

Top End

Native Plant Society

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Top End Native Plant Society May 2018 Newsletter

General Meeting Times

The next TENPS meeting is the AGM which will be held on *Thursday 17th of May 2018* commencing at 7:30 pm. Meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month at Marrara Christian College, on the corner of Amy Johnson Avenue and McMillans Road. The meeting is followed by a chance to chat with other members and access the TENPS reference Library over a cuppa. Bring your plants along to swap, sell or have identified. The guest speaker presentation commences around 8pm. All are welcome. Field trips are usually on the weekend following the meeting. Details of upcoming events are provided in the newsletter, or check the TENPS website.

What's in flower?



Schizaea dichotoma (fern) photographed by Sarah Hirst on Melville Island.



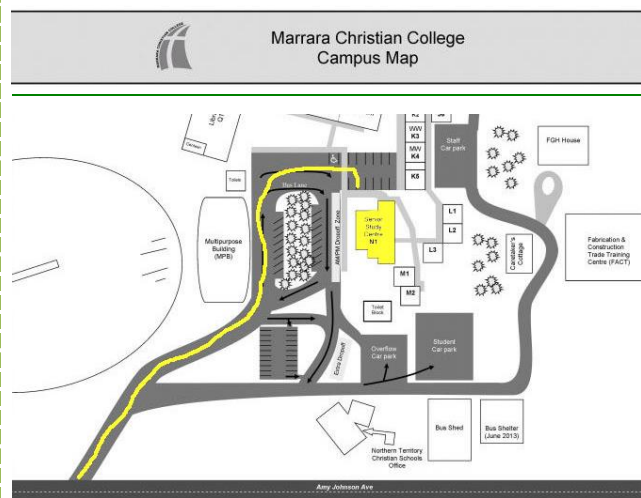
Natives mean more!

www.topendnativeplants.org.au

Upcoming TENPS guest speakers

May 17th: Dave Liddle – *Typhonium* in the NT.

June 21st: TBA.



TENPS Committee Meeting

Committee meetings are held every second month and members are most welcome to attend. The next committee meeting will be on July 11th, 2018 from 7.15pm. Venue: Blain Electorate Office, next to Pizza Hut, Oasis Shopping Centre, Palmerston.

TENPS Field Trips & other events

May Sunday 20th: Threatened species walk in the Darwin rural area. Dave Liddle will be leading a walk to find the vulnerable carnivorous herb *Utricularia singeriana* and the tiny critically endangered shrub *Atalaya brevialata*. Meet at 9.00am on the corner of Finn Road and Jenkins Road.

June: TBA

TENPS February Meeting Report

"Challenges of bushfire management for environmental outcomes in the Top End" by Mark Gardiner.

Public perception in many cases is that Bushfires NT is an emergency response organisation. However, it is a regulator and also coordinates fire mitigation and response by landowners, land

managers and volunteer brigades. There is a staff of 30 who cover an area of 1.4 million sq km. Staff need to have Certificate IV in Conservation and Land Management, Certificate IV in Investigations, and training in AIIMS (Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System). There are also about 300 volunteers who undertake fire operations training and are issued with a card identifying them as an authorised bushfires volunteer.

Bushfires NT comes under the Bushfires Management Act 2016 but is also subject to Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act and Weeds Management Act. Although aiming to minimise environmental impacts, priority is given to safety of people and protection of property. However, in reality the environment can often become an afterthought.



A controlled burn



Wildfire

Prescribed burning is planned and carried out by the various volunteer brigades. It's also carried out by land managers in areas like national parks, indigenous lands and defence lands. There are three main methods for fire mitigation, all having

their positive aspects as well as limitations. **Aerial burns** can be carried out over large areas in a short time. It is low cost and doesn't require ground disturbance. Control lines aren't established, the landscape is used for containment. A **ground burn** is more precise for small areas and is able to be monitored closely. However, It's labour intensive and expensive. **Bare earth breaks** can be installed by machinery. Stubble must only be to a maximum of 50mm. The breaks provide access and reduce risk to firefighters. They are however, expensive to install, can lead to erosion and need to be maintained.

Costs involved for mitigation work over 100 km of lines is estimated as being:

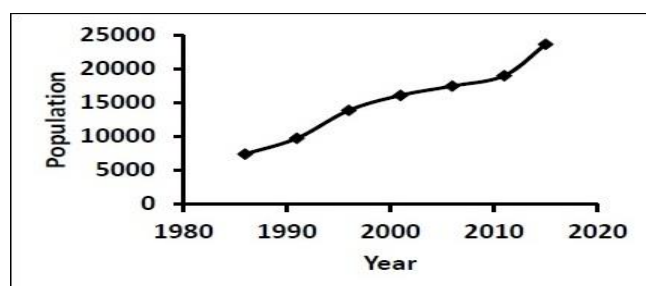
Aerial burn - helicopter, incendiaries, bombardier, logistics \$1,500

Ground burn - 2 grass fire units x 5 days = \$4,000

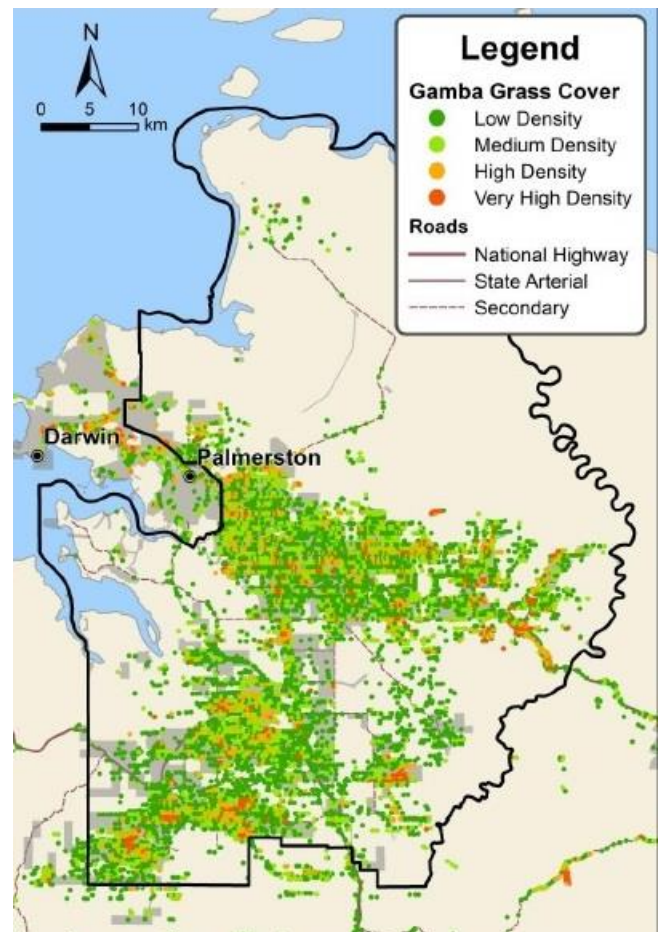
Bare earth firebreak - construction \$100,000, maintenance \$10,000

Responsibility for fire management rests with property owners/managers. However, fire management is essentially about people cooperating, both regulators and owners/managers. Prescribed burning is preferably done as an early burn, prior to 31 July as opposed to a late burn after that date. However, as seasons vary from year to year that date is arbitrary and often not realistic. For example, last year May was very windy even though it was early and still quite wet, so fires were able to race over wet areas. But the date is used as a fixed cut off in 'carbon farming'.

Fire risk has been changing over time. Population along with infrastructure in the Darwin rural area has been increasing rapidly and Gamba Grass infestation has risen dramatically.



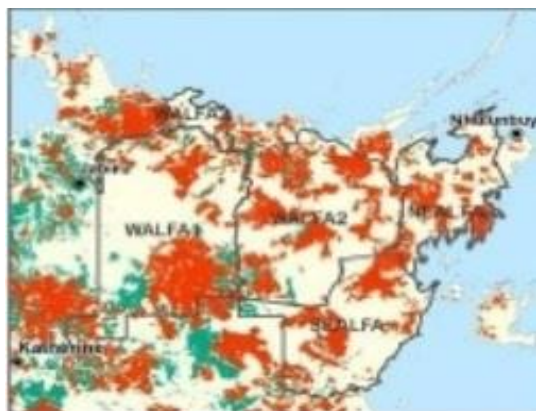
Population growth in Litchfield



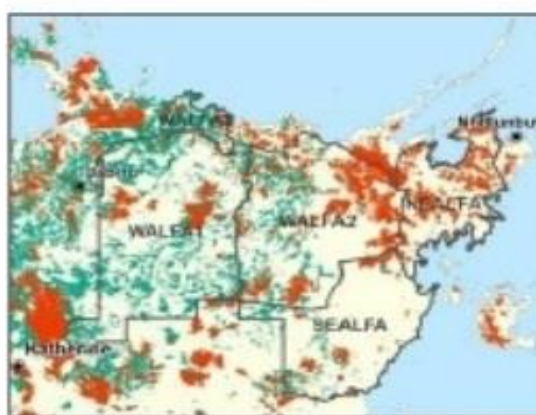
Gamba grass infestation in Litchfield

Controlled burns are planned by the 15 various volunteer brigades. Information is also obtained from the NAFI (North Australian Fire Information) website which shows current fires and histories of fire scars. The aim is for early season burning to keep the fires 'cool'. Some areas however, such as Noonamah Ridge, get hammered each year.

In Arnhem Land the change from late to early season fire has reduced greenhouse gas emissions by about 20%. This is due to programs carried out by WALFA which involves getting young Aboriginal people back onto country caring for it. The program has at the same time earned about \$8 million for the communities from carbon credits. Last year they flew approximately 60,000 km of helicopter lines.



2000



2008



2016

Late season fires shown in red, early season fires in green.

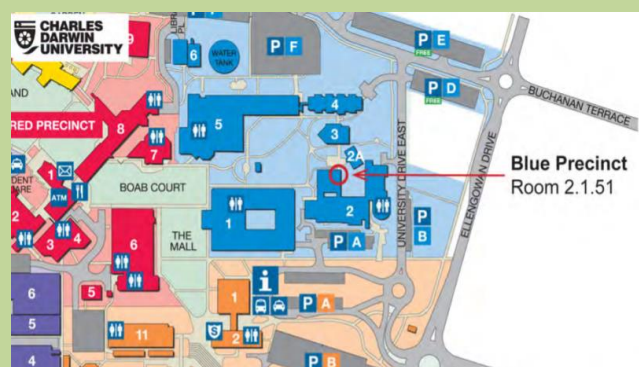
National guidelines have been developed and the NT is trying to implement them. Under the new NT legislation there are 27 offences relating to fires and compliance is being enforced more strictly. Three people were taken to court and heavily fined for lighting fires on fire ban days last year.

People working together to mitigate fires is the answer.

Article by Zig Madycki and Russell Dempster.

NT Field Naturalist Club Events

Meetings are held at 7.45pm on the second Wednesday of each month except January at Charles Darwin University, in Blue Building 2 (see map below)



Field Trips are a great way to explore the best of Darwin area's nature spots in the company of like-minded people. These are usually held on the Sunday following the monthly meeting and often related to the topic of this meeting. Additional outings are held from time to time, and everyone is welcome.

TENPS February Meeting Report: Berry Springs Nature Reserve

Heavy rains had cut off access to many areas in February however Berry Springs Nature reserve was selected for the excursion as it has all weather bitumen access. A small group gathered at the car park under sunny skies. The excursion was led by Russell Dempster.

The springs have a long history as a recreation area for Darwin residents. I remember going there in my teens when access was via a dirt road off the Stuart Highway and there was only a chain of waterholes with a couple of concrete slabs laid down by the military during WWII.

Since then with the rapid expansion of Darwin the area had undergone a lot of development to protect it from the increased usage. In addition to the carpark paths have been laid out and more concrete laid around the pools to control erosion.

Lawns were established making it a popular picnic place.

Along with that development came exotic plants, notably African Mahogany (*Khaya senegalensis*), which seeded and began to establish themselves. However much of the monsoon forest vegetation remains and the exotics are slowly being removed.



Being the wet season very few people were there as water levels were high and the pools closed to swimming.



Buttress roots of *Syzygium nervosum*



Glycosmis trifoliata



Calophyllum inophyllum flowers attended by *Tetragonula* sp. native bee.



Vavaea australiana



Diospyros compacta



Sterculia holtzei



Amorphophallus galbra



Dendrobium dicuphum



Tacca leontopetaloides



Upstream of the main waterholes a circular walkway follows near the creek into a moist gully dominated by a massive *Ficus virens*. In this humid shady area a lot of monsoon forest plants and mosses thrive.

After a very interesting walk with our small but enthusiastic group, while we were at the furthest point from the car park, a storm moved in rapidly unleashing torrential rain. By the time we reached the cars we were soaked but spirits not dampened.

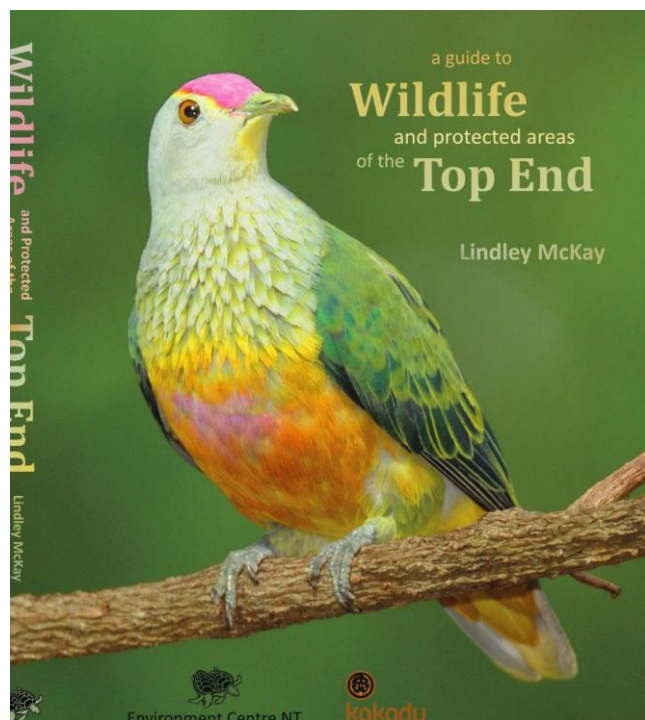
If there is to be a moral to this story it would go something like: in the wet season no matter how sunny it looks in the morning always take an umbrella!

Article by Zig Madycki.

BOOK SALE BOOK SALE BOOK SALE

TENPS now has copies of Lindley McKay's fantastic book for sale. If you would like a copy they are selling for \$60.00

Please contact Russell Dempster on 0459440665 or email topendnativeplantsociety@hotmail.com if you would like a copy.



TENPS April Field Trip Report: Riyala

5 TENPS members found their way to Riyala of Saturday April 21.

Our host, Ian Morris, told us that in the '80s when the property was acquired it was covered in spear grass, having been burnt every year for a hundred years to provide food for stock. Although there were some occasional remnant trees that on examination, had a well-developed root system, but they were stunted through being constantly grazed and burnt. There was no under-storey.

When fire was withdrawn the spear grass gradually disappeared, helped along by wallabies eating the young shoots. Ian planted monsoon trees to provide a corridor for birds. He has had particular success with *Allosyncarpia ternata*.

The rainforest ecosystem gradually established seems to now be self-regenerating. This saw a return of bird species not previously seen, though unfortunately the coming of cane toads also saw the disappearance of many species of goanna.

The property also includes a paperbark forest bordering the Elizabeth River, which regularly floods that area.

Article by Lon Wallis.

George Brown **Darwin Botanic Gardens**

Open Day

SUNDAY 27 MAY • 10AM-2PM

**Free
entry**

**Join in the free fun and information for all the family as we celebrate
Botanic Gardens Australia and New Zealand Day with**

Plant displays • Plants for sale • Garden information stalls • Wildcare stall •
Free guided walks and DIY orienteering • Discounted Segway tours •
Volunteer Week Celebrations • Junior Rangers activity • Crate climb •
Water slide • Sausage sizzle • Smoothies • Coffee and snacks
at Eva's Cafe...and so much more!



SUBSCRIPTION FORM - ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP (DUE 1 JULY)

Please accept my subscription/renewal for membership of the Top End Native Plant Society

☐ New membership ☐ Renewal

Name/s.....

Email address

Please Note: The electronic edition of the newsletter will be uploaded to the member's page of the website each month and members will be notified by email (Acrobat Reader is required).

If you DO NOT have email access and would like to receive the newsletter (black & white available only) by post please tick the box. ☐

Postal Address

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Payment Due \$..... (\$20.00 per member/family, \$15.00 unwaged)

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Account Name: Top End Native Plant Society Account Number: 61225276
Please include your name in the transfer reference.

Or MAIL TO: TENPS Secretary, PO Box 135, Palmerston NT 0831

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