PRACTICALITIES

WET SEASON STIMULATES WEEDS IN THE BUSH

by Eliza Dowling,
Wongee Farm, Popanyinning

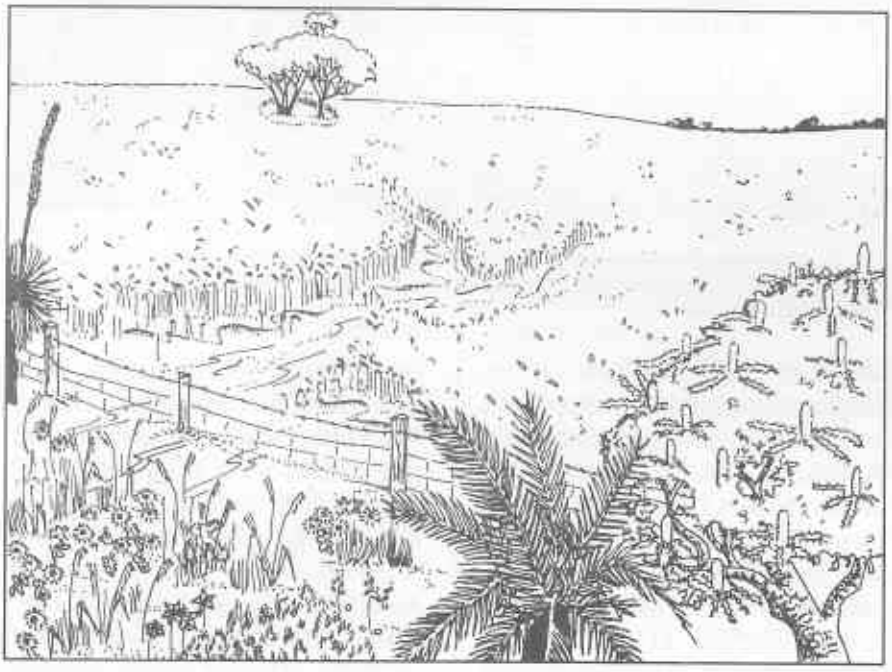
1996 will be remembered as an extremely wet year. The rain was very late in coming, but when it did arrive in mid June, it didn't stop. The soil profile became inundated with water (resulting in very yellow crops and paddocks too wet to get on and spray) and still the rain fell, so much so that many paddocks in the area washed. Some of these paddocks have never been considered at risk of erosion before this year. Apart from the loss of irreplaceable soil and the inconvenience of having small washes in the paddock, a major problem is where the soil has ended up.

On the farm where we live, there are several areas of good bushland. Two of these are below arable areas and there are minor depressions that go from the paddock into the bush. This year these have washed out and the water has carried soil into the bush where the water has slowed and the soil has been deposited. Not only has soil washed in, but weed seeds and fertiliser too. In November there was a lush growth of weeds - both agricultural weeds such as Capeweed and Wild Oats and actual crop itself. The weeds have swamped out native plants, such as everlastings and native grasses. With the depression now eroding and weed seed banks established, the infestations are very likely to spread.

In one area it should be possible to control further spread next year. By using a system of banks the water will slow down before it reaches the bushland and, by revegetating the drainage line as a buffer zone, weed seeds and fertiliser should be trapped before they enter the bush. The farming operation is changing to a direct drill cropping system in 1997 so there will be less soil disturbance. The new crop of weeds in this area can be controlled with careful spraying of selective herbicides.

The other area of bush is on the boundary fence with run-off coming from an upstream property so we will need some neighbourly cooperation to fix this problem. A catchment group meeting is a perfect forum to bring up this kind of situation and work out some solutions. As there isn't one yet in this area, this might prompt us to start one up, and who better to do it than the Landcare Development Officer!

The effect of contaminated runoff into bushland is dramatic and devastating. It is an insidious problem in that it can easily go undetected unless you keep a close eye on what is happening in your remnant vegetation. A particularly bad year such as 1996 can mark the beginning of the problem, but often it is easy to work out where erosion is likely to happen. Where farmers are adopting no-tillage techniques, the risk of erosion is minimised, and other improved farming practices such as contouring paddocks, working on the contour and fencing off and revegetating creek lines can all prevent weeds being spread into our precious bushland.



Typical site to keep an eye on.

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As a result of careful site selection, research and appropriate planting techniques, a four-fold increase in plant survival was recorded between the first and last trial reintroductions. The recovery team is now confident that with the knowledge acquired and the participation of volunteers to oversee and monitor the project, *G. Scapigera* will be saved from extinction. The direct participation of local landholders in this project, rightly integrated the farming community as part of the conservation process for the Corrigin Grevillea.

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