

Upper Dawson September Newsletter

Compiled by Ann Hobson

No doubt – it's drought. Bare paddocks in some places between Theodore and Possum Park, a crop struggling to grow, and long dry grass where cattle haven't grazed. Enough run-off from the bitumen road to line the Highway around Taroom with native, but unpalatable, "bluebells" (*Wahlenbergia communis*). We've had high fire danger and sizzling temperatures after a cooler



Viola with Thorsborne Award

spell. Similar conditions were seen through the North Burnett on return from the State Wildlife Queensland Annual Meeting at Currimundi where Upper Dawson member Viola Temple-Watts received the award for outstanding contribution to the organisation, to conservation and community, and the Upper Dawson Butterfly Weekend, initiated and planned by Viola, was also a winner. >



Our August weekend at Possum Park satisfied the curiosity of those who had driven past since childhood, and were finally able to go beyond the serious-looking barbed-wire fence, (sagging a little after 8 decades of military service), to find that some of the old artillery 'bunkers' have been transformed to provide comfortable self-contained accommodation for a night or two away from home. Other options included cabins, railway carriages and a stretched 'igloo', but the modified TAA (Trans Australia Airlines) aircraft isn't available yet, merely because there's an insurance hiccup around making certain that no one can get squashed if the 4 tonne door slams shut unexpectedly. Otherwise, it's fitted out for a very comfortable stay in a unique cabin. No cabin-crew service, however, I believe.



Our search for wildflowers the next day seemed doomed as we looked out over patches of drought-dry shrubs known as "heath" on pebbly red-brown soil along Mt Myrtle, Wildflower, Gurulmundi and Welsh's Roads.

However, a splash of yellow from a plant on the roadside encouraged us to

stop. It seemed attractive until someone touched it, and discovered why it's called "sickle" wattle (*Acacia triptera*). With metres of it in every direction, some of it flowerless, dessicated, and rust red, it seemed this might be our only wildflower, until we wandered into the heath, and found quite a variety of "xerophytic" shrubs, all using water-saving strategies. Short wiry stems, tiny leaves crowded close to branches, leathery foliage, tiny pale flowers, and prickly leaves, were typical. Hidden among this unpromising plantscape, however, were some more colourful gems .



Photo Helen Keys

<The white calitrix (*Calitrix tetragona*), has tiny crowded leaves hugging the stem, and when the petals soon fall, the calyx turns red, making a spectacular splash of colour among the bushes.

The Needlewood (*Hakea purpuraea*) has replaced its leaves with serious spines, and kept its seeds tightly flattened between the two stone-hard segments of its grey pod before letting them fly. >



Photo Helen Keys

More common in the heath were the less colourful and more prolific flowers of the *Baeckea densifolia* and others for which our amateur knowledge had no name. >



Later, on sandy soil, we found graceful wands of mauve-pink kunzea (*Kunzea opposita*) flowering above grassland and alive with meadow argus butterflies (*Junonia villida*).



The yellow slender riceflower (*Pimelea linifolia*) also preferred the sand along Gurulmundi Road as we left the area.

We had seen the war-time use of Possum Park transformed, while respecting the past, and we had found beauty among droughted and inhospitable spiny shrubs. Nature plus human creativity gave us a great weekend of discovery.



Public Presentation: On 28 October at 10am our Branch will be hosting a public presentation at 10am at the Anglican Hall, covering what scientists are learning about the Upper Dawson Wetlands and their past 1000 years. Hear scientists Maria Vandergragt and Lisa Pulman who are studying the wetlands of the Great Barrier Reef Catchments. Please see flyer in Taroom Tidings, and contact Loraine on 0429 931 264 so we have numbers for cuppa and light lunch catering.

A flyer for a public presentation about the Upper Dawson Wetlands and the Great Barrier Reef. The top half of the flyer features a photograph of a wetland landscape with a body of water, trees, and a clear sky. The bottom half has a dark green background with white and yellow text. The title "Upper Dawson Wetlands and the Great Barrier Reef" is in large, bold, orange letters. Below the title, the text "Wildlife Queensland's Upper Dawson Branch presentation" and "10 am 28th October at the Anglican Church Hall, Taroom" is in white. The presenter information "Scientist Maria Vandergragt and team member Lisa Pulman from the Department of Environment and Science presents:" is in white. A list of topics is in white, and a box on the right contains "Free entry", "All welcome", and "Morning tea and light lunch provided" in white. At the bottom, contact information "For catering numbers, please contact Loraine Hellyer on 0429 931 264" is in yellow. The Wildlife Qld logo is at the bottom center.

Upper Dawson Wetlands and the Great Barrier Reef

Wildlife Queensland's Upper Dawson Branch presentation
10 am 28th October at the Anglican Church Hall, Taroom

Scientist **Maria Vandergragt** and team member **Lisa Pulman** from the *Department of Environment and Science* presents:

- Studying the present condition of Upper Dawson wetlands.
- The sediment and chemical changes for two sites, including Lake Murphy, over the last 1000 years. One study has been completed.

Topics include:

- Overview of the Reef catchment wetland monitoring program
- Selection process for wetlands
- Commitments made to Landholders
- How monitoring is conducted
- How their findings will be reported
- The future of GBR studies

Free entry

All welcome

Morning tea and light lunch provided

For catering numbers, please contact Loraine Hellyer on 0429 931 264

Wildlife Qld
Preservation Society of
Upper Dawson