

# BUSH NEWS

from the Natural Areas of Kedron Brook & Environs

## Fifth Anniversary Issue

No 20, Autumn 1994

GreenBrook Association

### EDITORIAL

Most would have been appalled by the bushfires in NSW in January. Traditionally Brisbane's summers are wetter than those further south, and the danger of bushfire damage is therefore considerably less. However, we do have houses close to bushlands, and the potential for similar catastrophes, if on a smaller scale, is still real.

This issue looks at the history of bushfires in Australia.

### BUSHFIRES

Fires lit by people are an integral part of the Australian landscape. Virtually all of the reports of the early explorers, from Cook onwards, make mention of the Aborigines lighting numerous fires. It seems that vast areas of Australia were burnt regularly during the 65 000 years of Aboriginal occupation.

There is no doubt that this had a considerable impact on the vegetation. Some even suggest that the Aborigines used fire as a form of farming, which they had refined to a fairly sophisticated level.

One impact of this was to create a park-like landscape over much of the better coastal country. For example, consider Colonial Botanist Fraser's 1829 description of land between the lower reaches of Kedron Brook and the Brisbane River:

[The land] is formed of undulating ridges of gentle height ... The soil is a rich brown loam, covered with a luxuriant crop of Brome, or kangaroo grass. This forms the middle land between the fresh water stream and the Brisbane. The land on the banks of the river is extremely rich, and is covered with a species of panicum or panic grass, averaging from 4½ to 5 feet ... It is lightly timbered, averaging not more than twelve trees an acre.



Removal of fire altered this landscape dramatically. Major Mitchell, writing in 1848, commented that:

the omission of the annual periodic burning by natives, of grass and young saplings, has already produced in the open forest lands nearest to Sydney, thick forests of young trees, where formerly a man might gallop without impediment and see miles before him.

So, where before there were only thin grasses to burn, now there were forests. To add to the problem, we then introduced pasture grasses - many as tall as a man, which became tinder dry during summer.

As the fires became hotter and more destructive, efforts were made to eliminate them. But this only increased the fuel build-up, resulting in the sort of damage that we have just seen in NSW.

Removal of fires also affects the plants which grow in the bush. Locally, at Downfall Ck Reserve, the lack of fires in recent years is changing the vegetation from an open heath/grasstree community to a thick forest of she-oaks.

Similarly, at Grange Forest Park the purple-flowering Hoveas are disappearing because they need fire to germinate.

There is no "correct" answer here - Australian bushfires have usually been deliberately lit, and the choice is ours whether we fire systematically, at random, or not at all.

Since much of the pasture grasses from both Grange Forest Park and Sparkes Hill have now been removed, we believe that there is a strong case for experimenting with a few burns. Not only should this result in a richer mix of plant species, but it should reduce the potential for the sort of wildfires that caused so much damage down south.

Frank Box



## MORE BUTTERFLIES

Our backyard seems to be a haven for hungry waterdragons. Each year, young offspring accompany their parents to our garden, and each year there seem to be more than the year before.

These dragons go to extraordinary lengths to catch the Blue Tiger butterflies, who lay their eggs on the Monkey Vine.

It is common for them to stand on a piece of unchopped firewood with their necks stretched, and they will even jump into the air to catch one.

Recently, we watched as a large dragon scaled a tree growing in among lantana. It made quite a bit of noise moving up through the foliage, and even more when it jumped to another trunk.

It then extended itself from the trunk of the tree, lunged at a butterfly, and crashed down into the lantana below. We were amazed that a lizard would go to such lengths to procure a meal.

Marty Moles

## PLEASE HELP

If you are a regular user of Grange Forest Park or Sparkes Hill, you might notice plants carrying seed from time to time.

Since plants from local seed seem to do much better than general nursery stock, we are always seeking quantities of this seed.

We would greatly appreciate assistance in collecting ripe seed, or even just advice that a plant is seeding.

Next working bees:

17 April / 22 May / 10 July

Bob Devine



## NATURAL AREA MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Brisbane City Council is proposing to establish a community management committee to advise them on managing the Sparkes Hill/Grange Forest Park bushlands.

To this end, they are calling for nominations from persons with an interest, or expertise, in this area.

Please forward nominations, including reasons for the nomination, to:

Mr R. Friend,  
Bushland Management Officer,  
BCC, GPO Box 1434,  
Brisbane, 4001.

I can provide further details if desired.

Frank Box (857 1086)

Sponsored by -

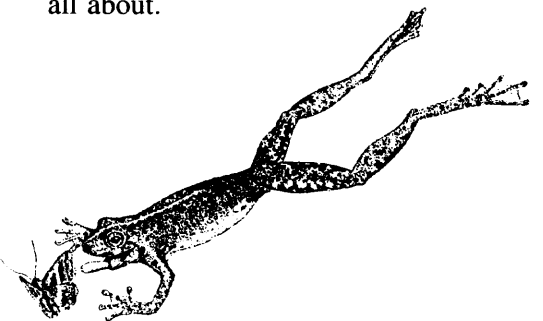
**Ramware  
Educational Computer  
Specialists  
Blandford St, Grange**

## PUBLIC MEETING

A public meeting to launch the Sparkes Hill/Grange Forest Park Management Committee will be held as follows:

7.30pm, Wednesday, 20 April  
Grange Progress Hall,  
Cnr Wilston & Daisy Sts,  
Grange.

If you are a neighbour or user of these areas, or simply have an interest in bushlands or nature, come along and find out what it is all about.



## PLANT OF THE MONTH

The Richmond Birdwing is one of Australia's largest and most colourful butterflies.

It was apparently common around Brisbane at the time of settlement, but now is rare everywhere.

This vine is one of the few plants that its caterpillars will feed upon. It is normally a vigorous rainforest vine, but should be more behaved in a garden.

Grow in semi-shade, and out of the wind.

## *Aristolochia praevenosa* "Richmond Birdwing Vine"



Available from Perrotts Nursery, Elkhorn St, Enoggera