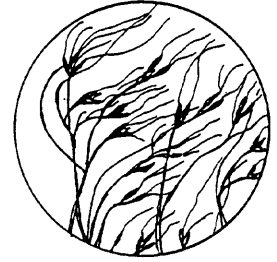




BUSH NEWS

from the Natural Areas of Kedron Brook & Environs



No 27, Summer 1995/96

GreenBrook Association

BANDICOOTS

Why Bandicoots?

The native mammals of Australia consist of three types: the monotremes (platypus and echidna), the marsupial mammals, and the placental mammals. The placental mammals are very poorly represented, comprising only rodents and bats. On the other hand, Australia and New Guinea share about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the world's marsupials.

Our marsupials can be divided, according to their diet, into two main groups. Herbivores include the koalas, possums and kangaroos, while carnivores include the Tasmanian tiger, numbat and quolls. Bandicoots and bilbies constitute a third group that bridge the other two - they eat anything.

Of the 120-odd species of marsupial in Australia, only three occur in our local area - the ringtail and brushtail possums and the short-nosed bandicoot.

Bandicoots are generally regarded to have adapted well to urbanisation. But can they survive along Kedron Brook?

The short-nosed bandicoot

Bandicoots are solitary animals, coming together only to breed and fight for territory.

They are one of those animals whose numbers suffer badly in times of stress, and recover

quickly with good conditions. For example, a female bandicoot can rear 7 young to independence in only 2 months, and give birth to another litter immediately.

Young bandicoots are carried in a pouch, where they attach to one of 8 teats. Once weaned, there is no further contact with the mother. Sexual maturity can occur as early as 2 months.

The bandicoot as a pest

Unfortunately, some regard the bandicoot as a pest.



Although bandicoots will eat berries, seeds and the like, they prefer insects. They obtain their food by wandering randomly around their territory, and using a keen sense of smell to detect their prey.

Often they will dig their food from the ground, leaving small conical holes as evidence of their visit. When feeding in lawns, they are actually doing more good than harm, since the lawn and curl grubs that they take are definite lawn pests.

They are also regarded as carriers of ticks, but it is doubtful if they are any worse than possums.

Preferred habitat

Bandicoots seem to have a need for two main types of habitat. The first is one that is open and uncluttered at ground level. Their liking for lawns gives a clue as to just how open this can be. They definitely don't like undergrowth that they have to tunnel through.

Their second need is for somewhere to rest during the day. They seek out thickets, often in gullies, where they build a flattened nest of sticks and grasses over a shallow depression. The nests have no obvious entrance, with the animals opening and resealing entrances as they need them.

Population densities

This was the subject of a study at Seventeen Mile Rocks some years back. One 2 ha site and one 70 ha site were surveyed over an 18 month period.

Male bandicoots were found to possess territories of about 2 ha, with females having smaller territories of about 1 ha. However territories seemed to overlap by about 30%.

Of course, not all parts of a site provide suitable habitat for any animal. At the Seventeen Mile Rocks sites, about 14 bandicoots were found to have their home range within the 70-odd hectares, with recordings of another 10 animals passing through or visiting during the study period.

Implications for conservation

While they need an open understory, bandicoots also need grasses, probably because these attract the grubs that the animals feed on.

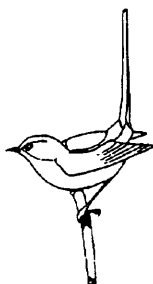
This is the first challenge. The para-grass that grows in the moist areas of Kedron Brook is far too dense to allow bandicoots to move. The higher and drier sites have carried lantana and guinea grass (introduced to feed cows) for many years. While suitable, these tend to dominate the bush, and provide tremendous fuel for a bushfire.

So there is a need to re-establish an understory of native grasses and shrubs in the open forest areas of Sparkes Hill and Grange Forest Park. There is also a need to re-establish bracken in the gullies to provide nesting opportunities.

Finally, it is likely that neither Grange Forest Park or Sparkes Hill is big enough to support viable populations, and there is a need for a wildlife corridor of a special sort to allow an exchange of animals.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that bandicoots will recolonise suitable areas if they are provided. It is also likely that good bandicoot habitat will prove attractive to small birds such as wrens and whipbirds.

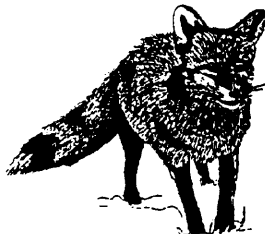


It is also clear that most of our remaining natural areas are currently unsuitable for these animals. If they are going to survive, it will take some effort on our part.

Frank Box

THE SAGA OF THE FOX

There have been further sightings of foxes, this time on Sparkes Hill. Foxes are a real threat to ground-dwelling animals such as bandicoots and bush-stone curlews.



Foxes have always been difficult to control, and particularly so in a city. They are, for example, generally regarded as being too smart to be trapped.

This makes for some innovative approaches, like that offered in correspondence recently from someone responsible for fox control in Brisbane: lock up your chickens at night and starve the foxes to death (they were serious)!

However, a local golf club has reported several successes recently with trapping foxes. The kills that led them to suspect foxes were all, surprisingly, of possums, despite the presence of bush-stone curlews on the course.

Doxiadis

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RECREATE THE BUSH

During the past 11 years that we have been working in Grange Forest Park there have not been any large fires in the park. This is not coincidental, but the result of volunteers removing the large stands of tall grasses.

Prior to this, these grasses would dry out each year and somehow catch fire, causing much concern to residents and damage to the bush.

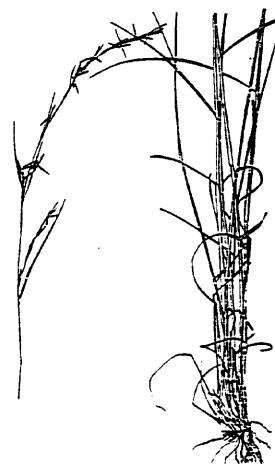
Large areas of the park have now been cleared of introduced grasses, and we are trying to re-establish a native understory. If you would like to join us, the next working bees are on:

- 4 February
- 3 March
- 31 March

Meet at the Blandford St entrance to Grange Forest Park.

Bob Devine

PLANT OF THE MONTH



**Cymbopogon refractus
"Barbed-wire grass"**

Not as well known as kangaroo grass, but a lovely local grass just the same.

This is also a clumping grass, but with much taller seed heads - up to 1.8m, with the seeds held in capsules that circle the stems like fence barbs.

**Available: Perrotts Nursery,
Elkhorn St, Enoggera**