

The Big Fig

by Ed Parker

Rainbow Lorikeets are deliriously screeching, feeding on the generous, fresh blossoms on the Pink Euodia in the backyard, an important reminder of the importance of planting our yards with native plant species that can sustain our native fauna.

The twist to the story is that the Pink Euodia (*Melicope elleryana*) was in fact self-sown by bird dropping laden seed, and now some years later, the tall, slender Euodia is itself serving as a food source to a variety of birds. (While the Euodia occurs naturally in the Moreton Region, it is not certain whether our specimen derived from natural stock or another garden plant.)

The flip side to this story is that many exotic garden plants become bushland weeds, displacing natural native vegetation, through the same mechanism of dispersal of fruit and seed by birds. Examples of such undesirable plants are Asparagus fern, Privets, Umbrella Tree, Broad-leaved Pepper Tree, Chinese Elm and Murraya.

But back to the good news story, in the Westlake riverfront bushland, exists a prominent tree known affectionately by locals as “The Big Fig”.

This magnificent specimen is a Small-leaved Moreton Bay Fig (*Ficus platypoda*), standing proudly near the corner of Tennent Street and Westlake Drive. It is estimated to be at least one hundred years old.

The tree itself tells the rest of the story. Under its well-shaped, 20 metre wide canopy, exists a treasure trove of native species. No less than 30 different native species make up the understorey below Fig Tree’s canopy. There are also weed species, including some of those garden escapes

mentioned above. Fortunately, however, these nasties are outnumbered by the native plants.

So what we have here is a venerable old native Fig Tree that, for over one hundred years, has provided roosting, nesting and shelter for native birds. It has also provided a food source, as well as allowing seed from elsewhere to be dispersed here, under the tree canopy.

Council’s Habitat Brisbane officer, Kenneth McClymont, described this particular specimen as “node of regeneration”, referring to the way it has sustained a stock native species under its canopy, while around it the influence of man has degraded the bush. In turn, it serves to allow those natives to spread back into the degraded bush, with proper care and some attention.

Postscript: On Sunday, 4 Feb, at 7am, a working bee will be held to plant a natural buffer at the Fig Tree. Enquiries: Ed 3376 1389.



Small-leaved Moreton Bay (*Ficus platypoda*)

Illustration by Frank O’Shannassy

This regular Nature Watch column is contributed by your local Centenary bushland care groups.

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