

Weed work on the lake

Conservation Volunteers Australia have just completed three weeks of their second year of weed control on Lake Kununurra under the direction of the East Kimberley Weed Working Group.

In the first week they concentrated on areas close to town such as the Lions Park and Swim Beach. Weeds targeted were leucaena, neem and the 'vine' merremia. These pest plants were rapidly choking out the remaining native trees still standing on the foreshore. The second week saw them working up around Cooliman Creek chasing down horseradish tree, coral vine, feral bananas and other weeds including carpentaria palms that are starting to spread down small creek lines.

Their last week was spent working around the Ord Dam and village area up at Lake Argyle concentrating on bellyache bush and leucaena. Currently bellyache bush is confined to an area just below the dam and close to the village. It is important to remove this particular menace before it spreads down stream.

Ord Land and Water took on a coordination and management role for the project over the three weeks that the volunteers were here

The work would not have been possible without the generous support of the following commercial, community and government organisations who supplied the following—

- Department of Agriculture and CALM - chemical and sprayers
- BP Kununurra, the Shell Depot and Department of Environment - diesel.
- Ord River District Cooperative - protective clothing.
- Go Wild tours, Argyle Expeditions and the Agricultural Society - accommodation.
- Water Corporation, CALM, SWEK, Envirofund and Rio Tinto WA Future Fund - funding.
- Department of Environment - transport.

Salvinia back in Lily Creek

The notorious weed 'salvinia' has re-emerged once again in Lily Creek. Salvinia is a free-floating, aquatic weed and one of the 20 Weeds of National Significance. It poses a severe threat to the ecological health and landscape values of Lily Creek Lagoon and potentially all Kimberley waterways.

Salvinia was first discovered in Lily Creek in May 2000 and was considered to be all but eradicated after some fast control work by the community and government organisations. However a new sighting made by a member of the community was confirmed by the Department of Agriculture in early June 2004.

It is likely that the Salvinia first found its way into Lily Creek from a backyard pond or fish tank, down a stormwater drain. It is important that people are aware that plants in their gardens and ponds can escape, spread and turn into a huge environmental and aesthetic problem.

Salvinia grows very fast, and it degrades water quality and animal habitats by reducing dissolved oxygen. If not contained, it could affect not only wildlife and water quality, but also impact on irrigation, tourism and popular recreation activities. Currently within the Northern Territory where it is considered a major weed menace boat access is prohibited on the waterways due to the weed's presence. If the weed escaped from its present position, currently behind a floating boom the impact on current activities within the creek could be serious.

The eradication of the weed from its present position will be shared between the Department of Agriculture, CaLM and the Shire.

Where are the toads?

Just how close are they is something we would all like to know. One way to find that out would be to receive road reports on where people are seeing them on the road to Katherine.

If you've come across them in your travels lately let us know where you saw them, contact Dick on 91 692 222 or dick@olw.com.au



CVA volunteer with the remains of a horseradish tree that was cut down and about to be sprayed



Lakeside drain where the salvinia was found



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Farming practices changing for the better



Farmers at a recent field demonstration held on Oasis Farms by the Department of Agriculture looking at soil compaction, moisture content and other aspects of soil health.

A recent survey done by Ord Land and Water has highlighted farmer's efforts to safeguard the river and maintain a healthy industry. The survey covered over 50% of furrow irrigated land within the irrigation area and highlighted a strong trend in farmer's management decisions to improve the quality of water running off their farms, increase their efficient use of water and improve soil health as a means to grow healthier crops.

The survey looked at farmer's adoption of actions and strategies that have come out of the 'Land' component of the Ord Land and Water Management Plan since its release in 2000. A total of 86% of the actions relating to irrigation have been acted on by growers. In addition the survey indicates that since 2000 there have been continued widespread environmentally sound improvements to farm management.

Whilst it was clearly articulated through the interviews that the survey missed many of the changes made prior to the release of the Plan in 2000. It does highlight the depth to which these changes have been made across the agricultural community and their continued refinement since then.

The greatest changes have been made with growers adopting practices to improve general crop and soil health such as the use of cover crops in the wet season, developing integrated pest management systems that rely on beneficial insects and soft chemicals and the use of less mobile forms of fertiliser.

With further local projects planned over the next four years through the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water quality feeding in more information it is expected that farmers will be able to further improve on the steps they have already taken

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OLW web site

The Ord Land and Water web site is now up and running, although far from finished. For those who have seen the old site the new one is quite a change.

Project progress reports. Board member profiles and even past newsletters will all be on the site.

For a look see the website address is www.olw.com.au

Any feedback or suggestions on how to improve the site would be appreciated.

Also if anyone knows of some interesting links please send them in for inclusion.

Redclaw trapping trials

Many local anglers are currently taking advantage of the large numbers of redclaw in Lake Kununurra. Native to the Northern Territory and Queensland they have become established in the lake over the last few years. Although how they actually got here is still a bit of a mystery.

The main ways of taking redclaw is either by diving or by trapping. The WA Fisheries rules indicate that drop nets are legal to use whilst enclosed traps are not. It seems that the majority of red claw fishers are using enclosed 'opera house' traps because redclaw will not enter a trap immediately. There are concerns that these traps may catch and drown tortoises and freshwater crocodiles.

A research project is being developed by the East Kimberley Recreational Fisheries Advisory Committee to trial various trap designs and baits that catch redclaw but not other animals. Input has been sought from CALM, Department of Fisheries, East Kimberley Sport Fishing Club and Murdoch University. The research project is being finalised and research applications will be forwarded to both Fisheries and CALM to authorise the trials.

Over the next 12 months, a few members of the local fishing community will be carrying out the work. What is hoped is that at the end of the trial sufficient data can be provided that may lead to a change in the legal gear that can be used to take redclaw in Lake Kununurra.

Further information can be obtained from Francis Bright (after hours) 9169 1215.

On farm water monitoring

The Ord Irrigation Cooperative has recently received funding through the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality to extend the current ORIA irrigation water quality monitoring program onto local farms.

Random sampling of farms tail-water in the valley will provide, over time, an indicator of how effective current and changing management practices are in keeping pesticides, nutrients and soil from moving off farm and into the River.

This project is a good companion to the OLW Pesticide Project that is finding management options farmers can use to reduce runoff of pesticides.

Both projects are good examples of how organisations are working together to solve local problems with local solutions.



New Environmental Officer for the Ord Irrigation Cooperative Anna Price installing an automatic sampler in a farm tail drain.



Redclaw going through one of its moulting phases

Wetlands testing

Ord Land and Water has recently received funding through the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality to monitor an artificial wetland complex within the irrigation area. The system has a catchment for over 500 hectares of cropped ground that produces sugar cane, cotton, tree crops and some horticulture. It has evolved over the years in the flattened gully of a natural watercourse and covers just over two hectares of land. The monitoring program will initially run for 12 months and will look at the system's ability to remove pesticides and nutrients from tailwater running back into the river.

Wetlands are becoming a viable method of removing pollutants from waterways in some areas and may have a place in local irrigation management. The project will also examine the maintenance requirements and costs associated with the site.



Water sampling the wetlands system

'Nuke' the neem

Neem trees have been an increasing part of the local landscape for over a decade now. What was once planted in the hope of people benefiting from its natural insecticidal properties is rapidly turning into a weed of major consequences.

Ord Land and Water wants to see some control, gained over the plant before it becomes a Kimberley wide problem. We will be organising a neem kill program with other interested organisations and community members over the coming 12 months

Pesticide project

The first Ord Land and Water - CSIRO pesticide experiment for this year was undertaken on Oasis Farms in early May. This particular experiment was designed to see if cultivation after a spray application could be used to reduce chemical runoff. The work was done on a hybrid seed crop and both soluble and non-soluble chemicals were tested.

Of the three chemicals tested, cultivation reduced the movement off farm by between 75% for the non soluble chemical and 53% and 38% respectively for the more soluble chemicals. This work confirms earlier work where a different type of cultivation reduced the movement off farm of a soluble chemical also by 53%

The last experiment of the project will be held later this year on sugarcane to see if the use of polyacrylamide will reduce atrazine runoff. The experiment will try to determine if polyacrylamide allows pesticides to infiltrate further into the soil profile and threaten ground water quality.

The project will be completed in June of 2005 with the release of guidelines to minimise pesticide runoff from local farms.



Incorporating the chemical after spraying while a previous trial in the experiment is watered.

The effects of fire on animals

Thalie Partridge is conducting a PhD research project looking at how habitat preferences and requirements of small mammals and reptiles in Purnululu National Park are related to fires. Trapping and radio tracking will be conducted at the end of the wet and dry seasons in 2004 and 2005. The April/May trip earlier this year was very successful with three new species recorded, two blind snakes and the chameleon dragon.

Habitats with different lengths of time since fire appear to support different species, e.g. the desert mouse is restricted to dense unburnt spinifex while the delicate mouse is found in areas that have been recently burnt with little ground cover. Information on the fire ecology and biology of small mammals and reptiles in the park may enable better fire management or through community involvement at least a more informed debate pertaining to fire management. Volunteers are required for field trips and will be trained in fieldwork procedures including, trapping, radio tracking and plant and animal identification. Please contact Thalie for more information, email:

tpartrid@rna.bio.mq.edu.au



A radio transmitter attached to a Western Chestnut Mouse allows the project to find out what habitat (burnt/unburnt) is used for nesting and feeding.

Kimberley Natural Resource Management (NRM) update

The first in a series of Kimberley wide workshops that will feed information into a Kimberley wide natural resource management strategy was held in Kununurra in late July. Other workshops were also held at Broome, Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek in early August.

Those attending were asked to identify the region's land, water, coastal and biodiversity assets within an economical, social, cultural and environmental framework.

The workshop went on to identify the threats to those assets and strategies and actions to deal with them within a 10 year time frame. The draft plan will be released in November for further public comment.



Workshop participants discuss NRM priorities for land in the Kimberley