

Thur 04/07/24 - Amius Lennie (Horticulturalist Araluen Arts Precinct) about buffel grass.

Me – I am talking to Amius about his work as a horticulturalist at Araluen Arts Precinct and he has identified buffel grass as a plant that he has a reciprocal relationship with.

Amius – I have a positive relationship with buffel grass! To explain this, I discovered the work of two sisters in Sydney called the Bradley sisters and they are well known in bush regeneration circles. They have passed away, but they pioneered a technique, pioneered in the way western ideologies regard plant and habitat management and ecosystem restoration. They pioneered this technique that I will share with you. Where they lived their fence backed onto a bush reserve and they noticed that their neighbours were getting rid of the weeds on their fence lines. As they went for walks in the bush, they identified places where the very same weeds were becoming established in their beautiful bit of bushland. And they thought, what could we do about this? They noticed that the fence lines were being cleared, but on the other side of the fence lines the weeds the people were trying to control were taking parts of the bush habitat. So, they thought to remove weeds from those small, isolated pockets and areas of intact bushland using hand tools. They used to carry a board that had a whole variety of hand tools, and they would remove them, hang them up in trees to let them desiccate, they remove the seeds. So, they found by doing that the native plants were then recolonising those areas. They worked out what I see as a strength approach. Strength of the native bushland to be able to rehabilitate itself. Then they moved out, to other areas. So that's broadly how I view my strategic approach to managing weeds here on the precinct.

Me – So working on a small area and working outwards.

Amius – So I am strategic, where there is access to areas. Not so relevant here in this more urban environment, but if I just focused on those high visibility areas then the intact places, we have would become overrun. One example is over at the Connellan Hangers, there was a gentleman there who has been getting rid of buffel for years. You can see the work, there are native oat grass, kerosene grass, a variety of species that have re-established themselves in that space where he has cleared. And so, I thought there has already been some good work done here I'm just going to enhance that. But I chose to use herbicide on a broadscale. They have put a fence up now, but before the fence was there, I went through and cut the buffel, and waited for it to regrow. Then before it went to seed, even before it flowered, I sprayed. So that knocked out huge swathes of buffel, reduced my workload but also allowed me to focus on other areas that are more threatened. So, I go back there and just check and get rid of little isolated pockets. I've just had to do another spray because obviously there's lots of recruitment.

So yeah, when I said my relationship with buffel grass isn't negative its positive, I think if you have a negative relationship towards pest species they can get you down. So, you lose your inner strength, of being able to have the resilience to keep persisting. And I think that if you haven't understanding that all plants have a place. A weed is just something, out of place then that can help you maintain motivation in trying to tackle stuff.

Me – and the strategic approach...

Amiuis – There is no doubt the strategic approach, using a variety of techniques. So, on this scale, I've got to prioritise, because I have got so much to do as I am only here 3 days a week. Brush cutting, bulk spraying the regrowth and then re-applying. It's a *really* successful strategy. Sometimes you have a win and sometimes you don't. For various reasons a spray regime might not be as affective, so you go back and revisit.

Me - It's all about ongoing processes anyway...

Amiuis – maintaining and being consistent. Having strategy, being prepared to shift that strategy, if you have to. I think that the parallels between humanity and weed management are there for us to see if we choose to look.

Me Ok, so tell me a little bit more about that...

Amiuis - Yeah so invariably people come to Alice Springs, and they just see a whole swathe of different relationships in their face. I see Alice Springs as like Paris. I lived in Paris and worked in Paris almost a year, and people would come from the suburbs and come to party hard and then go. Come and party hard, cause havoc and then go. I think that happens in Alice Springs, to a greater or lesser extent. If you judge the people who come to party hard, as weeds.

Me – It puts the view of the whole town askew?

Amiuis – It puts your/our view of community askew. If people view them as weeds, there is continual visitors coming and causing drama, then its whatever...

Me – Put their behaviour into perspective

Amiuis – Have a bigger perspective. I have kids, when they are exhibiting behaviours that you are not too happy with you try and encourage them when they do the right thing, a positive strength-based approach.

Me – Positive reinforcement.

Amiuis – Same with healthcare...

Me - Its related to your original point to look at buffel grass positively.

Amiuis – I think more broadly, if we have a view that we are all weeds in a certain respect. Some people may view us as weeds, yet we as we don't necessarily view ourselves as weeds. I think if we have that perspective, we can then recalibrate our relationships with 'other', with stranger, with unknown. Whether that be people, cultural practices and the concept of cultural inertia. An anthropological concept. Cultural inertia (my understanding of it) is if you have Culture A and Culture B, living alongside they invariably come together. There can be an intense collision with shrapnel and collateral damage, so that the rupture and repair process is quite difficult. If you are aware of moral inertia coming into that meeting place, rupture still occurs and that's OK, but there's sensitivity and awareness, emotional awareness cultural awareness that you bring to that so that the shrapnel and repair required isn't quite

as extensive and the damage is not quite as huge and rehabilitation after that can be expedited hugely. The benefits all around that interaction, because people see that rupture, they see the repair process, they think, it's not quite as bad.

I guess that's the parallel of managing weeds and looking after country. You have these special places, you want to look after those special places, guard against them. Threatening processes such as buffel grass, it is a massive threatening process, and we need to significantly look at our approach. I see it as something that needs to be removed from the landscape, I'm not sure whether that's possible. I not sure that its possible, other experts can talk to that. I think that in certain locations it certainly is possible. It certainly is possible to keep it out. I advise people doing bush regen themselves to check out the Bradley sisters. Look at their work and get a bit of inspiration, because people can get disheartened easily. If you don't see the native grasses, there. People have told me after they have removed buffel, that they see the natives come back and it is motivating.

Me - I have heard it's immediate, the return of species. The Community Garden at Eastside have started a project very recently called Adopted a Tree in the area outside of the garden. People choose a tree and keep the base of it clear of buffel and couch.

Amiuus – Buffel is an adversary, but I don't have that attitude towards it! It's rewarding, a positive feedback loop!

Me - Thanks so much for your time Amiuus.