

The Fort Bushland Reserve

April 2008 Notes - by John Lahey

Another successful and well-attended working bee was held on the 6th April. It is pleasing to note that about 20 bushcarers are continuing to attend each month. The weeded area continues to increase in area and when weed spraying becomes possible with the installation of the water tap I'm sure we'll see a significant step forward. It was great that our new councillor, Matthew Bourke, was able to attend and check out the site. Ours is one of 11 bushcare groups in the Mount Ommaney ward.

After nearly 18 months of weed clearing, it is pleasing to be able to show an area which is now virtually free of all weeds and with a fine cover of native grasses; mainly *Ottochloa gracillima*. This has been helped enormously by the recent rains. The photo also shows the large number of trees that have fallen down having been destroyed by the Cat's claw creeper.



This month I added *Macaranga tanarius* and *Platynerium superbum* to the list of native plants in the Reserve. If anyone wants the full list please send an e-mail to laheyfamily@bigpond.com.



Macaranga tanarius (Macaranga, Nasturtium tree)

Quite a number of seedlings of *Macaranga tanarius* have appeared recently in the areas where the Cat's Claw creeper has been sprayed. This is a pioneer species that quickly colonises disturbed and degraded areas. It grows to about 6 metres in height and has large, prominently veined peltate* leaves. It is dioecious and the edible fruit on the female trees is attractive to many birds which assist in seed dispersal. I haven't seen any mature trees in the Reserve.

*peltate having the stalk attached near the centre of the leaf rather than at the margin. Hence the common name Nasturtium Tree.

Platycerium superbum (Staghorn Fern)

This fern together with its close relative *Platycerium bifurcatum* (Elkhorn fern) is very popular in cultivation and I suspect that this plant grew from spores blown here from a garden plant. It is an epiphyte and is growing here on a large *Lophostemon confertus* (Brush box) tree. The spores are carried on the large antler fronds growing outwards and downwards from the lower part of the plant. Unlike the Elkhorn fern this species does not produce pups and new plants must be grown from spores.



Platycerium bifurcatum (Elkhorn Fern)

This plant is actually a mass of plantlets which have developed over many years from the original plant. The nest leaves grow upwards around the tree trunk and assist in collecting falling leaves and twigs that decay and feed the plant. The leaves that grow outwards and downwards from the middle of the plant carry the spores. The fern is growing here on an old dead tree.

Acacia maidenii (Maiden's Wattle)

This wattle is common in the reserve and grows to about 20 metres in height. It can be distinguished from the other wattles in the reserve by the following features; the longitudinal veins in the phyllodes (leaves) are joined and there are prominent lenticels (small raised white dots) on the branchlets. The pale yellow flowers are followed by long thin twisted and coiled seed pods.





Sida cordifolia (Bala, Heart-leaf Sida, Country mallow, Flannel Weed)

Hundreds of these plants have colonised the areas that have been disturbed and cleared of weeds. They are now covered in bright yellow flowers that seem to be attractive to many butterflies. The plant originated in central America but is now widespread throughout tropical and sub-tropical areas and naturalised in Australia. While NSW Flora Online still lists it as a native, I think it is now generally considered to be an introduced species and I've removed it from our native plant census.



Polyscias elegans (Celery Wood, Silver Basswood, Black Pencil Cedar)

This is another pioneer species that grows quickly with a tall thin trunk and crown of very large bipinnate** leaves. The tree can eventually attain a height of about 30 metres with a stem diameter of about 75cm. It is not

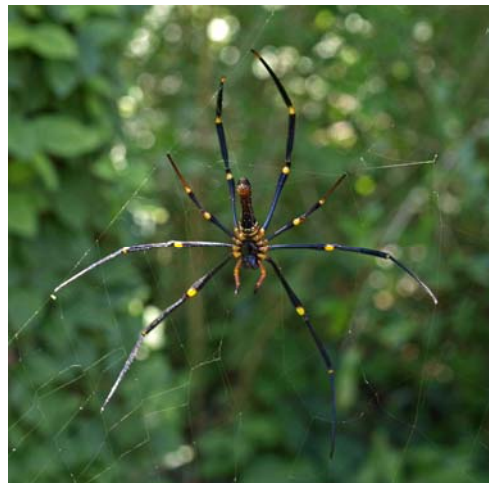


particularly common in the reserve and I haven't seen any large trees. The purple flowers are carried on large much branched panicles at the ends of the branches. The small fruit, which contain two seeds, are flattened and carry two persistent styles. They are attractive to birds which assist in their dispersal. The common name Celery Wood is derived from the bark that is said to taste and smell like celery.

** bipinnate leaves divided into leaflets that are themselves subdivided; ie doubly pinnate.

Nephila pilipes (Golden Orb Weaver)

In last month's Notes I included a photo of a Golden Orb Weaver spider that I think is *Nephila ornata*. Here is another spider from this genus that also builds a large web using strong silk with a golden sheen.



Pogona barbata
(Common Bearded Dragon)



Over recent years I've found that the common bearded dragon does not seem to be as prevalent as it once was, while the population of the Eastern water dragon (*Physignathus lesueurii*) has increased. However I've seen several common

bearded dragons in the last few months. This handsome fellow supervised my weeding in the north-east corner of the Reserve. When I got too close, the dragon put on a formidable display with a puffed out torso, darkened skin and a most impressive "beard".



Melanitis leda (Evening Brown Butterfly)

During the day this butterfly rests close to the ground, typically on dead leaves, where it is perfectly



camouflaged. When disturbed they tend to fly off about 10 to 20 metres before again alighting on dead leaves. However in the early evening, just before it gets dark, they become quite active and can frequently be seen flitting through the undergrowth. Their caterpillars feed on a wide range of grasses, both native and introduced.



Notelaea longifolia (Large Mock-olive, Long-leaved Native Olive)

This tree is in the same family as the European Olive and produces small bluish-black ovoid fruit to about 15mm in length. It is fairly common and widespread throughout the Reserve and grows to about 10 metres. The short flower spikes arise from the leaf axils and typically carry about 6 to 12 small yellow flowers





Eucalyptus siderophloia (Grey Ironbark)

This is one of several species of ironbarks growing in the reserve. It is a large tree growing to a height of 45 metres with deeply furrowed hard rough permanent bark. It is a noted food tree for koalas and gliders.



I found this nest in the bushland last week, having been attracted to it by the noisy chirping of the chicks inside. I could see three chicks but there may have been more. It is in the top of a small *Araucaria cunninghamii* (Hoop Pine).

Unfortunately I found it about half an hour before I had to go off to the hospital for a back operation and although I watched the nest for about 20 minutes the parents didn't return in that time. When I checked it again almost a week later the nest was empty so I assume the chicks had fully fledged and flown away. I consulted Paul Grimshaw, who advised me that "The nest is probably either a Red-browed or Double-barred Finches nest. Both species usually choose a prickly shrub or tree in which to build their untidy nest with the entrance hole on the side of the nest."

Taeniopygia bichenovii (Double-barred Finch)

I took this photo a few weeks ago when I noticed a small flock of Double-barred Finches in the Reserve. I'm guessing that the nest belonged to one of these birds as I haven't seen any Red-browed Finches here recently. These birds feed mainly on grass seeds but will take small insects especially when feeding their young. Both parents play an active role in incubating and feeding their chicks.



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