The Dongolocking Corridors Project

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INTRODUCTION

Dongolocking is in the Dumbleyung Shire and lies 22 km north of the Dumbleyung township and approximately 210 km south-east of Perth. The district of Dongolocking and the Dongolocking Nature Reserves are high in the landscape, and lie roughly halfway between Toolibin Lake and Lake Dumbleyung.

The Dongolocking Nature Reserves are made up of 13 separate blocks which total 2 269 ha in area. They are home to at least 82 species of birds, seven species of frogs, 23 species of reptiles and 10 species of native mammals. The Dongolocking Corridors Project aims to link these separate blocks, other public reserves, bush on farms, and roadside vegetation with substantial passages of revegetation consisting of local species.

The Dongolocking Corridors Project was set up while I was employed by Greening Western Australia. I had worked and lived in the general area for 11 years. During this time, seminars on Wildlife on Farms, Ribbons of Green, and Fox Control had been held in the Great Southern Region, and bus trips had taken place with the general theme being remnant vegetation, and its plants and animals, among farmland.

ACTIVITIES

Before starting our corridor fencing, we held a public meeting for all farmers in the Dongolocking district, with short talks, "cuppa" tea, discussion and then a field trip. Most farmers were willing to cooperate, with only two farming families declining the offer of subsidised fencing for the protection of bush.

Our first step was in 1987, when we planted native species on the road verge of the newly made Tincurrin Road, which runs parallel to the Dwelyerdine Road and intersects the Dongolocking Road to the south. In 1991, with the help of schoolchildren, the local Dongolocking community planted several kilometres of the old Dwelyerdine Road, shortly after it had been realigned by the Dumbleyung Shire Council. This corridor connects two Dongolocking Nature Reserves (Reserve Nos 19082 and 19083) with the Dongolocking Road.

In the same year, a Save the Bush grant enabled 14 Dongolocking farmers to fence 32 km of unformed road reserve and several more kilometres of connecting corridors to bush on farms, roadsides, public reserves and Dongolocking Nature Reserves. This linked 11 reserves into the corridor system. Within these corridors on private property, we are now replanting and direct seeding local gene pool plants to recreate bush for the movement of plants and animals from one remnant to another. With supplementary plantings of understorey this year, most plantings will have included both canopy and understorey species.

RESEARCH

We have just become the volunteer "legs" for scientific research, or "barefoot biologists", to answer our own questions of:

- "How wide do we make our corridors?"
- "What is going to use our corridors?"

To do this, we have begun a six year study of three of the corridors planted in 1992 and 1993, under the guidance of Drs Graeme Arnold and Graeme Smith, Senior Research Scientists, CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology, Perth.

We began monitoring the movement of birds from one patch of bush to another in March of this year (1993), by listening and looking for birds at either end of, and along, our corridors. We record species and numbers seen and will continue to survey bi-monthly until 1999. We are about to set up pit traps to see what small invertebrates and vertebrates are using our man-made corridors, and we will monitor these for a week at a time in December, January and February for the following six years.

We are fortunate in having Graeme Arnold's guidance, expert advice and teachings and Graeme Smith's direction and support. We also have support and help from the friendly and enthusiastic people who work in the Narrogin and Katanning offices of the Department of Conservation and Land Management. We have been helped and encouraged by easy access to people dealing in remnant vegetation research.

We have a reasonable reference library, including the important publication by the WA Museum (Chapman *et al.* 1978) that provides the basic biological reference on the Dongolocking area. It is an invaluable guide for our revegetation work.

Our efforts have taken a lot of time, money and "hard slog". The project requires seed collecting and sorting, weed and rabbit control, site preparation, direct seeding, planting and fencing, and we are still far from recreating bush with all of its diversity of plants and age groups — only time and plant succession will do that. The bush corridors we are growing are small in area — 19 ha in total — and compare sadly with the 240 ha of remnant vegetation adjacent to the Dongolocking Reserves cleared in the past 10 years.

We cannot make long-term advances without adequate extension programs to publicise our results and their practical applications. For example, at a recent Dumbleyung Land Conservation District Committee meeting, a motion was passed to support a local farmer in his intent to clear 197 ha of virgin bush. This is disappointing in a Shire where only 6.3% of private land occurs as remnant vegetation (Coates 1987). Furthermore, less than 1% of remnant vegetation in the Shire is of a size and condition to be of ecological significance (Environmental Protection Authority 1993), and 197 ha accounts for a considerable proportion of this meagre total.

The amount of public land under vegetation in the Dumbleyung Shire is estimated at 4.1% (Coates 1987).

CONCLUSIONS

It is heartening to see a positive change of attitude to bush and its worth among our volunteer work force at Dongolocking. We have enjoyed extensive coverage of our activities in the local, regional and State wide press. Regrettably, we still have a hard road to hoe to convince the local farming community of the importance of remnant vegetation.

More emphasis needs to be placed on extension work promoting the retention, management and appreciation of the little remaining bush that we have.

REFERENCES

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REMNANT NATIVE VEGETATION
TEN YEARS ON

A DECADE OF RESEARCH
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PROCEEDINGS OF THE
DRYANDRA WORKSHOP
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