

LANDCARE WORKSHOP OUTCOMES

Waddy Forest LCDC's Field walk and Workshop on Boreholes, Bugs and Birds



Adele Kendle of DAFWA and the rest of the group in the remnant bush of Waddy Forest Catchment (picture by Adele)

On 28th July 2011, NACC's Regional Landcare Facilitator and Waddy Forest LCDC teamed up to convene a field walk and workshop for participants to learn and hear the latest information on insects and birds as indicators of environmental health on farms and the implications for agricultural production and sustainability as well as the hydrology of the catchment. Twenty six volunteers and representatives from diverse range of stakeholder groups across the region attended.

The events started with a field walk in the remnant bushland of Waddy Forest catchment identifying diverse range of vertebrates, insects, birds and their foraging habitats. Four experts from Curtin University and the Department of Agriculture and Food were present in the field walk to provide comments and help identify various species of insects, bugs and birds.

The field walk was followed by a workshop at the Coorow Community Centre. Featured in the workshop were Lindsay Bourke from the Department of Environment and Conservation who presented on the hydrological and climatic trends in the region and share his observations in the Buntine-Marchegee Catchment hydrology.

Professors Jonathan Majer and Professor Stephen Davies (both from Curtin University) shared on different aspects of insects and invertebrates (such as worms, snails, spiders, mites, millipedes and centipedes) and about how these creatures are indicators of environmental health.

According to Professor Majer and Davies, the habitats of many of these species have deteriorated markedly because most of the land has been cleared for agricultural production. "With around 93% of the agricultural zone cleared, many species have retreated in their distribution or become extinct. Nevertheless, a number of species still persists in agricultural areas in the paddocks, remnant vegetation, reserves and road reserves but, the majority of these could soon be impacted by climate change." Prof Majer said it's often the smallest creatures that play a critical role in maintaining healthy landscapes. "What people often overlook is the role of invertebrates in a healthy and functioning ecosystem which is necessary to agricultural production and sustainability.

Prof Davies also made a remark that many of these creatures only survive because they can find living spaces, particularly around the homestead areas of the farm as these are usually not ploughed or burned. "However, if you want to maintain biodiversity or encourage animals to return such as birds and reptiles, all you need to do is create corridors that will provide nest sites and a dense understory in remnant vegetation."

Also Wayne Parker of the Department of Agriculture and Food WA presented on the outcomes of the Grain and Graze biodiversity project conducted in 2008 to measure the extent at which mixed farming, cropping and grazing have contributed to a healthy landscape. The project also investigated the level of impact birds have on neighbouring paddocks. According to Parker the number of species identified in the survey was dictated by the



Prof Steve Davies talks about importance of insects on the farm at the workshop in Coorow (picture taken by Ingrid)



Prof Steve Davies explaining different aspects of insects to the audience during field walk at Waddy Forest Catchments (picture taken by Ingrid Krockenberger)

surrounding habitat. The high number of species found in the perennial pasture paddocks is the result of sown tree lines and larger trees in a neighbouring drainage line.

While the larger open spaces of the cropping and rotation paddocks don't provide the shelter required by smaller birds. Over and above their aesthetic birds have practical implications for the farm in which they live. Many birds feed on the insects from the paddocks surrounding their habitat.

The last speaker was Peter Mangano also of DAFWA who spoke about the pests and beneficial insects of crops and pastures with reference to host preference and landscape. According to Mangano landholders should consider an integrated pest management (IPM) plan which employs natural methods to control pest insects and only uses chemicals as a last resort as many birds feed on these bugs.

Acknowledgement

This field walk and workshop is supported by the Northern Agricultural Catchments Council, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Network Initiative. The event was organised by the RLF in response to the requests from the Waddy Forest LCDC for more training and support of the volunteer community landcare groups in the region. Special thanks go to Fiona Falconer who helped in organising the event.

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Wayne Parker of DAFWA presented about Grain & Graze biodiversity project in the Coorow Community Centre (Picture by Stanley Yokwe)

