

Saving our remnant vegetation

December 2005

Little remains of the Savannah vegetation (trees and grassland) of the 'Australia Felix' in south west Victoria enthusiastically described by Major Mitchell. Nearly 170 years later, examples of the original vegetation of the basalt plains of south western Victoria are only to be found on some roadsides, rail reserves, cemeteries and the occasional paddock which has not been fertilised. These remnants constitute a part of our heritage, as well as the only source of genetic material.

The main threats to remnants of the original vegetation are weeds, increased soil fertility, and destruction by cultivation or indiscriminate spraying with herbicide. For example, it is not appropriate to spray or cultivate a strip greater than 3 metres wide on roadsides.

A good example of remnant vegetation is to be found on a section of disused rail railway land where the old track crossed Hensley Park Road about 7 km north of Hamilton. This section of old railway land between Fort's Road and McFarlane's Road is now known as the Kanawalla Flora Reserve.

The late Dr Peter Milne recognised that this stretch of disused line comprised a valuable remnant of basalt plains flora, and in 1978 and 1979 recorded some 54 native species at the site. Recent surveys in 2003-2005 by the Hamilton Field Naturalists Club have shown that these species are still present, and have also added 8 new species to the list. These plants constitute orchids, lilies, heaths, other wildflowers, grasses and wetland plants.

The photographs depict Blushing Bindweed, Running Postman and Blue Devils, species commonly found in native grasslands. At Kanawalla, these plants are threatened by weeds, the most significant being a forest of young pine trees that have proliferated since the track was closed.

The Club has received a grant from the State Government to remove young and old pine trees, spray weedy grassland species such as Harlequin Flower, Phalaris and Paspalum, and re-vegetate some areas with plants grown from seed collected at the site.

It is fortunate indeed that we have this valuable and interesting collection of indigenous plants so close to the town for everyone to enjoy.

Photos:

Blushing Bindweed (*Convolvulus erubescens*) with Golden Moths (*Diuris chryseopsis*)

Running Postman (*Kennedia prostrata*) – a bright component of remnant grassland.

Common Everlasting (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*) & Blue Devils (*Eryngium ovinum*)

