

from the Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park



Copies of the new constitution are available on request to the Secretary, Anne Gadsby.
Email: anngad@wn.com.au or mail: c/- PO, Bremer Bay WA

Next issue– March

SOME PRICKLY, SOME FEATHERY – the Verticordia and Dryandra weekend

Rosemary Jasper

Altogether 31 people participated in the weekend led by Elizabeth George & Margaret Pieroni on the 1st & 2nd November. Participants came from the local area but also from further afield and included many people with particular expertise, which enhanced the weekend for everyone.

The bush was looking superb because of the mass displays of flowers and the flush of new growth, due to the time of year and the good rainfall in previous months. The new growth provided colour and luxuriance which was quite magnificent. It is a novelty for leaves on plants like *Hakea corymbosa* or *Dryandra quercifolia* to be soft to the touch, but that they were! There were also wonderful displays of flowers – the yellow of *Verticordia*, the pink of *Melaleuca* & *Beaufortia*, and the white of *Trachymene* & *Asteridea* in the recently burnt area along Pabelup Drive. The setting for the weekend couldn't have been better.

The weekend started in Ravensthorpe with Margaret and Elizabeth giving illustrated talks about Dryandras and Verticordias, respectively. This provided an excellent basis for the weekend. Our first walk was down Mt Benson to Floater Rd in the Ravensthorpe Range, where we looked at the incredible diversity of plants that is a feature of the Range vegetation. After lunch in Ravensthorpe, we drove along Old Ongerup Rd, on the northern boundary of the Park, and stopped at several places where *Verticordia* were obvious. At one place 4 different species were found, including the delightful *Verticordia oxylepis* which looks like a perfect bonsai specimen, along with *V. pennigera*, *V. endlicheriana* var. *major* and *V. habrantha*.. At each place there was a diversity of other plants as well, so that the main challenge for the organisers was keeping the group moving to get to Twertup before dark.

We spent the night at Twertup, sharing the Field Studies Centre with a group of Albany Bushwalkers who had spent the day walking the 22 km to Roes Rock and back. The weather was fine and calm and the company relaxed. How could you improve on that as a way to spend a Saturday night?

On Sunday we started by finding the rare *Verticordia crebra* which grows on spongolite breakaway country. It is a distinctive Verticordia - a small erect plant, bearing few flowers (yellow and with a very long style). We also stopped at several places along Pabelup Track on our way to Point Ann, including a place where *Dryandra quercifolia* was growing. This is one of the Dryandras which has a propensity to hybridise with other species, which was a topic Margaret raised in her introductory talk on Saturday and of which we saw several examples, even in the limited number of places we looked on the weekend. The phenomenon of hybridisation is intriguing. It suggests that something significant is occurring in evolutionary terms in the flora and it therefore would seem to warrant serious investigation.

When we arrived at Point Ann we were greeted by a whale in the bay. After lunch the group also took the opportunity to discuss the Western Ground Parrot Project which has recently started (see article on page 3). This was of considerable interest to all present and it was a valuable opportunity to talk about the project as a group. We then walked the trail at Point Ann - again being thrilled by the variety of plants and the spectacular scenery of the place.

Many of the group went on to West Mt Barren and Mt Maxwell, so completing a transect through the region, from the top of the Ravensthorpe Range to the coast and peaks near Bremer Bay. On Monday the ever enthusiastic leaders, Elizabeth and Margaret, took the opportunity while in the district to visit the nearby Chereninup Creek, an Australian Bush Heritage property, accompanied by Nathan McQuoid and others.

The weekend was a great opportunity to get out into the bush as a group and to indulge in just looking, talking plants and other 'bush things'. Margaret and Elizabeth have extensive knowledge and were able to share that in an enthusiastic and informative manner. We were very privileged to have them as the leaders and they enjoyed the opportunity to spend time in the bush in this region. Once again we have been reminded of the incredible value of the Fitzgerald River National Park and surrounding bushland -- that it is so healthy, so diverse and so extensive; and also of the role the Friends of the Fitzgerald can play in increasing awareness and knowledge of the bush in the region (and have fun doing it).

Some of Verticordia species seen on the weekend: *Verticordia chrysantha*; *V. crebra*; *V. endlicheriana* var. *major*; *V. fastigiata*; *V. habrantha*; *V. inclusa*; *V. oxylepis*; *V. pennigera*.



Left: Nathan McQuoid, Gil Craig and Margaret Pieroni considering a Dryandra likely to be a hybrid between two nearby Dryandra species.

Right: *Asteridea* sp. growing in an area along Pabelup Drive which was burnt by a wildfire earlier this year.



See also Peta Ireland's account of the weekend on Page 6

Birds, Animals and Orchids

The Search is on for the Western Ground Parrot

When it comes to endangered species searching is often all we can do, indeed most humans spend their lives searching for one thing or another. Last month six members of the Western Ground Parrot Recovery Project did just this. Lead by CALM research scientist Brent Barrett this hopeful team entered the magnificent Fitzgerald River National Park on a mission. No complications were expected and their goal for this trip was simple - using a prescribed methodology to survey an area known to have the highest concentration of Western Ground Parrots in Australia and record the number of calls. Previous surveys had occurred from 1996 to 2000 and there was confidence that the number had been steadily increasing. What they were greeted with was the contrary. Silence, and plenty of it. Not from the other abundant bird life or indeed the crickets and locusts that shared this communal calling time, but from the ever elusive Western Ground Parrot. Areas that have consistently held high numbers of birds, including areas that have been reliable for twenty years, now contained very low numbers.

Western Ground Parrots are cryptic birds, which are rarely seen and are most active while we are still sleeping. Each morning the team arose at 3 am, well before the dawn chorus began. They travelled up to 30 km from camp and were in position when the first birds hit their distinctive notes. Surveyors remained until the sun had risen and the day had begun. Typically, by this time all ground parrots were silent. The team then returned in the evening before sunset and remained for a further hour into the night. Each night offered only six hours sleep and the days were often too hot to even contemplate entering a tent. Despite this difficulty the team remained positive to the end. Evening after evening, morning after morning these silent sentries stood, straining their ears for the eagerly awaited calls, time and time again they were disappointed. Of the 63 sites surveyed only 7 contained birds. It is hard to hold up your optimism when faced with such disappointing results. More surveys are needed, the populations' extent needs to be recorded. The reality is that at 300,000 hectares the Fitzgerald River National Park is very large and it contains a lot of suitable habitat (>30,000ha). If these birds have simply moved on it will be very difficult to find out where they are now. At the conclusion of a meeting held last week it was decided to survey further into Fitzgerald River National Park in the hope that the population distribution can be better understood. This will require mapping critical habitat based on topography, vegetation/soil structure and historic records. It is a big task.

The Western Ground Parrot is probably already critically endangered based on IUCN criteria. Sadly the results of this recent survey are supporting this claim. The information gained during the next year will be essential for the better protection of this unique species. A display will be set up at the tourist centre in Ravensthorpe. This will have a model of the Western Ground Parrot and photos of an Eastern and Western Ground Parrot as well as posters and pamphlets. It is hoped that this display will help people confirm any future sightings.

Enthusiastic volunteers are wanted and are encouraged to either contact Brent at CALM Albany 9842 4500 or email

/Continued bottom of next column

Wildlife Observations from the Rangers

The recent Western Shield fauna monitoring has produced some encouraging results. The Moir track site on several previous trapping programs had yielded results that in the Fitzgerald River National Park we might consider a little under our expectation. The recent Spring program produced a much improved result with five Dibblers being captured as well as Bush Rats, Western Mice, and a Grey-bellied Dunnart. I don't recall this number of Dibblers being caught at this site previously.

The Twertup trap site also provided what I consider an above average result. Eleven Dibblers were caught, all of these had not been caught previously, five Western mice, five Honey Possums, twenty-one Brush-tail Possums, one Ash-grey Mouse, one Bush Rat, a Grey-bellied Dunnart, a young Quenda, an Echidna and a new species for this trap line was a Western Pygmy Possum.

Another interesting result from this monitoring program was the lower number of House Mice being caught compared with the previous two or three programs. At the Twertup site we caught as many House Mice as we did Dibblers.

It seems the wet year has been favorable with the Dabbler as well as the wildflowers. I added a few more Orchid species to my Jacup list this year; about 30% of the Orchids known in park are present around the Jacup Ranger station.

The Western Ground Parrot project has just finished its first survey in the park, which targeted the Short Road site initially, and then other suitable sites between Drummond Track and Hamersley Drive. The survey did not provide the results that were hoped for; the project will now focus on more surveying to try to determine where the birds have gone. Its not known whether the birds are dispersing into 1989 post fire vegetation regrowth or whether the population has declined.

On behalf of the Department of Conservation and Land Management I would like to pass on much thanks and gratitude to the members of the Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park for all of the educational activities and other voluntary time that you have offered this year,

Seasons Greetings to you all, and take care over the Christmas period.

Peter Wilkins, Senior Ranger.

brentb@calm.wa.gov.au or Friends of the Western Ground Parrot; Brenda Newbey (Perth) 93375673 (E-mail sfryc@iinet.net.au); or Anne Bondin (Albany) 98441794 (E-mail albanysbirds@hotmail.com). **CALM and the Friends of the Western Ground Parrot are also keen to hear of any possible sightings of Western Ground Parrot.**

Brent Barrett, Research Scientist, Western Ground Parrot Recovery Project, CALM Albany

Biosphere?

As visitors drive down our way,
They pass a striking sign.
“Welcome To The Biosphere”
A Beautiful design.

Do they drive too fast for small print,
Or is their sight just way too near?
For inevitably they ask us:
“What the heck is a Biosphere?”

I stutter for a moment,
Can't find the words as such.
It was born of the United Nations,
But to me it's Double Dutch.

You see it's not a ball or dome,
Whose border you can see.
But a zone of close relationships,
Between environment and me.

The concept is an odd one,
And that is very plain,
But give me just a moment,
Whilst I sit down to explain.

The core is the Fitzgerald Park
A reserve that's world renowned,
For its flora and its fauna,
Unique wonders which abound.

Outside extends the buffer zone,
With remnant vegetation.
Then there's a place to live, work and play,
The zone of co-operation.

Now all these put together,
Form the Biosphere Reserve.
It's hard to get your head around.
But do not be deterred.

There's one important part,
You should strive to understand,
Each zone impacts the other,
They all go hand in hand.

The aim's to find a balance,
To make it work for all.
Conserve, enjoy and profit,
The order it is tall

But each day we will take the steps,
To make it work just fine.
I think I'll start with a tin of paint
And make a larger sign!

© Annette Caelli, 2003

TOTALLY BIOSPHERED Story and Art competition . . September 2003. .

Above—the winning entry from Ravensthorpe writer, Annette Caelli.

Below—the Friends' entry (Runner Up)—a collage of the Biosphere, created by Gil Craig with 'bits and pieces' collected and donated by Gil and other Friends' members.



AND THEN THERE WERE NONE ...the continuing threat of Dieback

The plant pathogen *Phytophthora cinnamomi* (known in WA as Dieback, Wildflower Dieback or Jarrah Dieback) has been recognised for several decades as an extremely serious threat to the values of Fitzgerald River National Park. This threat is recognised in the current management plan and continues to be an over-riding consideration in the management of the Park – hence measures such as road closures after rain. There is currently one infestation of the disease in the central area of the Park, on what is known as Bell Track. The area of the infestation is estimated to be 175 ha.

Dieback is present in Cape Le Grand National Park and the Stirling Range National Park. It is also present in areas surrounding the Fitzgerald River National Park. These include: along Masons Bay Rd and Jerdacuttup Rd, at the eastern end; on two spots on the South Coast Hwy north of the Park.

Although this disease has been known about for a long time, there is a concern that in this region the general public, earth-moving contractors and Local Governments have not been aware of the serious implications of the disease, or of protocols necessary for reducing the risk of spread.

Stemming from a National Park tour for the BHP Billiton Ravensthorpe Nickel Operations Community Liaison Committee, Malcom Grant (CALM Ravensthorpe) & Nathan McQuoid (Greening Australia WA) organised a field trip to raise awareness of the disease, its impact and management. Thus, on Nov 14th, a bus load of people which included staff and Councillors from the Jerramungup and Ravensthorpe Shires, some WA Government employees, local earthmoving contractors, and representatives from a variety of community organisations, travelled from Ravensthorpe via East Mt Barren to Jerramungup and the Stirling Ranges.

The trip started at the lookout on East Mt Barren, where, at that spectacular vantage point, we stopped and, among other things, looked in detail at the vegetation. Malcom made a point of showing the group the plants that are sensitive to the Dieback fungus – and that was the majority of the plants present. The notable exceptions were the Eucalypts and the sedges.

We then travelled to the Stirling Range, and were shown some of the effects the disease has had in that National Park. We saw an active Dieback front, where *Dryandra* plants were alive, dying & dead within a metre of each other, and in another spot *Sand Banksias* (trees) were progressively dying.. On the larger scale we were told of the drastic impact that the disease has had on particular species of plants (including endemic and rare plants), but also on the unique montane thickets of the peaks in the Stirlings, and on the vegetation generally. Most graphic was a whole hillside that appeared to be composed of clumps of Mallees with a uniform layer of sedges and patches of bare ground between. This vista was very similar to the view looking toward the peak of East Mt Barren that we had seen earlier in the day, except that on East Mt Barren the vegetation was obviously diverse, healthy and intact. It is devastating that a Park as botanically rich as the Stirlings has been so badly affected, and it is clear that we don't want the same future for the Fitzgerald or indeed for any areas of currently healthy bush in the region.

One very positive outcome of the day was that the Shires of Jerramungup and Ravensthorpe have agreed to look towards establishing a working committee on Dieback. All those who took part were impressed by the gravity of the situation and appreciated the professional presentation on the day. As users of the Park we all need to be aware of the risk of Dieback and be prepared to take measures to prevent either its spread or further introduction to the Park.

Malcom compiled an excellent booklet (17 pages) for the field trip. If anyone would like a copy please contact Rosemary Jasper, 9838 1640 or rosemaryj@westnet.com.au or Nathan McQuoid, nmcquoid@gawa.org.au

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TOTAL

Please tick box below if receipt is required. Make cheques payable to 'Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park' and post to:

The Treasurer,
Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park,
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☐

Raffle Winners

A raffle was run during the 'Verticordia and Dryandra' weekend with illustrations by Margaret Pieroni forming the prizes. The Albany Bushwalkers Club, with whom we shared Twertup on Saturday night, helped our raffle enormously. Despite valiant efforts by the walkers to draw a winning ticket, all prizes went to Friends!

1st Prize: *Banksia speciosa* print - Kim and Merle Bennett

2nd Prize: 2 sets floral cards – Anne Gadsby

3rd Prize: 1 set floral cards – Anne Williams

A well matured bottle of port was also raffled. "John" Tucker (much to the disappointment of "John E.") won the bottle and generously shared it around in the evening.

It Was Worth It!

I went along to the Verticordia and Dryandra weekend as one hungry to learn more about our wonderfully diverse flora. What a great and generous opportunity, having two women of such expertise guiding us through the complexities of the Dryandra and Verticordia genera in such a beautiful area of bushland!

Tired and stressed from daily life, I was concerned about taking the three hour drive to Ravensthorpe and unsure how I would manage to get through the next week of work. But the Fitzgerald River National Park worked its magic without me even noticing. We moved in convoy from site to site, eagerly absorbing as much as we could of the flora around us, making new friendships with the wonderful group of fellow enthusiasts.

While driving to Twertup for our Saturday night sleepover I had to concentrate hard to keep myself alert. I slept like a log that night. It was so peaceful.

Sunday started gently not too rushed. But there was still so much to see and do. Through Margaret and Elizabeth's explanations we could gain an insight into nature's "work in progress", the plants being promiscuous in their breeding and refusing to yet be clearly segregated into species, or even subspecies.

I left as late as I felt I could to head back to Albany. And by Monday morning I felt lighter and more rested than I'd felt in a while. Even, just being out there in the park seemed to soothe and calm the stress away.

Thankyou to all concerned for a wonderful, wonderful weekend.

Peta Ireland (a member of the Albany Wildflower Society)

Twertup cleaning roster:

December	-	Barbara Miller:
January	-	Angela Sanders:
February	-	Tim and Caroline:
March	-	Robyn and Nigel

NB: LIFE ON THE EDGE ..Feb 14th & 15th

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