

# The Fort Bushland Reserve

## March 2008 Notes - by John Lahey

It was a beautiful morning for the bushcare working bee that was held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March. The cleared area below Fort Road is now quite impressive and the spraying that has been organised by the council has removed most of the ground cover plants there. Hopefully the native groundcover plants will regenerate quickly with a bit of rain.

I am told that funding has been approved for the installation of a tap near the picnic table. This will be of real benefit to picnickers but will also allow us to do some weed spraying during our working bees. This will allow us to consolidate on the areas we have previously weeded where the Cat's claw and Ochna are regrowing.

Cleanup Australia day was also held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March. The Boothroyd family did a marvelous job clearing from the bush the rubbish that had accumulated over decades along Cliveden Avenue.

The wonder of our "natural" spring, which flowed even in the driest of times, was shattered a few weeks ago when I discovered that our peaceful soak had become a gushing torrent. The water supply workmen uncovered an old pipe that they eventually determined was connected to the mains in the Passionist Father's property in Fort Road. The origin of this water pipe in the middle of the Reserve is still something of a mystery to me but I have been trying to piece together the clues. In her reminiscences of "The Fort at Oxley and its Early Owners" Miss Olivia Corkran recalls that there was a dam in the small valley below the Fort (see March 2007 Notes) and that water from this was used for the cattle. It appears to me from the 1946 aerial photograph (see March 2007 Notes) and from the current topography, that this dam must have been located in the area above the large Bunya Pines which is currently clear of any trees or shrubs. Over the years it has been filled by silt washed down by storm water runoff. I can only surmise that there must have been a pump at the dam and the water pipe was installed to take the water to the cattle shed at the top of the hill. It is also my assumption that at a later time the pipe was connected to the mains and reused for another purpose. Supporting this theory is the presence of the non-return valve that only allows water to flow towards the top of the hill. If anyone has access to a metal detector we may be able to trace the pipes.



A few weeks ago I was pleasantly surprised to find caterpillars of the leaf-tying moth, *Hypocosmia pyrochroma*, on Cat's claw beside the northern firetrail. This is at least 200 metres from the release point near Cliveden Avenue. It is difficult to gauge the population of these caterpillars, because as this observation shows, they have spread quite widely. I've also noted a very significant increase in the leaf sucking tingid bugs which are spreading out from the release point.

On Wednesday 5 March, Ric Natrass and Peter Luxton did their first survey of the nesting boxes that were installed in October last year. Three of the four possum boxes contained possums – two young Common Brushtail Possums and one adult Common Brushtail Possum. The fourth box showed evidence of having been used. One of the four “small parrot” nesting boxes contained a young Common Brushtail Possum. The entry hole on these boxes is quite small so that only quite young possums will be able to enter. There was evidence around the entry hole that a possum had been trying to enlarge the hole with its teeth, but the face of these boxes is made of thick hardwood so its efforts were in vain. The Boobook Owl nesting box contained a Common Brushtail Possum with a baby. The hole on this box is quite large and sufficient to allow the entry of adult possums. All the other nesting boxes were empty. One of the glider nesting boxes had been temporarily used by European Honeybees to build a hive but it appeared that *Camponotus* ants had driven them out. Ric and Peter will return later in the year to monitor the boxes again, at which time some of the unused boxes may be relocated to less densely covered areas.

This month I’ve added the following species to our census of native plants in the Reserve.

<u>Plant</u>	<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Type of Plant</u>
<i>Tragia novae-hollandiae</i>	Stinging Vine	Vine
<i>Scleria mackaviensis</i>		Sedge
<i>Fimbristylis dichotoma</i>	Common Fringe-sedge	Sedge
<i>Leptochloa decipiens</i> ssp. <i>decipiens</i>	Slender Canegrass	Grass
<i>Microlaena stipoides</i>	Weeping grass, Weeping Ricegrass	Grass
<i>Panicum simile</i>	Two-coloured Panic	Grass
<i>Panicum effusum</i>	Hairy Panic	Grass
<i>Crotalaria montana</i> var. <i>angustifolia</i>		Herb
<i>Aristida queenslandica</i> var. <i>queenslandica</i>	Queensland Wire-grass	Grass
<i>Entolasia whiteana</i>		Grass
<i>Urochloa whiteana</i>		Grass
<i>Eragrostis leptostachya</i>	Paddock Lovegrass	Grass

***Crotalaria montana* var. *angustifolia***

The species is described as an annual or perennial but this particular plant looks like an annual. It has narrow hairy leaves on an upright stem about 40 cm high. The small yellow pea shaped flowers have opened progressively up the flower spike and set very dark brown pods.



***Tragia novae-hollandiae*** (Stinging Vine)

Ouch! I found this stinging vine by touch rather than by sight. My forearm brushed against it while I was spraying and it left a mass of angry welts along my arm. I'd rate the pain as slightly worse than stinging nettles and the sting lasted for about 3 hours. It grows as a twining climber to about 2 metres and the stem and leaves are covered in stinging hairs. The plants are monoecious and the photo on the right below shows three male flowers at the top end of the raceme and three female flowers at the base of the raceme. The photo on the left shows the relatively large three lobed fruit. My advice is if you see this vine look but don't touch.



I've been really pleased by the way in which the following two grasses, *Oplismenus aemulus* and *Ottochloa gracillima*, have recolonised the areas we have cleared of weeds. They have reappeared following clearing, apparently from dormant seeds, and are forming an attractive green carpet.



***Oplismenus aemulus*** (Australian Basket Grass)

This grass is quite easy to identify when not in flower by the broad leaves that have a ripply appearance. The leaves and stems often have a red tinge. When in flower they can be positively differentiated from *Ottochloa* by the spiky awns associated with each seed. Note the branched racemes which differentiate this species from other species of *Oplismenus*.



***Ottochloa gracillima*** (Ottochloa)



The leaves on this grass are long and narrow and typically yellow-green in colour. The leaf length varies considerably from about 1cm to 5cm depending on the growing conditions. Note that there are no spiky awns associated with the seeds and this makes it very easy to differentiate this species from *Oplismenus*.



***Fimbristylis dichotoma*** (Common Fringe-sedge)

This sedge is widespread around the world and grows as an annual or short-lived perennial. Most of the plants I've seen look as if they have come up as an annual this year, probably following the rain. The plant, right, is growing amongst *Oplismenus aemulus* with some Cat's claw and Asparagus weeds.



***Scleria mackaviensis***

This slender little sedge is a perennial with a short rhizome and tough raspy leaves. It can be found growing in relatively dry open conditions in somewhat clayey soil. It has very small yellow flowers.



***Leptochloa decipiens* subsp. *decipiens***  
(Slender Canegrass)

This is a tussock forming perennial grass that seems to be scattered through the Reserve in relatively small numbers. The plants that I've found are relatively young and haven't yet formed a real tussock. It grows to a little over a metre in height with a large arching flower spike.



***Nephila* sp. (Golden Orb-Weaver)**

The Golden Orb-weaver spiders have been busy in the Reserve building very large strong webs that have a golden sheen to the silk. The very large spider in the centre of the web is a female and she is responsible for spinning the web. You may also see a small spider somewhere around the periphery of the web (but not in this photo). This is the male.

While it is really unpleasant to walk into one of these webs, the spiders are quite timid and rarely bite.

I'm not certain as to the specific identity of this spider but I think it is *Nephila ornata*.

I've been quite impressed by the size and "meatiness" of some of the fungi that have appeared in the Reserve over recent months. This big yellow fungus is about 15cm across and seems to be quite common.



The next working bee will be held on Sunday 6 April at 8 am.