

HFNC excursion to Nigretta Falls Scenic Reserve 18 Nov. 2017

Rod Bird

Participants: Roger Thompson, Dave & Lyn Munro, Reto Zollinger & Yvonne Ingeme, Peter Hocking, Glenys Cayley and Janeen Samuel.

Members arrived at the Nigretta Falls Scenic Reserve at 9.30 am and spent the morning at the site.

The original intention was for most of the group to cross the Wannan River above the Falls to the Nigretta Flora Reserve on the north side. The object was to dig up any African Weed Orchids (AWO) that were missed in earlier weed-wiping operations and to take time to look at the wildflowers. From a visit on 28 October, when we approached the Flora Reserve from a private farm on that side of the river, it was thought that many of the 205 species of flora would be at their flowering peak.

Those who did not cross over the rock channels would work on the AWO on the Scenic Reserve. Lists of flora were provided for both reserves so any 'new' species seen could be added to the lists.

Unfortunately, due to rain during the week, following greater than usual spring rains, it was not possible to cross the river! The excursion/working bee then concentrated on the Scenic Reserve.

The African Weed Orchid (AWO) is a serious environmental pest and was found on these reserves in 2009. Work by HFNC to control it has continued annually in Oct-Nov-Dec.

Roger Thompson has again attacked this pest plant with zeal, searching on 7 occasions this year across the site, spending 11 hours on the work of digging up the plants. The extra workers that Roger had this visit enabled an increased area to be inspected on the Scenic Reserve, including the part east of the road from the entrance down to the Swimming Hole. That area had not been visited in previous years and it yielded about 115 AWO, some more than 30 cm tall in the long grass.

In all, 603 AWO were removed from the reserve in the spring-summer of 2017. There was a 63% decline in number of AWO found in this 'normal' year, compared with 2016, so maybe we are gaining ground. Whether the apparent decline is due to our good work or simply to 'natural' variation (particularly in rainfall) remains a matter for conjecture. However, it is unlikely that we can eliminate the pest, since the plants have appeared all over SW Victoria, particularly on sandy soils. We can only hope that we have given the local 'agents of nature' some time to adapt to the 'blow-in' pest species and to exert some control on its numbers. A full report on the history of our efforts to remove AWO from these reserves is given in the HFNC Project Report section on our web site.



Tree Violet (*Melyctis dentata*) flowering at Nigretta Falls