

HFNC Report on Kanawalla Rail Flora Reserve works 2023

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Background

HFNC applied to VicTrack in 2004 to manage the Kanawalla section of the disused Hamilton-Cavendish rail reserve. Despite a history of grazing after the line closed in the late 1970s this reserve contained valuable remnants of the Basaltic Plains Grassy Woodlands, of which less than 0.2% remains on public land. HFNC has worked to restore indigenous flora and remove weeds from the reserve.

Flora – Details of the history of removal of pines and cypress (2004-08), the planting of local indigenous native species (2006-08 & 2018-20) may be seen in the 2020 Works Report

A summary of species and numbers of trees, shrubs and grasses planted at Kanawalla from 2006-20 is given in the 2021 report.

Weeds – the work in controlling weeds (2004-20) may also be seen in the 2020 Works Report.

Work on Cleavers *Galium aperine* (GA), *Fumaria capreolata* (FC), *Sparaxis bulbifera* (SB), *Oxalis purpuria* (OP), *Oxalis pes-caprae* (OC), *Rosa rubiginosa* (RR), *Gladiolus undulatus* (GU), *Phalaris aquatica* (PA) and *Dactylis glomerata* (DG) continues. St John's Wort *Hypericum perforatum* (HP) and a yellow-flowered weed (YW) that may be Canola *Brassica napus* are problems at the northern area on and near the road reserve (X). A bush of Burgan *Kunzea ericoides* (KE) south from the Hensley Pk Rd gate (X) was cut out and poisoned in 2020 – a crop of seedlings then emerged in 2021, 2022 and 2023. A patch of KE on the roadside 300 m Sth, and HP on SGSC works area near our Hensley Pk Rd gate, was treated by SGSC in 2023 but needs to be followed up.

Activities in 2023

This year HFNC had a major project at Wannan Flora Reserve and had to abandon any organised working bees at Kanawalla. Instead, Diane and Rod managed to carry out the routine work there, with a total of 40 hrs contributed, with weed control the main activity. The worst of the weeds is GA, which had a massive infestation in the southern block just south of the power line for about 100 m on both sides (Y). RR continues to be spread around the reserve and OP and FC linger on.

Spot-spraying of pasture weeds (PA & DG) continues on the former station ground at the northern end of the reserve (X). The spillage of fertiliser (and other chemicals?) there over many years makes this a problem area. Many replants have failed to thrive. Our planting of sheoaks will, hopefully, eventually spread a carpet of 'needles' to suppress the exotic grass.

The tree planting that we have done over the years is looking good – many of the sheoaks and eucalypts exceed 5 m in height and the banksias are mostly doing well, despite being browsed by macropods. The tactic is to grasp a branch and bend it over to eat the new tips. Old leaves are not touched. The branches are broken in this process and some pruning has been needed to reduce the impact.

Spraying around younger planted trees continued in 2023, along with hand removal of grass inside many of the tree guards. That will be needed for a while longer for some small trees, particularly at the northern end of the reserve near the gate (X).

Grass has to be controlled on our trail – this has been done by application of herbicide once a year.

The advance of *Acacia mearnsii* (Black Wattle) across the reserve is an issue. This is an admirable tree but it is very shallow-rooted and drastically affects the ground flora, converting a complex native grassland to moss. Should we contain this species to the bounds of the present clumps?

Leptospermum continentale (Prickly Tea-tree) seed from a solitary near-dead remnant near MacFarlanes Rd was grown and 17 seedlings planted in 2022 in the damp sites at the southern end of the track (V). All except one of those shrubs have survived and two now have a mass of flowers.

In 2024 we must remove many mesh guards used to protect sheoaks from wallabies and kangaroos. Some can be lifted off the trees but many will need to be unclipped. What do we do with the guards?

A Powercor contractor accessed the reserve in May 2023 and cut down several Blackwood and Swamp gums near the power line. Powercor rang GHGMA, who then contacted us, and we unlocked our gate but their contractor did not return to chip and remove the material. We subsequently cleared the track and spread much of the cut branches. Belatedly, 11 Dec, another contractor rang to say they were going to clear away the felled trees! They did so the next day.

06 Feb 2023 – RB [2.3 hr]

- Spraying the yellow crop weed in the H Pk gate area (X), much of it on the road reserve.
- Chipping dozens of FC seedlings from the Cherry Ballart site on the embankment (S).
- Masses of small GA seedlings in power line area (Y), Sth block, need spraying.
- Sprayed 12 KE and patches of PA and a few HP in Hensley Pk gate area (Z)
- Checked for Bent Grass adjacent to 'pool' but could not see any.
- No GA or FC weeds evident under the Cherry Ballart on the embankment
- AWO evident west of embankment.

03 April 2023 – RB [3 hr]

- Sprayed YW and 12 KE from the reserve in Nth area (X) and weeded 12 trees near the gate.
- Notified SGSC of a mass of HP on their dump site across the road from the gate.

24 April 2023 – RB [2 hr]

- Weeded around 4 trees in the Nth area (X) and untangled a eucalypt that was snagged in its guard.
- Crow-barred 4 spots with dead plants in the Nth area (X) and sowed a few seeds of Drooping Sheoak and Silver Banksia in each hole, hoping that this might produce a replacement.

4 May 2023 – RB, DL[4 hr]

- Powercor contractor created a mess under the power line by cutting down Blackwood and Swamp Gum. We spoke with Powercor and unlocked our gate to give access to the chipper.
- Cut off a fallen Swamp Gum and Black Wattle on the track further along.
- Sprayed several small lots of GA just Sth of the power line (Y)

18 May 2023 – RB, DL [3 hr]

- Contractor for Powercor failed to clear up the power line area. We locked the gate.
- Cut up many of the trees cut down by Powercor and cleared the track. We spread branches thinly over the area (Y).
- A Red-necked Wallaby (*Macropus rufogrieseus*) was seen –first record here.

11 June 2023 – RB, DL [4 hr]

- Sprayed the track (30 L spray) to control the grass. Also sprayed weeds outside the Hensley Park Rd gate (X).
- Cut up and spread more branches at the power line.

12 July 2023 – RB [2.5 hr]

- Wiped OP on E side from MacFarlanes Rd gate (V) to the mid-section (Z) – 5 or 6 spots where this weed still persists
- New small infestation of GA on W side, S of junction (Z)

13 July 2023 – RB [4 hr]: Applied 15 L herbicide spot-spray to weeds

- Infestation of GA 20 m Sth from dam on E side and an area just Sth of power line (Y) on W side.
- GA and FC under Cherry Ballart on the embankment (S)
- GA, OC and PA in NE corner area and in the former cypress area

23 Sept. 2023 – RB [6 hr]: Applied 12 L herbicide spot-spray to weeds.

- GA near the dam area; Sth of power line; under the Cherry Ballart on the embankment (some FC also sprayed); Nth end of the embankment
- Sprayed YW inside and outside the Hensley Pk Rd gate area (V).
- Sprayed around most of the trees in the area just Sth of the gate.
- Re-erected 6 tree guards knocked over by kangaroos

08 October 2023 – RB [1 hr]

- Sprayed around trees and phalaris clumps at MacFarlanes Rd end and around the trees in the next block to the Nth.

15 Nov. 2022 – RB [5 hr]

- Replaced stakes on 7 tree guards that had been knocked over (used *A. paradoxa* stakes).
- Checked trees and pruned branches broken by browsing marsupials – only 5 or 6 losses overall.
- Hoed out hundreds of GA at sites Sth of the power line (Y) on both sides of the reserve
- Removed 2 GA and 1 FC at embankment site
- Hand-weeded and hoed many small (and a few large) YW near Hensley Pk Rd gate (many more are germinating) and a few large plants in the reserve.
- Removed guards from 2 large trees – many more to be removed later
- The reserve looked very dry and few wildflowers were seen
- White-winged Choughs still present and Rufous Whistlers and Grey Shrike-thrush were vocal.

11 Dec 2023:

- A contractor for Powercor requested access to the reserve, to chip the wood at the power line. The did so the next day but tried to exit through the locked Hensley Park Rd gate.

14 Dec 2023: RB [2.5 hr]. Substantial rain in late November and in recent days has relieved the dryness of the reserve but has triggered a wave of weed germination (especially GA, FC & YW).

- Hoed and hand-pulled dozens of GA from both sides of reserve Sth of the power line
- Hoed the few GA and FC at the embankment (the site is now almost clean)
- Hoed some YW at the Hensley Park Rd gate area but it needs spraying over summer

