

August Field Trip Report - Walk along the Gurumbai Trail Report by Emma Noonan



On a beautiful dry season Sunday morning a group of about 30 people met at the north end of the Gurumbai Walk for an early morning stroll led by Lesley Alford and Michael Schmid. The Gurumbai walking trail is about 3.5km and is located at Darwin International Airport. Gurumbai is the Larrakia name for Rapid Creek and means 'elbow' which refers to the shape of the creek at its mouth. It takes you alongside Rapid Creek, which is Darwin's only significant freshwater system and apparently flows all year but can be down to a trickle by the end of the dry season.

We started at the north end of the walk and strolled through the woodland area spotting Ironwood (*Erythrophleum chlorostachys*) and Fern-leafed Grevillea (*Grevillea pteridifolia*). This area has benefitted from having had the area fenced off to stop the illegal dumping of waste and rubbish into the bushland which was unfortunately an issue thanks to thoughtless Darwin residents / businesses! It is encouraging to see the hard work of many groups including the Rapid Creek Landcare Group paying off in this area of regeneration.

Walking through the dew-drenched grass (yes we were up that early on a Sunday morning!) we noticed the webs and burrows of the Wolf Spider (*Lycosidae* sp) but not the spider itself I am happy to report.

We were then curious about the perfect 'drill holes' that appeared along the path and

Tissa solved the mystery. They are made by a wingless cricket (*Apterogryllus* sp). Apparently with the onset of the dry season, the ground is cooled which prompts the crickets to burrow down making the holes we could see. The crickets will remain there until the first rains of the build up – I wonder if they realise they are missing such wonderful weather, the Darwin Festival and so many other dry season benefits!

Then we sighted treehoppers and green ants together – a mutualistic relationship. The treehoppers provide a liquid which is consumed by the ants and in return the ants provide protection to the treehoppers. And did you know that it is the juvenile Green Ants that are the nest builders? This fact didn't seem to impress the younger members of the group but the older members were impressed, particularly since the juvenile green ants seemed to be working so hard on a Sunday morning.

Lesley and Michael gave us an informative talk on the benefits of reducing weeds in the area. They gave the talk at the 'Fire' information panel which someone had thoughtfully burnt around which was purely coincidental we were assured! The weeds found in the area include Gamba Grass (*Andropogon gayanus*) and both species of Mission Grass. Lesley commented on the difficulty of distinguishing between weeds and some native plants but says her knowledge and identification skills have grown as a result of the weed eradication work. As you would be aware these weeds provide a great fuel load for the fire and the hotter the fire the less chance of native seedlings. A lot of work has been done in the area to reduce the amount of weeds and this has reduced the coverage of a fire and allowed recruitment into fire ravaged areas by close by natives.

Walking along the path by the edge of the wetlands, the sides of the track provided a number of flowering herbs – identified were the mauve flower (*Osbeckia australiana* and *Melastoma malabathricum*), violet *Lindernia* species and yellow bladderwort (*Utricularia chrysanthra*). The Territory's only *Banksia* species (*Banksia dentata*) was also spotted in the wetlands area although we had missed it during its flowering season which is apparently worth seeing.



Melastoma malabathricum. Photo supplied by Tisa Ratnayake

As we continued our walk a flowering Terrestrial Mangrove provided some

discussion – was the humming noise around the tree a bee or fly? The experts in the group ruled that the pollination was being provided by flies – probably both Hover Flies (*Syrphidae* sp) and blowflies (*Calliphoridae* sp). Clearwing Swallowtail or 'big greasy' (*Cressida cressida*) and a flower-shaking Carpenter Bee were also spotted.

A highlight of the walk was watching a Brown Honeyeater (*Lichmera indistincta*) collecting a spider web and weaving it into its partially built nest. Other birds spotted were the Fig Bird (*Sphecotheres vieillotii*), Rainbow Bee-eater, (*Merops ornatus*), Mistletoebird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*), Crimson Finches (*Neochmia phaeton*), Double-barred Finches (*Taeniopygia bichenovii*) and a Forest Kingfisher (*Todiramphus macleayii*).



Brown Honeyeater Nest . Photo by Tisa Ratnayeke

We finished the walk at the weir down behind the Airport Resort which was in the cool of the monsoon forest. After discussing the success of the weir in flood mitigation and spotting some small fish, we all made our way back to the car park. We had spent only a couple of hours along the Gurumbai Trail but there is so much more to explore and I know I will be back.

Thanks to Lesley and Michael for leading a very interesting and eye-opening outing – it is hard to believe that such a fascinating walking trail exists less than a kilometre from the main airport runway.

PS. There is a very good birdwatching list for this area available and more information on this and the walking trails is available at www.rapidcreek.org.au.

Upcoming Field Nat Activities

October Meeting - Wed 11 - Birding Trip to Sri Lanka, Mike Jarvis

October Field Trip - Sat 14 - Microbat Spotting - Damian Milne

November Meeting - Wed 8 - Re-Introduction of Quolls to Kakadu Nat Park - Chris Jolly

November Field Trip - Sun 12 - Introduction to birding at Mary River Wilderness Retreat - Diana Lambert

December Meeting - Wed 13 - BushBlitz Trip to Bradshaw Station - Michael Hammer

December Field Trip - Sun 17 - Christmas party - location to be confirmed