

Wanganella sandhill revegetation project update, 27 January 2020

Project commenced 2001

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Due to the continuing drought 2019 was another challenging year to establish plants. I had 2000 plants at home in my nursery that were supposed to go in the ground in 2018 but that year was one of the lowest recorded rainfalls in European history so I couldn't plant. By 2019 I had 2000 plants that were rapidly becoming root bound and needed to go in the ground ASAP.

In February 2019 there was 35 mm of rain at the Wanganella revegetation site, then another 17 mm in April. On 1 May there was 56 mm, so I thought this is it, I will get as many plants in the ground as I can before having to go away up north on tours in June. Normally I like to spray the weeds in a metre circle where I intend to plant a month or two prior to planting as it conserves the moisture. However, time constraints didn't allow for spraying. I went flat out for the next few weeks and



between 13 and 31 May I managed to get 1,516 plants in the ground, all with guards on. Rainfall was a bit light on with 14 mm for the rest of May, then only 6 mm for all of June, traditionally one of our wettest months. July was a lot better with 82 mm. The rest of the year was a disaster with just 31 mm recorded till the end of the year. When I returned home in late September most of the plants were still alive but were starting to struggle for moisture. During October I watered most of them twice, carting out water from home, in a desperate bid to try and save them in between

guiding local birding tours. They were still mostly alive into November but the only thing that was saving them was the fact we had had virtually no hot weather. Sure enough, when the hot weather hit in December they started dying like flies. Nothing like a few 40° C and higher days to test a plant out, especially on sand. So, to date, I guess I have 200 — 300 plants left out of the 1500 I planted. Time will tell whether the remaining few hundred, which don't look great, survive. Given that they were probably partially root bound when I planted them and the lousy amount of rainfall we received in 2019, I would be happy if a few hundred survived.

Not one to give up, I have been busy over the last month with over 2000 plants potted up ready to go in when it rains in 2020.

The established plants on the Wanganella sandhill are mostly hanging on fairly well. The native pines don't look fantastic and certainly don't have any new growth on them. The fringe-myrtles are probably struggling the most and don't look well at all. They are on the edge of their range in this area and with the drop in rainfall over the past twenty years will struggle to survive in this area. I stopped growing them about ten or more years ago. The rest of the plants look pretty good particularly the acacias and mallees I have brought in from lower rainfall districts like Moulamein and Cobar. The mallees (mainly from Moulamein) are incredible and look fantastic and covered in new growth even with the meagre amount of rainfall we have received over summer. They have probably been growing a bit too fast as a few branches have been splitting off on windy days. One



of the mallees *Eucalyptus socialis* has been in flower lately and attracting quite a few insects and a few birds. Also flowering



Eucalyptus socialis January 2019

for the first time this year was the rough-barked apple box (*Angophora floribunda*) from the Cunnamulla area. It's about ten years old and flowered for the first time this year.

The upper parts of the tree were a mass of cream flowers. Strangely enough I didn't see any honeyeaters feeding in it. Perhaps it didn't produce much nectar because of the low rainfall. The silver-leafed needlewoods *Hakea leucoptera* were spectacular this season covered in cream blossoms, which was amazing given the very low rainfall in the spring/early summer. It is a very drought tolerant plant. The prickly bottlebrush *Callistemon brachyandrus* has had two crops of flowers this season, the main flowering was about six weeks ago and a smaller crop now. It also is a very drought tolerant plant. Also flowering is the buloke mistletoe *Amyema linophylla*. I have several flowering. They are very popular with the honeyeaters so must produce a lot of

nectar. The wire-leafed mistletoe *Amyema pressii* has been in full bloom and looks a picture. It's popular with honeyeaters too. The fleshy mistletoe *Amyema mirulosum* is in bloom. It is not as showy as the other two species but the honeyeaters still go for it. It's good that the mistletoes flower at this time of year as the emubush *Eremophila longifolia* is all but finished flowering now.



Acacia calamifolia October 2019

My aim is to have something flowering in every month of the year so the honeyeaters and insects have a constant supply of nectar. Even though it's been a very dry season and butterflies generally have been in short supply, there's been a few of the satin azure butterflies around the flowering mistletoes lately. So far, I have managed to get five species of mistletoe growing on my plants. These are the grey, fleshy, buloke, wire-leafed and harlequin. The only other one I

hope to get going here is the box mistletoe *Amyema miquelii* that only grows on eucalypts. Most of my eucalypts are

probably not mature enough yet for the mistletoe to take but I am working on it. The grey mistletoe *Amyema quandang* is the best for birds as it flowers and fruits nearly all year round. It also has the largest and sweetest berry but it's also the slowest growing and not so easy to strike so it takes time to get them going. I do have a couple of grey mistletoe going although a mistletoebird must take the credit for one of them — I noticed it up high on a boree way out of my reach. I could have others growing but as they are so slow it can take years before you spot them. The harlequin mistletoe will be the next to flower as I noticed flower buds just starting to form on it lately.

Overall the Wanganella sandhill is looking surprisingly good for the meagre amount of rainfall this season.





Wanganella sandhill October 2019



Showy daisy 24 September 2019

