

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE AUSTRALIAN RANGELAND SOCIETY
BIENNIAL CONFERENCE**

Official publication of The Australian Rangeland Society

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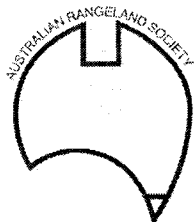
The reference for this article should be in this general form;
Author family name, initials (year). Title. *In*: Proceedings of the nth Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conference. Pages. (Australian Rangeland Society: Australia).

For example:

Anderson, L., van Klinken, R. D., and Shepherd, D. (2008). Aerially surveying Mesquite (*Prosopis* spp.) in the Pilbara. *In*: 'A Climate of Change in the Rangelands. Proceedings of the 15th Australian Rangeland Society Biennial Conference'. (Ed. D. Orr) 4 pages. (Australian Rangeland Society: Australia).

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The Australian Rangeland Society

MONITORING, REPORTING AND TAKING STOCK ON TOORA STATION – A LANDHOLDERS PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

As a keen observer of habitat change on my property, regular recording and monitoring has been carried out to measure changes using key photo points. The record keeping is simple and consistently maintained and goes back than 45 years. Along with the photographic evidence and record keeping, I have more than 60 years experience on rangeland properties. The following paper covers some of my observations from my ongoing record keeping and monitoring.

INTRODUCTION

Our property Toora Station is situated approximately 50km north of Wentworth in the southwest of New South Wales, just west of the Silver City Highway. The property consists largely of open Belah/Rosewood country, with areas of Black Bluebush, areas of Mallee, which is mostly open, along with Black Box Woodlands on the floodplain along the Great Anabranche of the Darling River.

Degradation on our frontage country has largely been “taken up” due to the property having been fully pipelined for many years, allowing appropriate stocking. We have also heavily subdivided our property based on landscape/pasture types, which has been very helpful in enhancing vegetation communities.

RESILIENCE OF THE GRASSLANDS

I have observed over the last 50 years a number of changes in pasture composition. Following the 1940's drought, there was a great invasion of stemless Saffron Thistle, and it really appeared as if they were going to take over the country. The stemless Saffron Thistles were in serious proportions until the 1960's when they decreased to a moderate, now a low component of the pasture. Wild Turnip was also extremely prevalent in the 1970's, now much more of a minor cover.

Blue Crowfoot used to be a great standby in our pastures, unfortunately in the 1980's, Toora was attacked by a large plague of caterpillar species, since then it has unfortunately become quite a minor pasture component.

Currently I consider two of the worst weeds we have are Red Brome Grass and Silver Grass. Both grasses contaminate wool, displace useful palatable species and produce virtually no useful forage. Red Brome seeds cause tooth loss in sheep, mouth and throat abscesses in cattle, its just bad news. Other current serious weeds are Wild Sage and Statice, both I consider 'cover up' plants of minimal pasture value. Accompanying photos show the drought conditions and the recovery of various species throughout the vegetation communities on Toora.

WARDS WEED – NOT SO BAD

I used to be really frightened by the great and rapid increase in Wards Weed. “Plants of Western New South Wales” book states Wards Weed “*not known to be utilised*” which I feel is clearly incorrect as I refer to below. It has shown to be highly nutritious when young and my observation is that in this early stage it is a highly utilised pasture component.

Our paddock, which has the heaviest concentration of Wards Weed, has over the last several years sustained a stocking rate (rotationally grazed) of over 200 S.DH (sheep days per hectare) yearly, in seasons of below average rainfall. Toora’s overall reasonable season average is approximately 120-130 S.D.H.

To get the best out of Wards Weed it must be grazed heavily at an early stage, by doing this it enables other more desirable pasture to better compete with it, Wards Weed being preferred over Button Copperburr and Cannonball as an example at this early stage of growth. Toxicity can occur; it appears particularly when in heavy seed. Could it be a form of grain poisoning? My thought only, incidentally we have not had any problems to date.

The paddock mentioned at all times has had reasonable ground cover, largely litter and Wards Weed stalks. The small exclosures shown in the accompanying photographs were set up in the paddock approximately 5 weeks after the seasonal break in 2003 and clearly illustrate its utilisation.

Overall, I now believe Wards Weed to be a minor worry.

REVEGETATION OF ERODED AREAS

Over many years I have had great success in reversing erosion, particularly water erosion in gullies and claypans. Photos from photos sites clearly illustrate quite a dramatic result of revegetated claypans.

Simple placement of branches and almost any biodegradable material, (it **MUST** be biodegradable) break down over time. If the material laid down does not break down there is the potential that the ‘cure may be worse than the disease.’

As an example, in a heavy thunderstorm there was a small gutter washed out beside our road down a creek bank, up to 20cm wide and 20-30cm deep. I believed filling it with soil would not permanently solve the problem. My wife suggested we fill it in with dead vegetative matter, such as weeds, hay or similar trampled in the erosion gully. I doubted if it would be successful, but decided to give it a try and it “worked a treat” and the gully is now in excellent condition 6 years later. The essential point is that only biodegradable materials are used, no synthetic materials.