

Butterfly garden at Como

WHEN an access ramp was built early this year at the Como Training Centre, the adjacent garden bed had to be heavily disturbed.

Supply Services' supply manager Greg Beange decided to re-plan the bed, with the idea of saving water.

Greg approached Planning Branch officer Robert Powell, known to be interested in local plants. Despite some concern about the site's winter shade and summer sun, Robert agreed to give local plants a try.

Several species were kindly donated by the City of South Perth, through its then environmental officer, Mark Taylor.

The bed was cleared in late May, and some large granite rocks dug out and piled up at one end. Planting was carried out

in early June by several Como staff, under the direction of Planning Branch's conservation-estate officer Carissa Bathgate.

Seed of the annual native pellitory, collected from Robert's garden, was scattered among the granite rocks. Pellitory is the food-plant for caterpillars of the yellow admiral butterfly and the silver Y moth.

Although uncommon in Perth, admiral butterflies are highly mobile, and use their excellent sense of smell to find pellitory on which to lay their eggs.

In late October, Robert saw that most of the pellitory had been removed (probably by mistake), but that the green looper caterpillars of the silver Y moth were feeding on the few remaining plants.

Some of the leaves

were bent into shelters, suggesting the presence of very young admiral larvae. Nearby was an almost fully grown larva of the blue-spotted painted lady, which had been feeding on daisy plants.

Robert collected the large larva and two tiny admiral larvae for captive rearing at home.

The large larva pupated, and the painted lady emerged in mid November, whereupon Robert and Carissa released it at Como.

The two admiral larvae grew rapidly. One later perished, the other pupated, and the butterfly emerged in late November, when it too was released at Como.

With these encouraging results, the Como group intends to take up butterfly gardening again next year.



Carissa and Robert about to release the painted lady. Photo by Verna Costello

