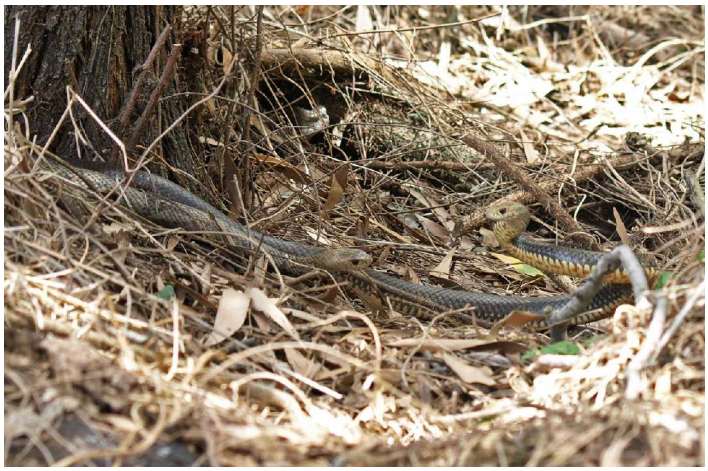
Family Halictidae –
Nomia sp. (Nomia Bee)

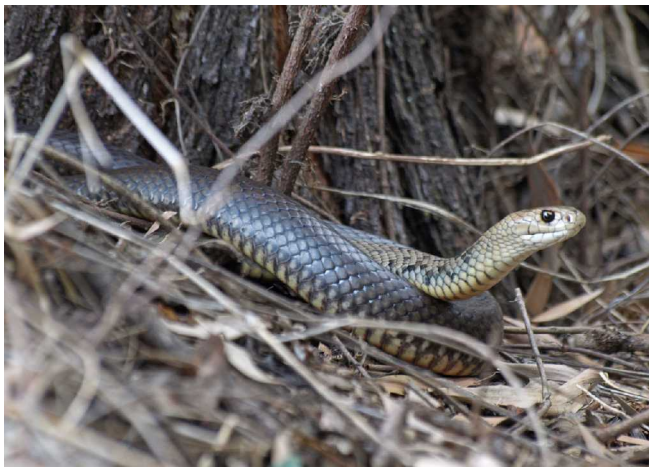
Most Australian native bees, of which there are over a thousand species, are solitary like this Nomia bee with its brightly striped abdomen. The female builds her nest in either the ground or rotting wood where she lays her eggs and cares for her larvae. Unfortunately I wasn't able to track the bee when it flew off. I had hoped that I might be able to find where the bee was nesting (assuming that this is a female).

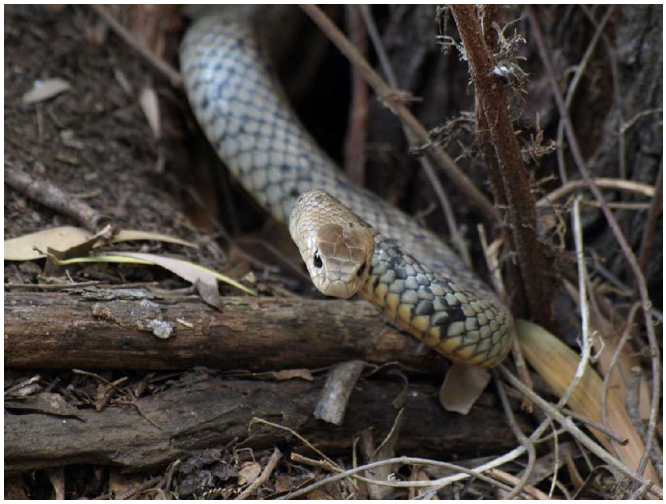
Pseudonaja textilis (Eastern Brown Snake)

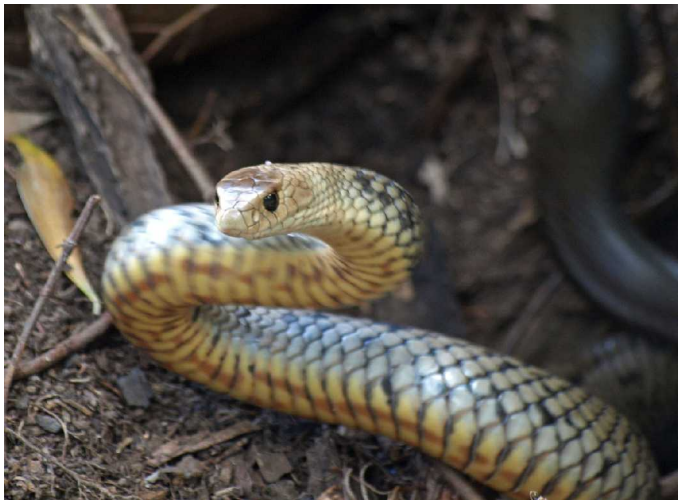
My illusion that the Fort Bushland Reserve was free of venomous snakes was shattered recently when I nearly walked on a pair of very active Eastern Brown snakes that appeared to be in an amorous mood and preparing to mate. They were about 1.5 metres long and just inside the reserve beside the eastern firebreak. These snakes prefer dry rather than swampy ground and because they feed on rats, mice, birds and lizards can often be found around barns and farms. They lay between about 10 and 35 eggs and the young brown snakes are banded in dark grey or black with a broad band on the back of the head – quite unlike the adults.

The Eastern Brown snake is one of the world's deadliest snakes and is in the top three or four most venomous snakes in the world. So a little care should be exercised while we are doing our bushcare. However they are generally reluctant to bite and I suspect would only do so when threatened. I'm hoping that the noise we make doing our bushcare will ensure that they slither away unseen before we get too close and threatening. The only snakes that I have seen previously in the Reserve were a Yellow-faced Whip snake and a large Carpet Python.









The next Bushcare working bee is on Sunday 7th November at 8am.

The recent rains have been good for both the native plants and weeds alike. Our working bee in October was rained out and it was rather wet in September so we need a really good turnout this month to tackle the rampant weed growth.