

The Fort Bushland Reserve

December 2008 Notes - by John Lahey

This month marks the one year anniversary of the release by the Alan Fletcher Research Station of two species of biological control insects on the cat's claw creeper. The populations of both of these insects increased most satisfactorily during summer and autumn so that by the middle of this year I was very optimistic that they were going to wreak havoc on the cat's claw. Unfortunately nature seems to have dealt us the cruelest of blows. Since winter I haven't been able to find any evidence that even one leaf-tying caterpillar or its moth is still alive. To make matters worse the population of tingid bugs has been virtually wiped out. I have been unable to find any tingid bugs on the "long-pod" cat's claw (this is the one with the orange flowers which makes up the bulk of the infestation) but have found a very small number of bugs on the "short-pod" cat's claw (this is the normal cat's claw which is only present here in the far south-east corner of the Reserve).

My theory (which is unconfirmed by the Alan Fletcher Research Station) for the demise of these insects is that they were unable to survive the prolonged dry spell at the end of winter. At that time the cat's claw was under severe stress and shed a lot of leaves. However with the advent of good spring and summer rain the cat's claw has grown explosively as the photo below shows. Unless urgent action is taken almost every tree in the designated biological control zone will be destroyed. In a recent storm two large *Alphitonia excelsa* trees were snapped off about 4 metres from the ground because of the wind loading on the cat's claw in the canopy. We need a team to go through this area now to cut off the thick cat's claw stems from around the trees otherwise we'll be left with only broken and dead trees covered in cat's claw.



Macfadyena unguis-cati (Cat's claw creeper) smothering the trees and carpeting the understorey

This month I added *Euchiton sphaericus* and *Vittadinia sulcata* to the census of native species growing in the Reserve.



***Euchiton sphaericus* (Star cudweed)**

This small annual herb grows to about 50 cm in height but the plants I've found in the Reserve have been about 20 to 30 cm. The plant is a native of SE Asia, Pacific Islands and Australia.



***Vittadinia sulcata* (Furrowed New Holland Daisy)**

This little annual daisy grows to about 30 cm in height and bears a relatively small number of inconspicuous flowers. The references I located on the internet all describe the flower as being either purple or blue-mauve. However I've found four or five plants in the Reserve and they all seem to have white flowers. It doesn't seem to be a particularly common plant.





Argyrodendron trifoliolatum (White Booyong, Brown Tulip Oak) - Refer August & November 2008 Notes

In my notes last month I stated that many of the seeds from this tree had germinated and started to send down a root. We now have dozens of little seedlings like this one scattered around the tree. This is really a momentous event in the life of this tree. I estimate that it must be at least 80 years old but has possibly been growing for well over 100 years. However I don't believe that there is another tree of this species within kilometres. It is possible that there were others in the Reserve that were killed by the cat's claw however I can find no evidence of this. This then may be the first time that the tree has successfully reproduced! Whether this is the result of serendipitous weather

conditions at the time the tree shed its seeds, or the fact that the weeds have been cleared from around it, or a combination of both, I don't know. However the seeds are known to have a very short period of viability and must be planted as soon as they fall if they are to germinate successfully. I just hope now that some of these little seedlings survive and thrive

Aviceda subcristata (Crested Hawk or Pacific Baza)

Last month a pair of Crested Hawks built this rather flimsy looking nest in the fork of a horizontally spreading branch of a *Eucalyptus propinqua* (Small fruited Grey Gum) located on the eastern boundary of the reserve. Since then I've never seen the nest without one of the parent birds sitting on it. These birds prey mainly on insects and small lizards. One interesting observation, which may be just coincidental, is that the Channel-billed Cuckoos seem to be keeping well away from the area this year. Normally at this time of the year they are extremely active and very very noisy. I have heard them occasionally in the distance but haven't seen them yet this year.



Last week I heard a chirring noise in the bush and eventually found that it was coming from a termite mound on the side of a tree. A Sacred Kingfisher (*Todiramphus sanctus*) had built its nest in the termite mound and the babies had hatched and wanted food. The Reserve has lots of termite mounds on the sides of trees and many of these have been used by the Sacred Kingfishers for nesting.

The next working bee will be held on Sunday 4 January at 8 am.