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Activity Update February 2023

This activity update is for the month of February 2023. If you would like to be on our mailing list and receive this free update, please email Aimee Linke on the above email address or view on webpage. These projects are from varied sources of funding including Grassroots Grants, the Irongrass Grasslands Project, Healthy Rivers Grant plus other small grants and contract work.

Meldanda

1. Continued with managing the volunteers, camp bookings, provision of materials and equipment and all necessary administrations including invoicing and banking for Meldanda. Kept neighbors informed of any camp bookings Campers- we have had about 18 campers stay at Meldanda, plus ASSA and star gazers they said we were doing a great job looking after the place, they got some great photos of the night sky and will definitely come back.
2. Aimee has been progressing the booking page that is linked in with the Meldanda website with John Kobes, to enable all bookings to be done through this website. It is now up and running and we have already had several bookings through the site.
3. Volunteers Mick, Sheralee, Bear, Andy, Paul, Brenton and Aimee have been very active weeding large areas of Meldanda, it is really starting to look great.
4. Aimee provided a talk and tour to thirteen members from the Mannum Garden Club at Meldanda, they heard about the Dark Sky Reserve, Western Pygmy Possums, 1 Million Turtle Project and Microbats.
5. Volunteers Andy and Bear sorted out irrigation issues with a broken pipe that runs across the Marne River to service the front bushgarden area.
6. Volunteers Bear and Andy moved the donation/camp fees box to the more secure metal one near the BBQ area. Andy and Bear also topped up the potable water tank.
7. Volunteer Brenton brought in his ride-on mower and mowed the large campground area for us, he did an amazing job. It is an ongoing activity mowing with how much the Roly Poly's keep on growing, but on the bright side I believe we are on top of the caltrop issue we use to have.
8. We made up some new signs for the large and small campground areas that the volunteers put up for us, it will help visitors when they are camping on site.



Figure 1 Small campground



Figure 2 Meldanda Carpark

Community Nursery

9. Volunteers Sheralee and David general nursery work potting on and weeding. Greg Kirk, Sheralee, and David potted on *Atriplex nummularia* and sowed some floodplain species.
10. Provided 50 Blackbox for landholder at Blanchetown who wants to replant area after the flooding.
11. Supported the Mannum Garden Club visit to the nursery, they were interested in seeing our nursery and what we grow.
12. Contacted from the Morgan Council office about supporting a community activity to support flood affected landholders with tubestock for replanting.
13. Supported a landholder at Mannum Xing with species selection for planting around two dams.
14. Landholder site visit to property on Pine Hut Road to provide advice and support on species selection for their project, also identified plants whilst there.
15. Landholder enquiry about periodic burning as part of their land management. Have made some enquiries with DEW and will look at supporting an information session for some landholders with a Fire Management Officer from DEW and other supporting staff, to help support and inform landholders to facilitate this type of land management in parts of our region.
16. Landholder who owns a 500 acre property at Brownlow is interested in a holistic approach to farming they plan to use rotational and regenerative farming practices. They would like me to look at their property to talk about the types of plant species found and assistance with what to plant to meet their project aims.

Committee & other

17. Managed the office, volunteers and all necessary administrations including monthly payment of bills, reports, invoicing, managing webpages and social media posts, scanned all receipts and reconciled monthly accounts in XERO.
18. Sent out agenda, minutes, correspondence list, and financial report for the month to the

Committee.

19. Submitted progress report for Grassroots grant 'Landcare in the Murray 2023', it was approved.
20. We held our monthly meeting at David and Tiqui Bennett's place at Devon Downs after a site visit to Chris Tugwell's Place to see the successful revegetation. Whilst on the site visit Alex Emmins spoke about an invasive declared weed, Hudson Pear, which is being managed on the property by the Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board.



Figure 3 Alex Emmins showing the Hudson Pear

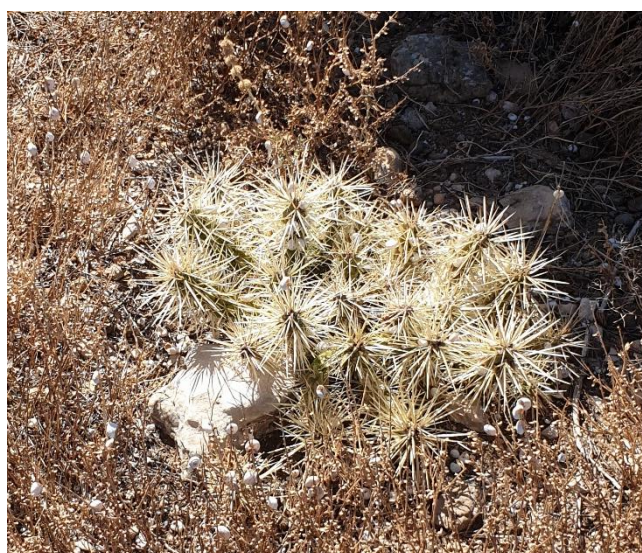


Figure 4 Hudson Pear



Figure 3 Chris Tugwell showing the committee before photos of the successful revegetation on his property.

Regent Parrots



21. Rowena - I have been keeping in communication with the Almond farms engaged in the Decoy Crop project and we have been discussing other ways that we can support them to manage Regent and other native parrots in their orchards.



River Murray International Dark Sky Reserve - Chris Tugwell

22. Spoke with Jason from the Monash Nova Rover team to discuss possible schools' visits in late March.
23. Contacted by Matthias Schmidt Dark Sky Coordinator at Cedar Breaks National Monument in Utah re possible collaborations. He is visiting Australia in for the lunar eclipse in WA and wants to visit our Reserve.
24. Many people will have seen the Aurora Australis, caught on camera as far north as Swan Reach
25. Discussions with SA Power Networks re security lights outside Cambrai School. They say they were installed after a series of school fires some decades ago. SAPN have suggested a light that is even brighter (4,000 K) to replace the current ones. Suggested to David Hassett at the Council that we only want Cambrai to be as dark as Sedan. He will look into it and do a night time check.
26. Aiming to re-schedule Parliament House presentation. Don Bursill is discussing this with Frank Pangallo.
27. David Bennett has been contacted by someone who wants to donate another Meade LX 90 telescope to us. Value \$3,000 plus.
28. Meeting- Dark Sky Committee Meeting in February, Aimee took the minutes for the meeting and typed up the minutes for the December meeting, both were emailed to Chris.

Healthy Rivers – aquatic weeds project - MRLB Staff

29. Due to exceptionally high river flows over the last few months all River operations were ceased. Boat launching facilities were closed and a ban was declared for no watercraft to be operational on the water during the flood event. Access to target land-based weed infestations were made difficult also due to high water impeding access and creating a danger as flooding to tracks and cliff areas made areas unsafe. With the River receding at a fast rate at the end of this month, planning is underway to revisit sites to undertake inspections and continue surveying/control of Yellow Water Lily infestations that have flourished during the flood event.

30. Surveys uncovered Yellow Water Lily present in various locations. Lily was juvenile at time of inspection, but the decision was made to treat what we could to reduce the risk of any further spread of plants with the strong flows
31. Zadows landing has had a huge influx of plants (YWL) with a very high percentage of lagoon covered with flowering yellow Water Lily plants. Access to boat ramp in this area is still closed but will be a priority to survey and control plants escaping into the main stream system.
32. Sunnyside was surveyed from a high advantage point location. Yellow Water Lily had also flourished and spread throughout the backwater at this location. This area will be another high priority location that will be targeted for control to reduce the biomass and reduce the threat of infestation of the main stream. Have been liaising with the Manager of Paiwalla Wetlands and we are putting together a plan to work in conjunction with the community group, utilizing our combined two boats to undertake control spraying of the area.
33. Caurnamont shack area inspection showed good results with Lily treated in late November 2023 has cleared all visible Lily from the area and not continued throughout the flood. Access is still unavailable to the lagoon area but will be inspected over the following month.
34. White Weeping Broom Trial – District officers visited the sites of the chemical trials to carryout monitoring of effectiveness of chemicals trialled. Talking to key Landowners that land was utilized for the trials, resulted in very positive feedback and the results of control. Two chemical treatments have had great effectiveness. Further monitoring will continue to be sure plants will not recover and reshoot throughout the growing season. Will look at further buffer spraying throughout this area to try and contain spread of the White Weeping Broom infestations.
35. Wheel Cactus – Properties in the Devon Downs/Sunny Dale area were inundated with water so planned control was put on hold until the water receded. Plants on the high country with large stands of Wheel Cactus (*Opuntia robusta*) were infected with bio control using Cochineal (*Dactyopius Sp.*). This has been successful in the area in reducing fruiting of the plant and suppressing further spread. With right conditions the bugs will breed and attack the plants internals and reduce biomass of pads and reduce infestations.
36. Spraying for *Opuntia* off the cliffs at Caurnamont has been successful with results taking a long time to take effect. Spraying early last year using Garlon and wetter have taken over 6 months to take full effect. Trial was undertaken on the cliffs up to the roadside of a heavy infestation of Common Pest Pear (*Opuntia stricta*).

Irongrass Native Grasslands Project – Aimee Linke

37. Rainfall at the Meldanda trial site in February 6mm.
38. Aimee topped up wicking bed 120 litres, over February and weeded the beds.
39. Volunteer Sheralee helped Aimee to weed the grass seed orchard and harvest *Enneapogon nigricans* and *Chloris truncata*, we then headed to the seed shed to clean the *Cryocephalum* sp. seed.

40. Volunteers Bear and Andy used the blower vac to harvest native grass seed from the seed production area.
41. Volunteers Mick, Brenton and Sheralee helped Aimee to keep cleaning the *Cryocephalum* sp. seed.
42. Aimee Linke made a trip up to the Hall's property north of Hallett to collect the Anabat Swift Bat Detectors, many were covered in bird poo, the droppers used must have been appealing as bird perches. It took some time to clean the equipment up.
43. Aimee has backed up all the bat data collected and started the call analysis.
44. Zoom meeting with Nicola Barnes, Kate Graham, Aimee Linke and Anne Brown to plan the field day to showcase the trials.
45. Promoted the upcoming Nature Discovery Day in Burra with a focus on Lomandra grasslands.

Western Pygmy Possums

46. A landholder near Sedan checked their three boxes with no evidence of Western pygmy possums, but a lot of activity from insects such as crickets, black cockroaches and several species of spiders, the landholder is taking photos and using the data sheet for recording the information.
47. A landholder near Blanchetown checked all her WPP boxes late January but no activity in any of them and queried moving some of them to different habitat locations.
48. Landholders who have boxes at a property on Sleeper Track monitored their boxes and were pleased to find some change, two out of the six boxes have shown some activity, Including leaves in two of them.
49. Landholders who have WPP boxes at Point Yorke monitored their boxes and found that three out of the five boxes showed signs of possible nests – most very fresh (green leaves).



Figure 6 Sleeper Track Box



Figure 4 Point Yorke Box

50. A landholder who has boxes near Bowhill has moved his boxes to area where there is the narrow leaf mallee, *Eucalyptus leptophylla* because this vegetation association was where he found leaf litter in the bat boxes. Since moving them he has found some activity in the possum boxes which is very pleasing.

51. Rowena - I have entered more data into the database for the WPP project and hope to have this up to date in March/April.
52. Rowena - a landholder at Hartley reported no activity in the WPP boxes at their property.



Figure 5 leaves in WPP box near Bowhill

1 Million Turtles Project – Aimee Linke

53. Set up a nest predation survey with landholder at Big Bend. We marked out the 20 x20 metre area with droppers, randomly dug 10 nest holes and placed two chicken eggs in each and covered them back over with the soil, all the while wearing disposable gloves so our scent won't be on the eggs. We set up a remote camera that will stay on site for three weeks to capture footage of the predation. We will go back survey the results of the predation, presumably from foxes, this can be verified from the camera footage we collect.
54. Set up another set predation survey at Devon Downs South with landholders and Citizen Science Senior Project Officer Sylvia Clarke, we saw many fox footprints in the damp mud around the floodplain, we will check the site in three weeks.



Figure 6 marking out nests at Big Bend.



Figure 10 fox prints,



Figure 11 buried eggs.