

Wednesday Walk Report

27/4/2016

House Creek in Gerard Moylan and Willows Park

Leader Glen Johnson, DELWP

Gerard Moylan Park

As we begin Glen points out how lucky we are in Wodonga to have these riparian corridors running like major veins through the city to the Kiewa and Murray river systems. These creek corridors are always especially fertile and potentially places of rich biodiversity. They reach like fingers up into the hills creating connected landscapes and we are fortunate to have large remnant trees dotted throughout the parks.

Riparian: A **riparian zone** or **riparian area** is the interface between land and a [river](#) or [stream](#). Plant habitats and communities along the river margins and [banks](#) are called riparian vegetation, characterized by [hydrophilic plants](#). Riparian zones are important in [ecology](#), [environmental management](#), and [civil engineering](#) because of their role in [soil conservation](#), their habitat [biodiversity](#), and the influence they have on [fauna](#) and [aquatic ecosystems](#), including [grasslands](#), [woodlands](#), [wetlands](#), or even non-vegetative areas. (Wikipedia)

Left hand side (walking south with houses on our left and House Creek on our right)

Crossing the footbridge on Brockley St to reach the eastern side of the creek, Glen points out the recent clearing underneath the bridge, which included a young Eucalypt that had self-sown there. This has left a gap between mature eucalypts too large for gliders to cover.



Walking south we note the diverse gardens in the houses beside the creek. While our attention was drawn by some cacti with alarming potential to spread, Glen pointed out that each and **every neighbour is an asset** with potential to assist in stopping threats and improving the creek. Our role is to engage them in becoming active stewards!

Stopping at a weeping willow (*right*) Glen points out another positive aspect of the urban creeks; we don't have domestic livestock (sheep, cattle etc) accessing the waterway and so do not have to contend with the issues they cause in eating native vegetation and causing erosion.



While the Weeping willow is not as bad a weed as other species, the Black willow is a terrible invader, and there is plenty in evidence as we continue along the creek. The Black willow is a "Weed of National Significance".



Weeds noted as we walk include many that are spread by berries; privet (*left*), briar rose, prunus, blackberry and ivy. Birds and particularly foxes spread these weeds. Other woody weeds noted spread by sucker and seed. Most have been originally planted in the parks or in adjacent gardens as feature trees. We saw box elder, poplar, ash, pawlonia,

Chinese tallow, Cootamundra wattle and brooms. There were also some, such as this Morning glory vine (*right*), which have probably



spread from dumped garden waste. The 'Bush Invaders' booklet is a good reference to identify and find out how best to remove these.

National Weed Strategy: Australia's National Weed Strategy is about national biosecurity and complements other national strategies for invasive species. The national strategy provides a framework to establish consistent weed management guidelines for all stakeholders. It identifies priorities for weed management across the nation with the aim of minimising the impact of weeds on Australia's environmental, economic and social assets. The Weeds of National Significance (WONS) list is a key part of this strategy (attached on back page).



Close to the creek bank we can see that the Council sprays the kikuyu grass to create an edge to the mown park zone. Glen points out that this has two negative effects; it leaves a bare strip prone to invasion by annual weeds like wild oats (which are highly flammable in summer), and leaves the bank bare, structurally weak and prone to erosion.

This brings us to a discussion about kikuyu grass. While it is an aggressive and smothering weed, it has advantages which make it preferable to other weeds in the riparian zone: It is green in

summer and therefore less of a fire hazard than annual grasses such as wild oats and phalaris. It does not grow as tall as the other weedy grasses so people are still able to access the creek. It is smothering potentially worse weeds. For these reasons Glen puts kikuyu way down the list of weeds needing attention along the creek here, and suggests that some kikuyu covered areas could even be carefully (so as not to kill regenerating natives) slashed once a year to provide picnic spots and creek access along the creek bank (*right*).



To our left at this point is a wide mown area with a playground – an area which shows good integration of native trees into the park and joining the park to the riparian zone. Planting native trees in the parks can be used to cut down on the need to mow while providing habitat. Unfortunately this area still contains poplars and box elder (*left*) which are spreading along the creek – quoting Glen: "Never, ever plant or retain non-natives that have the potential to become woody weeds... This needs to go!"

Also in this area is a dead old Eucalypt which the council have left standing (*right*), having removed the smaller branches which could fall. This is good practice as it provides a landing and perching point and good structure for birds and bats.



Looking back to the creek we see Canary Island date palm *Phoenix canariensis* (*left*), which Glen warns is a species with huge potential as an invasive weed. Unfortunately invasive birds love these palms; starlings and the dreaded indian mynah colonise them and spread them far and wide. Glen counted about 10 in the whole park and pointed out that it would be worth the effort to remove them and be able to say the park has NONE.

Glen demonstrates just how easy it is to remove some of these woody weeds just in the course of a morning walk, with weeds like privet up to thigh height pulling out by the roots very easily. Just bang the roots to remove any soil and leave them lying there to die. After rain other species are just as easy to hand pull and it is well worth doing before they get too big. Then 'cut and paint' is required which involves more effort.

Looked at in total there are a lot of woody weeds along the creek here. It is always tempting for us to tackle the worst areas first, which takes a lot of effort and often money. Glen advocates following the principle of the 'Bradley method', which involves starting at the best point, removing the few weeds there to have a clear patch and gradually consolidating 'weed free' patches. It's certainly very satisfying to be able to pull one or two weeds and then see that a whole area is actually weed free.

The Bradley method of bush regeneration: The method was developed by sisters Eileen and Joan Bradley and is based on allowing the native plants to re-colonise areas following, mainly, hand clearing of weeds. The basic principle of the method is to work from the least weed infested areas to the most densely infested. In the least infested areas there are abundant native plants and seed to colonise the area from which weeds have been removed. In the dense weed infestations, the number of weed propagules far out number native propagules so weed growth rather than native plant growth is favoured. See more about it at <http://www.anpsa.org.au/weeds4.html>

Pearce St Bridge

Once again the creek under the bridge has been cleared out, removing Eucalypt saplings which would have connected the corridor for gliders. We need to plant some trees very close by, preferably actually between the vehicle and foot bridges.

Gliders can't glide more than about 40 metres, and need to be able to glide from Eucalypt to Eucalypt. They need height to launch from and a landing place well above ground. Planting trees to ensure there is eventually a mature tree every 25m or so will allow gliders to move along the creek corridor. With our help, all of the connecting parkways throughout Wodonga can eventually have a network of trees for gliders.



Willow Park from Pearce St, walking north with House Creek on our right.

Now we walk amongst the Friends of Willow Park's extensive plantings and park improvement projects. The wetland is looking great and reeds are recovering rapidly following the latest cleanout of silt. The new artwork on the concrete wall looks spectacular (*right*).

To our right is a large mulched area with plantings from last National



Tree Day. Obviously a lot of work has been done here mulching and hand and spray weeding, and the work is ongoing. This prompts another discussion about mulching and weeds. Glen's rule here is **"Pick your sites"**. Sites most likely to succeed will have existing eucalypts creating competition for the light, using ground moisture and creating natural mulch. Bare sites with mulch added artificially have plenty of sunlight and moisture and are therefore the perfect space



for weeds to establish (*right*). In other words, starting in a bare area favours weeds over whatever you are planting, and means you will need to spend a lot of energy removing weeds.

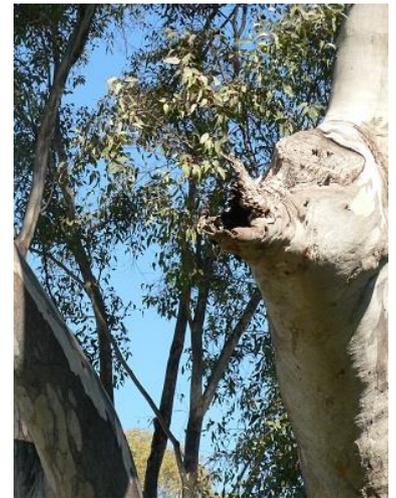
Further along we noticed mistletoe drooping down (*left*) and people asked if this was a problem. In a setting with the full range of understorey, where plenty of possums live, mistletoe is not a problem. On isolated trees with no supporting vegetation (ie in farm paddocks), mistletoe can parasitise entire trees and slowly kill them.

Glen's Easy Eucalypt family ID: Hug a tree. What do you feel? Rough bark means it's a Box. Smooth means it's a Gum.



Up near the footbridge the site for this year's National Tree Day plantings (*left*) is looking great, with a thick layer of mulch already in place. The new plants should do well here as it has the existing eucalypts at work creating a welcoming environment for natives.

Well done to the Friends of Willow Park for a sustained effort in rehabilitating the park. This morning we have seen a variety of birds, retained habitat, successful native plantings all along the creek and some natural regeneration as well. There is huge potential here to engage residents, improve the habitat for gliders and reduce the woody weed threats.



Enjoying these fruits of community labour, we set our course to complete the loop, encountering an illegal motorbike rider en-route, and later the police in pursuit!

Back at our starting point, morning tea featured yellow watermelon (the verdict: very good).

Thanks everyone!



In Summary: Gerard Moylan and Willow Park

Assets

- Riparian corridor
- Large remnant trees
- River Red Gum; Silver Wattle; Lightwood Wattle, River Bottlebrush, Red Stem Wattle; Bursaria lasiophylla

Threats | Weeds

- Woody Weeds (Box Elder, Ash, Broom, Canary Island palm, Poplars, Plane Tree)
- Berry based / fox bird spread plants (Privet x3 species, Briar Rose, Prunus, Blackberry, Ivy)
- Non local Weedy Wattles (Acacia floribunda, Cootamundra Wattle)
- Other weeds (Vinca Periwinkle Phalaris eg Jack Eames frontage)

Management Actions

Engagement and Awareness:

- Natives vs Exotics: Weeds species recognition & Understanding of threat status. Resource: Bush Invaders booklet. Project opportunity: Gardens for Wildlife, Council Impact Grant – community engagement
- Edge zones: Kikuyu OK with occasional Slashing. Round up edge zones have NO value.

Revegetation

Aim for

- Indigenous trees for arboreal mammals and suppression of grasses/ weeds.
- Indigenous understorey for food source and habitat
- House Creek = Exotic free zone (Natives only)

Methods

- Take advantage of competition and weed suppression principles - plant near established trees
- Mulched zones OK provided under existing established native tree zones (and out of flood zone) and edged both sides preferably eg track edge.

Priorities

- Riparian zone
- Parkland, access track and parkland linkages

Woody / weed control

Methods:

- Hand pulling small plants before difficult to manage
- Cut and paste slightly larger plants
- Frill & paste or Chainsaw large plants

Approach:

- Follow Bradley Technique - Protection of Best bits First.
- Map needs and progress
- Prioritise aggressive invaders (Box elder, poplars, black willow, Canary island palm)
- Staged long term removal of established weeping willows
- Green Army CoW potential for Woody Weed cut and paste
- Landmates potential chainsaw crew - use Mulcher for waste via CoW or contract

Priorities:

- Removal ASAP of existing Box Elder planted/ park setting plants - corner near Bulldogs, and 100m nth Bridge near track.

Weeds of National Significance

<http://www.weeds.org.au/WoNS/>

Common Name	Scientific Name
alligator weed	<i>Alternanthera philoxeroides</i>
athel pine	<i>Tamarix aphylla</i>
bitou bush / boneseed	<i>Chrysanthemoides monilifera</i>
blackberry	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.
cabomba	<i>Cabomba caroliniana</i>
Chilean needle grass	<i>Nassella neesiana</i>
gorse	<i>Ulex europaeus</i>
hymenachne	<i>Hymenachne amplexicaulis</i>
lantana	<i>Lantana camara</i>
mesquite	<i>Prosopis</i> spp.
mimosa	<i>Mimosa pigra</i>
Parkinsonia	<i>Parkinsonia aculeata</i>
parthenium weed	<i>Parthenium hysterophorus</i>
pond apple	<i>Annona glabra</i>
prickly acacia	<i>Acacia nilotica</i> spp. <i>indica</i>
rubber vine	<i>Cryptostegia grandiflora</i>
salvinia	<i>Salvinia molesta</i>
serrated tussock	<i>Nassella trichotoma</i>
Willows except weeping willows, pussy willow and sterile pussy willow	<i>Salix</i> spp. except <i>S. babingtonia</i> <i>S. x calendendron</i> and <i>S. x reichardtii</i>
African boxthorn	<i>Lycium ferocissimum</i>
Sagittaria	<i>Sagittaria platyphylla</i>
Asparagus weeds	<i>Asparagus aethiopicus</i> , <i>A. africanus</i> , <i>A. asparagoides</i> Western Cape form, <i>A. declinatus</i> , <i>A. plumosus</i> and <i>A. scandens</i> . Includes <i>original WoNS Asparagus asparagoides</i> Excludes <i>A. officinalis</i> and <i>A. Racemosis</i>
Bellyache bush	<i>Jatropha gossypifolia</i>
Brooms	
Scotch	<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>
Montpellier	<i>Genista monspessulana</i>
Flax Leaf	<i>Genista linifolia</i>
Cat's claw creeper	<i>Dolichandra unguis-cati</i>
Fireweed	<i>Senecio madagascariensis</i>
Gamba grass	<i>Andropogon gayanus</i>
Madeira vine	<i>Anredera cordifolia</i>
Opuntoid cacti	<i>Opuntia</i> spp. (excludes <i>O. ficus-indica</i>), <i>Cylindropuntia</i> spp., <i>Austrocylindropuntia</i> spp.
Silverleaf nightshade	<i>Solanum elaeagnifolium</i>
Water hyacinth	<i>Eichhornia crassipes</i>