

Plains Yam Daisy project

On a dull May morning in 2015, 20 volunteers hunted 3 hectares of recently burnt grassland at Kalkallo for some bright green tufts among the millions of new shoots. Their quarry? Plains Yam Daisy, also known as Murnong.

This humble yet culturally important plant has shared many secrets during the course of a five year project funded by Communities for Nature. The plant's history can be read a microcosm of its native grassland home. It was fostered by thousands of years of traditional Aboriginal management and drastically reduced by the impacts of the last 200 years. Its survival into the future requires relearning traditional ecological knowledge combined with scientific investigations into its new challenges including habitat fragmentation and introduced pests.

Volunteers from Victorian National Parks Association and Friends of Merri Creek helped with the search. In two hours, 40 previously unrecorded plants of the Yam Daisy were mapped including a new patch discovered a hundred metres from the main population. Such outliers can help inform management of the reserve and expand our understanding of the plant's habitat needs. Over the last three years every metre of the 9 hectare grassland has been searched using evolving techniques that maximise the chance of detecting Yam Daisies. From a handful of plants known at the beginning of the project, we have now mapped over 200. Some of these appear to be new plants establishing in gaps created by the reintroduction of regular burning and removal of competitive weeds.

Volunteers need great diligence to learn to identify and search for this cryptic species. They were assisted by the flower buds already showing on most plants, a month after an ecological burn.

On this day, volunteers also checked survival of plants from last year's direct seeding trials. Twenty healthy plants have survived the dry of summer. Importantly, we have also learnt a lot from the seedlings that didn't make it: kangaroos like to lie and jump on the bare ground of the seeding patches; and the introduced Grey field slug is a serious predator of daisy seedlings.

This season, Kangaroo cages have been installed over all newly seeded patches along with slug-detererring copper-lined barriers and slug traps! In September 2015 we will know whether these measures are sufficient to establish this year's target of 300 new plants at Kalkallo and [Ngarri-djarrang Grassland](#) in Reservoir.



Looking like a skinny Dandelion, a Plains Yam Daisy in full bloom.

The final year of the six-year Plains Yam Daisy Communities for Nature project is upon us. A major challenge for 2015/16 is to consolidate findings from our project and make them available to workers elsewhere in Australia working on these curious plants.



Volunteers lined up in groups to methodically search 25m square quadrats.



Newly installed direct seeding plots with guards to combat Slugs and Kangaroos.