

The Fort Bushland

December 2006 Notes - by John Lahey

The bushcare group met on Sunday 26 November. Unfortunately neither the spray training nor the advice on Cat's Claw eradication could be carried out that morning. Nevertheless the group put the meeting to good use by collecting the rubbish that had accumulated on the grassed area beside Fort Road and in the bush below. Most of the rubbish in the bush had been washed there through the storm water drain, which discharges just below the top of the hill. This storm water drain is causing serious erosion at its discharge point and has carved an erosion gully at various points right down through the reserve.

Kay Hallewell and three little helpers are seen here with an assorted collection of rubbish. ➤



Rubbish collection



Capparis arborea

The native bush caper berry (*Capparis arborea*) has produced a succession of beautiful white, but regrettably ephemeral, flowers right through the month. Hopefully these flowers will be followed by fruit in a few months. This plant is very common throughout the reserve.

The Caper White Butterfly (*Belenois java*) eggs laid on the bush caper berry last month quickly hatched into caterpillars. However the caterpillars rapidly devoured all the soft new shoots and then disappeared completely. I can only assume that they fell victim to the drought. I suspect that in a normal year the bushes would produce masses of soft new shoots which would be sufficient to feed the caterpillars till they were big enough to eat the tougher older leaves.



Caper White Butterfly caterpillars



Rachel Cruttenden and Lynn Brown

The bushcare group met again on the afternoon of Sunday afternoon 17 December to undertake brushcutter and spray training. Cat's Claw expert, Lynn Brown, provided advice on the control of our most noxious weed, the Cat's Claw creeper. Lynn made a special trip here from Gympie to help us by showing how best to tackle our Cat's Claw problem. She recommended using a sharp pruning saw to cut through the Cat's Claw stems twice, with the cuts about 60 mm apart, and then to knock out the 60 mm section. This is to ensure that the stem is completely severed because the creeper can regrow if a thin section remains uncut.

Swabbing the lower cut section with glyphosate within 15 seconds of the making the cut is usually successful in killing the plant at least back to the first tuber. The upper part of the plant will die quickly but remains attached to the tree until it eventually rots away. Lynn was surprised at how different our Cat's Claw creeper is from any she has seen previously. This had also surprised the botanists at the Queensland Herbarium who sent specimens to Kew Gardens for identification. It was confirmed by Kew Gardens to be *Macfadyena unguis-cati*. This form has flowers, which are yellow-orange instead of the typical clear yellow, and produces seed pods that are almost twice as long as the normal form. The group really appreciated Lynn's advice and the effort she had taken to help us.



Lynn Brown by a tree covered in Cat's Claw creeper (*Macfadyena unguis-cati*)



Randall

The remainder of the afternoon was taken up with a training course on the use of brushcutters and spraying equipment.

Randall instructed us in the correct operation of the brushcutter, the necessary precautions we should take and the safety equipment to use. Then we all had the opportunity to practice cutting some thick grass at the edge of the cleared area in Fort Road.

For spraying and controlling weeds our group will only be permitted to use glyphosate, which is a systemic general-purpose herbicide. It has a low toxicity and is effective in killing a wide variety of weeds (and of course wanted plants if used carelessly). If a stronger control is needed the Habitat Group will employ the services of a contractor.



Kerry Rosenthal using the brushcutter



Kay Hallewell using the knapsack sprayer

A Short Guided Walk

The following describes in detail a short walk that I hope might be of interest and should take no longer than 20 to 30 minutes. The walk starts at the top of Eddystone Road, just past the last house on the left. Walk a few metres down the firebreak and climb over the second panel of the fence. On your right in the very corner of the fencing is a large silver ash or bumpy ash (*Flindersia schottiana*) that has just finished flowering. Straight in front of you are two medium sized trees. The one to the right, with the slightly twisted trunk, is a Foambark tree (*Jagera pseudorhus*). The bark of this tree contains a high concentration of saponin, a frothing compound, which was used by the Australian aborigines as a fish poison. This tree is very common right across the reserve. The tree on the left, with the beautifully fluted trunk, is a Small-leaved Tuckeroo (*Cupaniopsis parvifolia*).



Cupaniopsis parvifolia



Trophis scandens

Just to the south of these trees is an old dead tree with Burnie vine (*Trophis scandens*) scrambling over it. This vine flowered in September and the fruit have now ripened. One morning, a few weeks ago, I saw a scrub turkey eating some of the berries for his breakfast snack.

Backtrack a few metres and head down the hill. The large tree with the buttress roots is a Brown Tulip Oak (*Argyrodendron trifoliolatum*). While this is a very common rain forest tree I don't think there are very many growing in the Brisbane metropolitan area. Notice the large number of mistletoe plants growing in the canopy. The small trees growing at its base and visible to the left in this photo are Ivorywood (*Siphonodon australis*). Check out the vicious spines on the bush caper berry (*Capparis arborea*,) which is growing just to the west of the Brown Tulip Oak.



Argyrodendron trifoliolatum

Now head south down the hill. The large bush on the right is a Brazilian or Surinam Cherry (*Eugenia uniflora*). Unfortunately this is an exotic plant and must be removed. It normally fruits quite prolifically and is quite a pest in other parts of the reserve. Now head across to the fence and observe the large number of Koala scratch marks on the large Grey Gum (*Eucalyptus punctata*) growing in the firebreak. See if you can spot a Koala – I've never had the luck!



Podocarpus elatus

As you continue down the hill you'll come to a mature Small-leaved Fig (*Ficus obliqua*). This is a strangling fig and the remnants of the original host tree are still visible. Follow the path to the bottom of the hill where you'll see a large Cocos Palm (*Syagrus romanzoffiana*). There are numerous such palm trees scattered through the reserve and again, as this is an exotic species, all will need to be cut down. The large tree just to the east of the palm tree is a Crow's Ash (*Flindersia australis*). Scramble down the low bank into the bottom of the gully and then head up the gully. On the right hand side of the gully as you round the bend you will see a clump of small Brown Pines (*Podocarpus elatus*) – more about this tree later.

In front of you, lying across the gully, is a dead tree which I think was killed by the Cat's Claw creepers. On your left are two large trees. The first one you come to (i.e. the more northerly one) is a Hard Quandong (*Elaeocarpus obovatus*). Living at the base of this tree is the most dangerous native animal you are likely to meet in the reserve – the jumper ant (*Myrmecia*). They have a nest just to the southeast of the stump of the huge Cat's Claw creeper, which you can see on the right hand side of the photo.



Elaeocarpus obovatus

Approach as quietly as possible, skirting well away from the tree on the southern side, until you can see the nest. These ants are very aggressive. When I took these photos the ants saw me when I was at least 2 m from their nest and immediately leapt into action – literally. You can see from the photos what big eyes they have. There were about 10 ants around the entrance to the nest and most of them came running and jumping towards me. However I have



Jumper Ant Nest

found that if they aren't threatened or provoked they tend not to sting. On this occasion, despite having them run across my feet and hands, I didn't get stung. Unfortunately I didn't know they were there when I originally cut and poisoned the Cat's Claw creeper and got stung on the finger that time. I've been stung a few times and don't find the sting particularly painful – certainly less painful than a bee sting. Their sting is in their tail and I have even been stung on the foot through the fabric of my old running shoes.

Note: About 2% of people may suffer an allergic reaction to the sting, which could cause anaphylaxis. If you think you might be affected this way I suggest you consult your doctor before working on the reserve.

If you approach quietly and don't molest the jumper ants you should not have any problems. Please don't attack them or damage their nest. They are quite common throughout the reserve but it is difficult to find their nests as they tend to hunt at quite considerable distances from their nests.

After observing the ants, return to the gully and proceed to the fallen tree. Skirt around the left hand end of the tree and proceed up the bank to the clump of Crow's Apple Trees (*Owenia venosa*). They are easy to recognize by their very hard, finely rough bark and one has a small elkhorn fern growing on it. Now branch off to your right and proceed along the rough track.



Jumper Ant (*Myrmecia*)



Flindersia xanthoxyla

After about 50 m you will find this beautiful Yellowwood tree (*Flindersia xanthoxyla*) growing at the top of the bank.



Flindersia xanthoxyla



Podocarpus elatus

Continue along the track and through the tiny gully till you come to the large Brown Pine (*Podocarpus elatus*). The Brown Pine is a primitive species that has survived since the dinosaur age. The Podocarps originated in the Gondwanan forests of the Triassic period, 245 million years ago, where they grew alongside Wollemi pines, cycads, tree ferns, giant clubmosses and horsetails. Ferns (not grass) covered the ground. The Brown Pine is dioecious, which means that there are separate male and female trees. We will need to wait till it flowers to find out whether this is a male or female tree. The swollen stalk that holds the seed (on a female tree) is edible, but unfortunately I can't see any on the tree at the moment.



Podocarpus elatus

This photo of the seeds and swollen purple stalks was taken from the internet.

A few metres past the Brown Pine is an old Scrub Turkey's nest.

As the going now gets quite rough, I suggest you turn around and return to where you started.