

RESTORING CORE RIPARIAN HABITAT FOR KEY THREATENED SPECIES IN WAGGA

overview of the project

North Wagga Flats is a 34 hectare reserve on the Murrumbidgee River, about two kilometres from Wagga Wagga Central Business District. The site has importance as a potential refuge for several threatened native animal species including the elusive squirrel glider. This project aimed to restore native vegetation to the reserve, enhancing its habitat value for threatened species. The work included a campaign of weeding, sowing, planting and providing nesting boxes where tree hollows were absent. Two interpretive signs were designed and installed to inform visitors about the restoration of the reserve and its importance as a wildlife refuge.



A squirrel glider

The project was carried out with the help of many community volunteers. Native trees, shrubs and ground cover grasses have established well and some of the nesting boxes are being used. New guidelines for management of the reserve will be written to ensure it continues as a viable habitat for native animals.

how the project was carried out



A brochure about North Wagga Flats

Volunteer community groups completed most of the restoration work. Local schools, Charles Sturt University, Council, Landcare and the Rural Fire Service all contributed to the activities of rubbish removal, weeding and planting. Groups of school students constructed the 53 nesting boxes and carried out surveys of water quality and bird species audits.

To re-establish the grasslands, some areas were sprayed with herbicide prior to sowing. Many thousands of native grass seeds and seedlings were sown and planted over the grant period. The woody weeds

targeted were willows and privet, both of which were treated chemically. A large number of species of ground cover weeds were sprayed, burned or slashed.

outcomes now and in the future

More than 2,000 tree and shrub seedlings of nine species were planted and most are surviving well. Due to drought conditions and competition from weeds, native grasses in some areas were slow to germinate. After good rain and weed removal, revegetation was successful in most areas and many grass species have subsequently produced seed. The weed eradication program eliminated almost all willows, but the privet has been more troublesome and some have regrown after initial poisoning.

Samples from the nesting boxes show use by possums and birds. Although there is no evidence of squirrel glider activity by spotlight and hair samples, there have been unconfirmed sightings in the area. Further formal evidence such as samples of hair or scats is required to ascertain whether the squirrel glider is living within the reserve but they are an elusive animal so may be difficult to detect.

The project group is considering the long-term maintenance of the site to ensure survival of the native grasses and is planning special control strategies for the different weed species. Many community groups have shown enthusiasm for the project. The Australian Grassland Society is using the site as an example for its studies on weed control. Charles Sturt University is hoping to use it for projects that will lead to development of a long-term strategy for management of the reserve.

benefits, challenges & lessons learned

This project successfully coordinated a large number of community volunteers to contribute to the effort of weeding and revegetating an important habitat for threatened species. Some aspects of the project could not be undertaken due to poor germination and plant growth caused by the extended drought. There were some problems with ant infestation in the nesting boxes, but methods are being trialled to discourage the insects. The campaign to remove woody weeds, although largely successful, was challenged by the vigour of some of the older plants. Difficulties of these kinds are unpredictable but common in projects dealing with the natural environment.