

The Fort Bushland Reserve

October 2008 Notes - by John Lahey

I am pleased to be able to report that the Council Habitat Group has finally agreed that the Cat's Claw is of no value to the native wildlife and can be eradicated. However I find it sad and disappointing that this result was only achieved through the intervention of our local Councillor. Unfortunately we still don't have approval to remove the *Ochna serrata* from the heart of the dry rainforest area despite the fact that less than 25% of the site has been cleared. This will continue to make the restoration process more difficult. I think that we can quite reasonably expect the council to send in their team of Ochna flower pluckers on a needs basis to ensure that these weeds don't fruit again. As they say in the Classics "One year's seeding is ten years weeding."

This month I added *Rumex brownii* to the census of native species growing in the Reserve.



Rumex brownii (Swamp Dock, Slender Dock)

This native perennial herb grows to about 50 to 80 cm in height with a basal rosette of leaves and a stout taproot. The flowers are produced in whorls around the upper leafless stems. The seed is a small nut surrounded by three valves with 3 to 5 hooked teeth on each side and a hook on the tip. The ripe seeds readily attach to clothing, particularly socks, and are a nuisance to remove.



Tabernaemontana pandacaqui
(Banana Bush)

This plant is now growing extremely well in the cleared areas and has produced a wonderful flowering this year. It grows to about 3 metres and the fragrant white flowers are followed by yellow/orange banana shaped fruit. I assume that the fruit is poisonous since this plant is in the same family as the highly poisonous Oleander. I cannot understand why this plant isn't grown more widely in home gardens since it is highly decorative when in flower or fruit and looks good at other times.



Aphananthe philippinensis (Native Elm, Rough-leaved Elm, Grey Handlewood) refer February 2008 Notes.

Last year I didn't notice any flowers on this species but found the trees covered in fruit in February. I now know why I missed the flowers – they are quite inconspicuous. This species is monoecious and produces small bunches of tiny male flowers about 3mm across along the stems. The photo below on the right shows the male flowers with the little pollen containers on the tips of the five stamens. The small female flowers are borne in small numbers towards the ends of the branchlets. The photo below on the left shows a single female flower with a pair of stigma near the tip of the branchlet. The fruit is edible and popular with fruit eating birds.



Female flower



Male flowers

Macfadyena unguis-cati (Cat's Claw)

I was hoping that we wouldn't see these very attractive flowers this year because the plants have been under stress from the very dry season. However they are now flowering sporadically across the reserve which means lots of seeds unless we can kill the flowering plants. The tingid bugs are still active in the control area but I haven't seen any sign of the leaf-tying pyralid moths since winter. I'm hoping that the cold winter didn't kill them off.



Guioa semiglauca (Guioa, Australian Crow Ash, Wild Quince)

I've only found one specimen of this species in the Reserve. It is still quite young (about 6 metres high) and this may be its first flowering. The compound leaves have typically 4 to 6 leaflets that are dark dull green on top and greyish green below (see photos below). Mature trees produce masses of flowers which are very attractive to bees and other insects. While I was photographing the flowers I noticed this small loopy-loop caterpillar which has continued to feast on the flowers.



Decaspermum humile (Silky Myrtle)

There are a couple of large specimens of this tree growing just above the site of the old dam as well as several saplings. It grows to a medium sized tree (about 15 metres) with dark glossy green leaves. The new growths have a silky appearance that can be seen on the flower stem in the photo on the right below. The flowers are sweetly fragrant and are followed by small berries to about 8 mm in diameter that turn black when ripe.



Maclura cochinchinensis (Cockspur Thorn)

This is a strong straggling climber that is covered in sharp thorns and is common across the Reserve. The plant is dioecious and last year I hunted high and low but was unable to find a female plant in flower. However I've been successful this year in locating a couple of female plants. The photo on the left below is of a female flower with protruding stigmas. The male flower on the right is breaking open to release the pollen. The photo of the ripe fruit was taken in December last year.



It's been rewarding to see the one year old *Hibiscus heterophyllus* flowering for the first time in the cleared areas. Although the flowers are short lived (one day) many of the plants have some flowers every day. This plant is proving to be an excellent pioneer species.

The next working bee will be held on Sunday 2 November at 8 am.