

Heatwave a killer for trees

BY SHANA MORGAN

TREES are dying on the Border, as they struggle under stress from a heatwave more severe than ever before.

Plane trees along Wodonga's Thomas Mitchell Drive are one example of how record-breaking January temperatures have led to defoliation.

Former Albury Botanic Gardens curator Paul Scannell has noticed changes in many other plants such as hakeas, Japanese maples, planes, and elms.

"It's the extreme temperatures, compounded by lack of water and attack by insects and diseases having an accelerated impact," he said.

"This is more devastating conditions than I've ever seen in my 54 years of gardening."

Albury's average January temperature was 37.4 degrees, which was 5.1 degrees higher than normal.

"When you see plane trees defoliated to that extent, it's got really bad," Mr Scannell said.

"The stress is just compounded over the years with



LEAVES ARE DYING: Former Albury Botanic Gardens curator Paul Scannell and Wodonga Albury Toward Climate Health convener Lizette Salmon are worried about falling leaves on Thomas Mitchell Drive. **Picture: MARK JESSER**

increasing storm activity, irregular seasonal weather and now that you have this extreme heat, the ground dries out to the point where it becomes hydrophobic.

"Water, when it hits,

doesn't even sink in, it's lost all the capacity to absorb."

He said the self-preservation of trees could only go so far and has called on Border councils to think outside the box when creating initiatives

to deal with climate change.

"It's really about councils recognising that the financial value, as well as the aesthetic value and the property value, of trees is sensational," he said.

"If the heat and dry persist they'll need to be well maintained with watering, mulching and, in the case of some street trees, air shattering the ground to open layers, or mechanical aeration to allow

moisture to the root zone.

"Even then, they may not survive long term."

There has also been defoliation of street trees at the western end of Lawrence Street, Havelock Street behind the Tesla charging stations, Baranduda Boulevard and in Amatex Street, East Albury.

Wodonga Albury Toward Climate Health convener Lizette Salmon said she was not surprised there has been impacts on trees from the Border's "premature autumn".

"We've received 60 reports from 30 citizen scientists describing impacts such as fatigued outdoor workers, decimated rhubarb, pumpkin and spinach crops, stressed and dehydrated wildlife and melting wax in bee hives," she said.

"A local arborist said he'd had double the number of limb fall call-outs from Vic Roads, a council worker said there was more summer leaf litter than any previous year and an orchardist estimated he'd lost 90 per cent of his avocado crop due to premature fruit drop."