

Narpulungup ews

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from the Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park

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Next issue:
February 2013

Also in this issue:

Postcards from Twertup-page 2

Fitzgerald Biosphere fauna report published-page 2

Report on Cocanarup Carnaby's cockatoo weekend-page 3

The Cocanarup numbat story-page 5

TWERTUP UPDATE

Since the last issue there have been two additional working bees, the last on the weekend of 3 & 4 November was attended by nine people at which the trenches for concrete footings were measured, laid out and dug.



Gil Craig, Libby Sandiford and Peter Dawson hard at it.



Steve Janicke, Peter Dawson and Nathan McQuoid under Ric Pepper's (the red hat) supervision.

Photos: Geraldine Janicke

Postcards from Twertup

November 2012

1. Twertup Waratah.

From the car I thought it was a waratah growing along the Twertup Track. An amazing range extension. It's a *Banksia caleyi* I was told. Well that's what Twertup is all about – nature studies.



2. Building work (photo top left hand side)

It doesn't look much but these trenches took one and a half days to measure, loosen, dig out and compact. They are the footings to support the external and internal walls. The little room isn't the little room but the pantry.

Ric Pepper, Gil Craig, Steve & Geraldine Janicke, Nathan McQuoid, Libby Sandiford, Grantly Morton and his Dingo posthole digging machine, Kevin Giles and me worked away pretty well. Cement may go down in December and maybe you'll see a waratah next spring at Twertup.

These postcards were contributed by Peter Dawson; I really enjoy their quirky style and encourage other members to contribute their own impressions on any relevant activity. Editor.



Photo: Geraldine Janicke

Grants for Twertup

Hooray! At last our many grant applications to restore the Field Studies Centre at Twertup are bearing fruit. We are grateful for both a \$20,000 'Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife' grant and a \$40,000 'State NRM Community Grant 2012-13' which will mainly be used for materials and equipment, and a skilled stonemason.

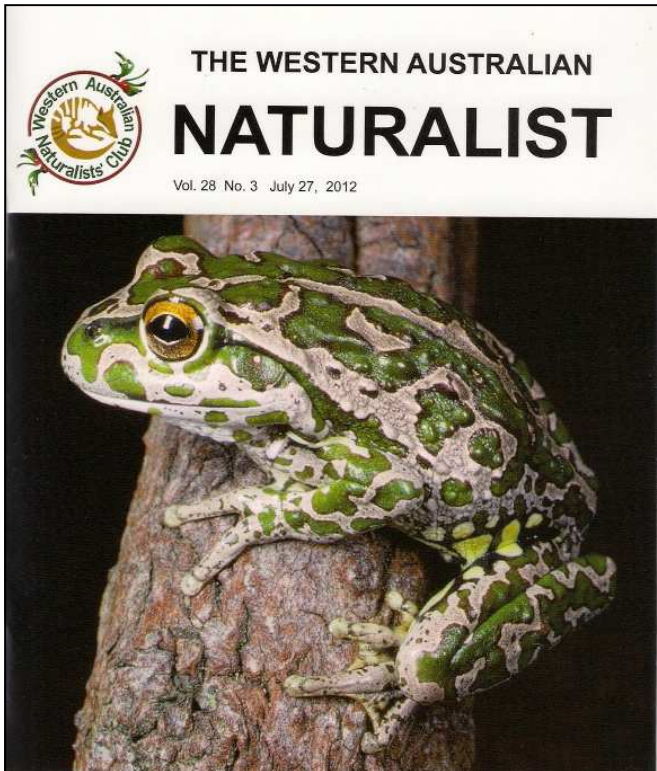
'Hopetoun Men in Sheds' have done an excellent job in strengthening the doors, windows and frames, and finding the various tacks and nails within them that imperil the sanders. The woodwork still requires further sanding back and painting with undercoat. If anyone can help with the latter tasks, please put your hand up. Working bees are being held each month at Twertup, so if you want to take part, please contact Ric Pepper or Gil Craig on 9838 1071 or ripicasa@wn.com.au *Contributed by Gil Craig.*

FITZGERALD BIOSPHERE FAUNA REPORT PUBLISHED

A comprehensive and up to date report on the vertebrate fauna of the Fitzgerald Biosphere Reserve has just been published by the Western Australian Naturalists' Club. It was written by local biologists A. Sanders, A. Chapman, G. Harold and consultant R. Teale and describes the distribution, abundance and habitats of five species of inland fishes, 15 frogs, 56 reptiles, 206 birds, 35 native mammals including seven locally extinct species. The biosphere reserve is revealed as a haven for threatened and species of particular conservation significance due to the quantity, quality and connectivity of relatively undisturbed bushland in and adjacent to the Shire of Ravensthorpe. Processes which threaten fauna including dieback, introduced predators, climate change, large wildfires and too frequent burns as well as deterioration of

rivers and wetlands are described. The report includes some excellent photos of some fauna and their habitats.

The report is timely as the biosphere reserve status which was granted in 1978 is now up for renomination and the application has been submitted to UNESCO for their consideration. The report is available from the Western Australian Naturalists' Club, PO Box 8257, PBC, 6849, telephone 92282495, for \$12 including postage.



THE VERTEBRATE FAUNA OF THE FITZGERALD BIOSPHERE RESERVE, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Cover photo: Spotted-thighed Frog, *Litoria cyclorhyncha* by G. Harold

RAVENSTHORPE RAILWAY HERITAGE WALK

On the Sunday of the middle weekend of the Wildflower Show six walkers met at Kundip to walk the heritage trail 11 km to the Lee Creek rest area. The weather was perfect, the wildflowers at the peak of their glory and the walk trail was a delight as it combines some really good bush with the history of the Ravensthorpe – Hopetoun railway which operated from 1909 to 1935. Apart from wildflowers, the walkers discovered a discarded steel plate which might have been the door to the engine firebox of one of the steam locomotives. The entire heritage trail has now been

walked over three separate walks as part of the Wildflower Show fortnight of events. Thanks are due to Anne and Derek Williams for initiating the heritage trail project and their on-going commitment to its management as well as to Paul and Ainslie Foulds, Greg and Diane Belli for their clearance work prior to the walk.



Walkers on the trail, left to right Marcia Shepherd, John Tucker, Andy Chapman and Rodger Walker. Photo: Sue Leighton.

COCANARUP CARNABY'S BLACK COCKATOO NESTING SURVEY

Once again, Birdlife Australia and Friends of FRNP held the Carnaby's black cockatoo camp-out at Cocanarup Timber Reserve over the first weekend of October. Twelve campers, including our youngest chick, Raana and Dylan's, 5 month old Otis and 3 day trippers kindly volunteered their time to 'tap' a large number of known and new salmon gums in search of breeding cockatoos. A number of birds were observed still in the 'house hunting' stages of the season, whilst other birds appeared sleepy eyed from their hollows to stare down on their admirers. It is still a sight that never fails to raise a smile from any of us! Thirteen birds were found in hollows, along with a number of barn and boobook owls, four new nesting trees were discovered. On past results, it appears the number of birds nesting at this time was down slightly but there was no indication of reduced numbers as other birds were still seen locally and was perhaps just seasonal variation.

Those that camped were treated to a cacophony of night calls from owls and nightjars and despite the warmth on the Saturday, a variety of local birds.

A huge THANK YOU to those who participated in the survey, your efforts and dedication are

invaluable to the study of cockatoos in this area. For anyone interested in participating in next years survey please email me at Debbie.Sullivan@birdlife.org.au The 2012 volunteers were: Ken and Jean Read, Peter and Ples Rushton, Chris and Jen Biddulph, Raana Scott, Dylan & Otis Gleave, Elisa Spengler, Rani Stewart, Simon Polle, Kylie Bishop, Roger Walker, Andy Chapman and Debbie Sullivan. *Contributed by Debbie Sullivan, Birdlife Australia.*



Jenny Biddulph demonstrates the 'tap and observe' method of occupied nesting hollow location. Photo: Kylie Bishop



Raana's famous photo of female at nesting hollow entrance.

THE 'FRIENDS' TEN YEARS AGO.....

2002 was another busy year for 'Friends'. Between the two fire symposia we organised held on 22 & 25 February in Ravensthorpe and Gairdner respectively, there was the AGM at Twertup on 24 February. At the AGM, Nathan McQuoid replaced Gillian Craig as President, Elspeth West replaced Barbara Miller as Vice President, Anne Gadsby remained Secretary, Giles West remained Treasurer, Corinn Hine remained Newsletter Editor, Mark Jeffrey remained Twertup Building representative, Rosie Jasper remained as committee member and Gillian Craig replaced Elspeth West as the other committee member. While on who was doing what in 2002; Peter Wilkins, Steven Mills and Lanny Bleakley were the FRNP rangers. Within this very active period we also fitted in two 'life on the rocks' excursions to Mt Madden and Calyerup Rocks with Steve Hopper.

On 2 May there was a meeting at Jacup ranger station attended by Gillian Craig, Alan Danks, Nathan McQuoid, Peter Wilkins and Andy Chapman to discuss ideas for on-going biological survey work in the Fitz. This came about as a direct result of the fire symposia which identified some inadequacies in our knowledge of impacts of fire on some flora and fauna communities. One of the tangible benefits of this meeting was the recommendation that a review of all research in FRNP be undertaken. This was the genesis of what became the Fitzgerald Biosphere Reserve Bibliographic Data Base and the Review by Paula Deegan, funded by the Gordon Reid Foundation and completed in 2005 and 2006 respectively.

On 31 August Malcolm Grant led a walk along Peniup Creek to Borakup Pool which was followed by a social get together at Twertup. Also in 2002 'Friends' made a submission to the Ravensthorpe/Esperance Blueprint for the Future reminding all that FRNP is not just a pretty face but an irreplaceable asset for biodiversity conservation at state, national and international levels. This came at a time when the south west of WA had been identified as one of 25 international biodiversity 'hotspots' (and the only one in Australia) and the FRNP and Ravensthorpe area were major contributors to this status. Ironically at the same time the proposal for the Bremer Bay to Hopetoun coastal route, not for the first nor last time, raised its ugly head.

By 2002 BHP Billiton had become owners of Comet Resources nickel project at Bandalup Hill. As part of their community liaison process a Community Liaison Committee was established and Nathan McQuoid was invited to represent 'Friends' on that committee.

Much of the events of 2002 were indicative of the growing awareness in our group that although our core business would always be FRNP; in the real world with all its complexities and interrelationships, we would inevitably be drawn into a wider sphere. In this case the biosphere. *Compiled from 2002 editions of Narpulungup News. Editor.*

THE COCANARUP NUMBAT STORY

by Dr Tony Friend, DEC, Albany.

On 6th July 2012, the radio-collar worn by the last numbat wearing a collar in Cocanarup Timber Reserve was found on the ground by radio-tracking by Andy Chapman and John Tucker. This animal, a female named Akala, had appeared in a segment of the BBC series "Nature's Miracle Babies" screened earlier in the year. Andy and John were part of a small team of 'Friends' who shared the monitoring of the radio-collared numbats with the DEC team based in Albany.

When the Numbat Recovery Team was looking for a new translocation site in the South Coast Region, Mal Grant, then with DEC in Ravensthorpe, suggested Cocanarup Timber Reserve. He invited me out to inspect the site in 2005 and I was very impressed. The area had all that numbats required: good stands of eucalypts with many hollow logs on the ground, reasonable cover at understorey level, and abundant termites in the soil. The area was being baited for foxes regularly under DEC's Western Shield fauna recovery project with some support from BHP Billiton. The most recent numbat translocation, to the Stirling Range NP, had not been successful partly due to the poor access for baiting around the perimeter in winter, when tracks were often impassable or closed for hygiene reasons.

Numbats were being bred at Perth Zoo using stock from Dryandra Woodland. The Recovery Team's aim has been to breed around 20 numbats for release each year, the numbers limited by the high cost of supplying the termite component of the captive diet. Other difficulties often resulted in fewer than that number being bred each year.



John Tucker radio-tracking in Cocanarup.

The translocation proposal was approved in late 2006 and the first release occurred in December of that year. This was only a month after a wild-fire had consumed a significant proportion of the best numbat habitat in Cocanarup. Despite this setback the decision was made to go ahead with the release and on 13th December, 12 captive-bred numbats were flown from Perth to the Mount Short airstrip and on arrival were released into hollow logs with an audience of around 100 local residents. Several days later, two adult male numbats were driven from Dryandra Woodland and released, as the males from the Zoo were all juveniles and would not breed for another year. All the numbats were fitted with radio-collars before release to allow them to be checked regularly. Karen Rusten of DEC did most of the monitoring over the first three years when funds were available from the Natural Heritage Trust through South Coast NRM.

The first year's results were disappointing, as the rate of predation by birds of prey was very high, despite the raptor awareness training that all the zoo animals had received before release. It may have been that after the fire the local raptor population had been concentrated into the unburnt habitat where the numbats settled. Anyway, after a year only one animal, a male from Dryandra, was known to have survived.

The release program continued however, with 12 animals released in 2007, 13 in 2008 and 13 in 2009. Over the four years, we released 52 numbats, 29 males and 23 females, including 13 wild-born animals from Dryandra.

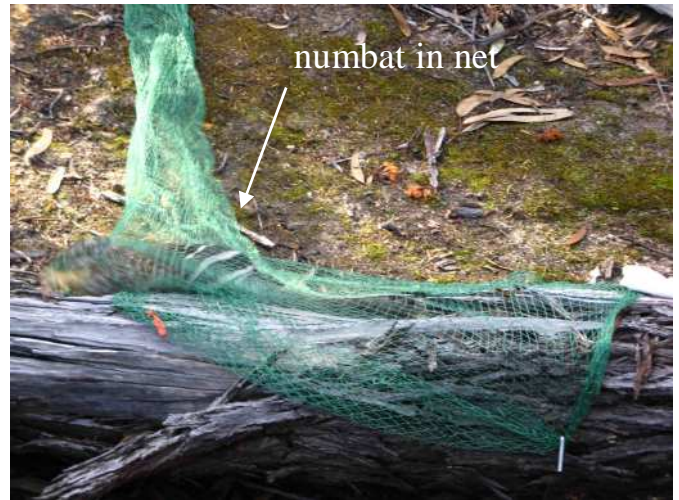
Our intention was to release 15-20 each year, but with breeding problems at the Zoo and a drop in the Dryandra numbat population, this was not possible. Better survival of released animals was achieved after 2006, with breeding being recorded regularly. All animals were captured regularly to check breeding status and change radio-collars, and attached young were generally found on females captured after early February each year.



The numbat is tracked to its log.....

On 11th December 2008, Justin Jonson took some great images of an uncollared male numbat at the turnoff into Cocanarup from the South Coast Highway (see page 8). Don Thomas, who owns the Cocanarup homestead property and land adjacent to the Timber Reserve, sighted a numbat in almost the same spot around the same date, as did Ellen Hickman, who was passing on the Highway. Clearly this animal, the first site-bred Cocanarup numbat recorded as independent from its mother, had settled in the area. The next year, we managed to capture and radio-collar another site-bred male.

The numbats occupied a relatively small area within the extensive area available in and around the Timber Reserve. They did not stray outside the well-wooded area in the Phillips River valley, although a couple of numbats moved south along the valley into unallocated crown land but remained in the wooded strip adjacent to the river. Thus their habitat is limited to a few thousand hectares, perhaps too small an area to sustain a population. However, as the vegetation burnt in 2006 recovers, the area available for numbats will increase.



...extricated by the net and 'garlic breath' method



..weighed and measured....photo A. Lullfitz

Andy and John found Akala's radio-collar on the ground with no other remains, but the condition of the collar left no doubt that this animal had been predated. This find was doubly disappointing as this female had four attached young when captured earlier in the year (see photo next page).



....and released. Photo Alison Lullfitz

The young would have still been dependent on their mother when she was taken. On the other hand, the fact that she was mated in January when we had no males radio-collared indicates that there were un-collared animals around.

The next phase of monitoring the Cocanarup numbat population involves searching the habitat for numbat signs. When numbats feed, they dig termites from their shallow galleries, leaving small distinctive diggings as they do so. They also leave scats near the diggings and on logs. While the diggings are not always identifiable, the scats always are, filled with sand and termite fragments.

I hope we can continue the partnership at Cocanarup and will talk to the 'Friends' about organizing some sessions to show numbat sign to people who are interested in following up the numbat story.

And what a story. As indicated by Tony's article translocations are always a high risk venture and the chance of success is never high. However locally bred and un-collared numbats may still be out there in Cocanarup. There may be a role for 'Friends' to do some tracks and traces recognition training at Dryandra and then set forth in

Cocanarup to see what we can find. Watch this space. Editor

PHOTO GALLERY Additional images from the numbat tracking project.



Akala with her pouch young. Photo T. friend



Akala's tail protruding from dead, hollow tree—this was the last time she was seen alive.



Akala's home turf, Eucalyptus extensa woodland



Justin Jonson's wonderful photo of the first known Cocanarup bred numbat photographed at the Cocanarup Road turn-off on south coast highway in December 2008.

AND THE FINAL WORD IS....

To wish all members and readers a peaceful, restful and safe holiday season and a smooth transition from 2012 to 2013.

ADVANCE NOTICE OF AGM

The 2013 AGM will be held at Quaakup Wilderness Retreat over 16 & 17 March. Details will be in the February edition.

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