

Nirpungup News

May 2009
Number 2 2009

from the Friends of the Fitzgerald River National

www.fitzgeraldfriends.org.au

A FRIENDLY REMINDER—IT'S TIME TO RENEW
YOUR MEMBERSHIP—THE FORM IS ON PAGE 8

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND MEMBERS' DAY

The annual general meeting and members day was held at Fitzgerald Hall on Saturday 28 March. Thirty three members and guests attended. Two guest speakers addressed the meeting—Abby Berryman made an informative but troubling presentation on the perilous situation of the ground parrot in FRNP and Sarah Comer informed us of the fire ecology project. Further details on these presentations are on pages two and three. The proposed ground parrot listening activity was cancelled due to late afternoon rain.

Outgoing President Andy Chapman reminded members that it was particularly appropriate for us to meet here because it was in the Fitzgerald Hall in March 1980 that the Fitzgerald River National Park Association (which became the 'Friends') was originally formed at the instigation of the late Ken Newbey. We are twenty nine years young and still going strong.

FROM THE PRESIDENT....

Since the AGM there has been a flurry of activity on a number of fronts, the most enjoyable being the 'Walk and Talk in the Ravensthorpe Range'. The event attracted many locals, as well as people from Perth, Albany, Newdegate and Esperance plus two visitors from the Nature Conservancy in Victoria. Some of the younger walkers were impressed at how many 'seniors' stuck out the day; I was impressed with the quiet attentiveness of the audience as each speaker expounded their knowledge on plants, animals, geology and other natural wonders! The 'walk and talk' was jointly organized by Friends and the Ravensthorpe Area Initiative Network (RAIN) and about



Next issue:
August 2009

\$150 was raised in ‘gold coin donations’ for the Twertup Building Fund.

The ongoing project for the restoration of Twertup is being progressed. It is with regret that I accepted Mark Jeffery’s resignation from the building sub-committee. Mark has put a huge effort into developing plans for Twertup, including a floor plan to make the building more serviceable and a challenging roof design. Mark has cared for and repaired Twertup for at least ten years and his enthusiasm will be missed. Another stalwart, Ron Taylor, has also left the building team – Ron has been building verandahs and repairing walls since the 1980s – so the new team are bound to call on the expertise of both these gents in the days to come! Ric Pepper was nominated by Mark to take his place and was subsequently accepted by the committee.

DEC Albany have also confirmed their stance on Twertup, i.e. that a structural engineer verifies the building plans and a registered builder supervises the restoration. Although the building is considered a DEC ‘asset’ and they wish to collaborate on the project, they have no funds to put towards its repair. This situation makes it difficult for Friends, as funding agencies perceive the building as government property and generally do not fund such ‘assets’. Our grant applications are pushing the fact that Friends have always maintained and managed Twertup, and expect to do so in the future! This will inevitably mean that we will need to explore options for ongoing management of the site, e.g. a lease agreement or memorandum of understanding between DEC and Friends; at present we have ‘permissive occupancy’.

Another issue that has consumed our time is the desire by some to “travel the Fitzgerald coast on the iconic wilderness road” *Community Spirit* (19/3/09, p13). Unfortunately the oxymoron is missed by many! More information about the road can be read later in this issue.

You may notice that this newsletter has a new look. Priscilla Broadbent decided that six years as editor was “enough” and that she was going off to spend more time feeding her little dog nuts. Maria Lee, our website manager, has decided that Katanning is greener than Ravensthorpe and Natasha Moore thinks it’s warmer in Merredin than Jacup. Thank you all for the fine effort you have given the committee over the past years and we

look forward to catching up with you at future events.

Gillian Craig

FROM THE AGM.....Guest speakers

Dr Abby Berryman DEC western ground parrot project officer presented an informative but disturbing account of the current status and research on this iconic parrot. Since 1990 numbers have declined dramatically; currently they are positively known from only FRNP and Cape Arid National Park (CANP) and in the former, numbers have declined from hundreds to less than 20 birds. The total estimate over both parks is 140 birds. Apart from predation by both feral and native predators response to fire, both its spatial arrangement and frequency, is implicated in their decline. Radio tracking in CANP has shown convincingly that parrots will use vegetation burnt as recently as six years previously to feed and the return to 40+ year old vegetation to roost. Therefore maintaining sufficient areas of long unburnt vegetation in an increasingly fire prone environment is a very difficult challenge for managers. In FRNP an added layer of complexity is present due to other threatened plants and animals which may have different requirements. There are few, if any, other options apart from prescribed burning and mechanical construction of reduced fuel barriers, both of which carry risks, to address this issue.

Observations at the 2006 wildfire at Short Road in FRNP challenged the assumption that as strong flyers western ground parrots could escape wildfire. One bird was seen walking slowly in front of the fire front and tragically one was observed on fire. Apart from fine tuning prescribed burning prescriptions more effort in feral cat control at the landscape scale and possibly a captive breeding program were mentioned as strategies to help restore the tenuous hold that this enigmatic parrot has on its survival.

Sarah Comer DEC regional ecologist for the south coast region then introduced us to the fire ecology project. This initiative will use existing staff and external expertise and research to unravel some of the complex relationships between fire regime and flora and fauna with particular emphasis on threatened species. Two key components of the project are to identify those species

that are vulnerable to fire and why and to make better use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to compile and analyse data. In the case of flora this could involve better use of data on whether plants are obligate seeders or re-sprouters (as the former generally are vulnerable to too frequent fires) their relative abundance in plant communities, the distribution of these communities and how frequently in the past they have been burnt. This would enable the answer to questions such as how much of and how many times has this community been burnt in the last 10, 15, 20 etc years being taken into account in burning prescriptions. In the case of fauna we need better data on whether habitat alteration including loss of cover and leaf litter etc, changed food supply or the inability to withstand passage of a fire front are involved. Similarly, known fauna localities can then be overlaid on fire history maps and the data analysed. In FRNP this has already been done for western bristlebird.

'Friends' would like to thank both speakers for their informed presentations. Further information on western ground parrot is in Birds Australia's 'Wingspan' Vol. 19. No.1 2009 edition. Sarah's presentation was encouraging in that it indicates a positive step forward on the vexed and complex issue of the interaction between use of fire as a tool and threatened flora/fauna management.
Editor

FROM THE AGM.....your new committee

President - Gillian Craig
Vice President - Rodger Walker
Secretary - Anne Gadsby
Treasurer - Robyn Cail

Committee persons are: Tracey Ross, Raana Scott, John Tucker, Andy Chapman (also Newsletter editor) and Ric Pepper (also building sub-committee convenor). Raana and Ric are new to the committee and are particularly welcomed.

Although Mark Jeffrey was elected to the committee he subsequently resigned and was replaced by unanimous committee decision by Ric Pepper.
Editor

The building sub-committee now consists of Ric Pepper, Kevin Giles, Mark Moore with Paul Cory as DEC's representative.

THE TWERTUP SITUATION.....from the AGM and beyond

The AGM resolved to continue to pursue the restoration of the building with external funding with the likely sum required to be of the order \$250 000 - \$300 000. A two tiered application process has been commenced; separate funding for the building and for re-design and layout of the surrounds. Applications have been submitted to the Minister for the Environment's community grants round. Further grant applications will be required and the committee is in the process of establishing a fund raising sub-committee (see below).

Since the AGM the committee has met and Ric Pepper submitted a model of a slightly re-designed building. The modified floorplan involves removing the wall between the kitchen and lounge to make a larger central room, an access doorway to the bunkroom from the west, and a partitioning wall in the back (west) room to accommodate an archive storage as well as a bedroom. The modified roofing plan involves a hip roof supported by verandah posts over the building except for a simple gable over the bunkroom. These designs which were endorsed by the committee are readily seen on the photographs of Ric's model.

From here we propose to submit the model to several builders for quotes. Detailed drawings will be derived from the model, the drawings will enable detailed costings and a structural engineer's approval which will then be submitted to DEC. A separate quote will be sought for the 'make safe' operation to stabilise the damaged building.

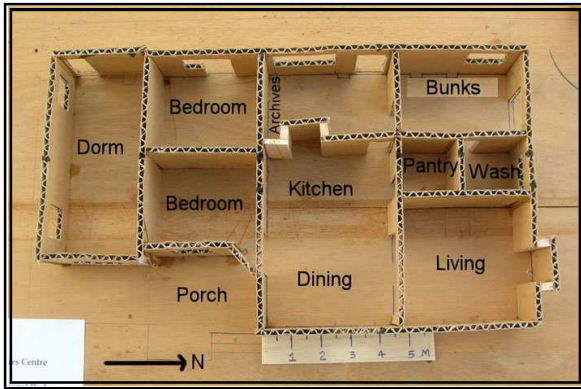
These are costly and ambitious initiatives. They will require extensive fund raising. Accordingly your committee will establish a fund raising sub-committee, we would like to hear from any member who feels he/she can help in this way.

Now here is another urgent call to 'Friends' and supporters:-

We do require additional spongolite blocks to replace those damaged by the fire, we would like to hear from anyone who can suggest a source of supply. Please contact Anne Gadsby on 98374063.

HERE IS THE NEW LOOK TWERTUP

Model by Ric Pepper, photography
Gillian Craig



NORTH AND EAST ASPECT
(note new doorway and hip roof)



SOUTH AND WEST ASPECT
(note new doorways and gable roof)

AND NOW TO 'THAT ROAD'

Some of you will have noticed a \$20 million allocation to the Bremer Bay-Hopetoun road in the recent state budget. Don't despair, 'Friends' are reliably informed that this allocation has been mislabelled. The \$20m is to seal Hamersley Drive from East Mt Barren to Hamersley Inlet and to upgrade the remainder of Hamersley Drive out to south coast highway. This is a satisfactory outcome, sense and reason have prevailed, congratulations to our decision makers. 'Friends' expect that the Ravensthorpe Shire will accept this as a satisfactory outcome.

AND HERE ARE A FEW SMALLER ITEMS.....

Some interesting facts are that in the year 2007/2008 FRNP had 37 000 visitors. This was down 14% on the previous two years. Seventy six percent entered on Hamersley Drive and 24% on Pabelup Drive. *From acting ranger in charge Paul Cory's report to AGM.*

'Friends' welcome the following new members and lapsed members returned: Mark & Sarah Comer, Stephen Fryc, Abby Berryman, Jessica Chapman, Paula Deegan, Alexander Watson, Scott Yarrow, Rick Farrell, Sarah Fethers, Aubrey Dinkelman and Amanda Keesing.

Raana Scott, project officer for the Carnaby's cockatoo recovery project (southern region) is interested in hearing from people who have either feeding or breeding observations on these birds. Raana can be contacted on 90716129.

NEWSFLASH!

The revised plant List for FRNP has finally been published. This is Ellen Hickman's updated (2008) version of the 1997 list revised by Nathan McQuoid based on Ken Newbey's 1985/86 work. The revised list has 1 665 taxa with details on life form, flowering season and conservation status. It will be available from our website: www.fitzgeraldfriends.org.au, or by phone to Andy Chapman on 98381149. Cost is \$7.50 plus \$2 postage and packaging. 'Friends' thank Mrs Rodney Van Proctor for her generous donation enabling this revision.

WALK AND TALK IN THE RAVENSTHORPE RANGE, A CELEBRATION OF BIODIVERSITY AND EARTH PROCESSES

What a day that was. Sixty five people attended, enjoyed each others company and magnificent weather in the Ravensthorpe Range on 9 May 2009. President **Gil Craig** welcomed attendees and outlined the plan for the day which was to walk a loop south of the highway before lunch and then do another loop north of the highway in the afternoon. **Annabelle Bushell** spoke to us of the risk posed by phytophthora dieback to the vegetation of the range and reminded us that dieback is present as close as Springdale Road. She sprayed our footwear with methylated spirit to eliminate any infection, a practice we should routinely adopt before walking in bushland. **Patrick Veerbeek** talked about the geological antiquity of the Range and indicated that the South Coast Highway follows a fault line through the Range which we call Cordingup Gap. At the eastern side of the gap is an exposed larva flow that has been diverted 1.5 km from its original south westerly course by the fault. **Patrick** reminded us that the Range is an erosional landscape in that the formative processes have ceased and it is slowly but surely eroding down in geological time. **Gil Craig** talked of the vegetation mapping project that identified 70 different plant associations between Mt Short and Kundip. Most plants are obligate seeders (as opposed to re-sprouters like mallees) that makes them vulnerable to too frequent fires. Geology and botany converged at this point as **Patrick** pointed out that where we stood the very different vegetation either side of the track was due to a mafic/ultramafic boundary. It was as if mallees and melaleucas had arranged themselves almost exclusively on either side of the track.

Russell Barrett told us about sedges; the number known from WA has gone from 23 to 200-300 since he started sorting them in the herbarium. Western Australian sedges are 'dryland' as opposed to most elsewhere that are associated with moist soils. This combined with the similarity between sedges and grasses created the mistaken impression of early explorers that so much of the country they were passing through was suitable for agriculture or pastoralism. **Russell** expressed the view that for sedges called Lepidospermas the Range has more different kinds than anywhere else on earth for a comparably sized area. **Rich-**

ard Harris discussed ants and was asked about the numerous small holes in the soft fluffy soil of the range; these he subsequently told us were made by funnel ants as traps for ground inhabiting insects. These ants are rarely seen as they spend most of their time underground cultivating aphids on plant roots. **Janet Newell** spoke of other invertebrates and showed us the shell of a large, native terrestrial snail. **Janet** also showed photographs of some invertebrates including trap door spiders, millipedes and scorpions some of which have very restricted distributions. **Nathan McQuoid** told us about eucalypt species richness i.e. that there are so many different kinds; he attributed this partially to the Range being a zone of convergence. This means that it has species from the wheatbelt, south coast and goldfields. **Nathan** pointed out four species of eucalypts that do not occur anywhere else as well as the likelihood that the Range has more eucalypt species per unit area than anywhere else on earth. A similar situation to sedges – what is this telling us about the Ravensthorpe Range? We were also shown an unusual hybrid between salmon gum and Ravensthorpe red mallee.

Following lunch we assembled at Cordingup Creek and **Andy Chapman** told a very fishy tale about how a small fish, the common minnow, in the creek, is locally land-locked. The same species also occurs in New Zealand, South America and the eastern states of Australia where it has a marine larval phase. As a consequence of this, it is only on the south coast of WA that it migrates upstream to spawn; elsewhere it migrates downstream to the sea. In a patch of salmon gum far too young to host nesting hollows **Raana Scott** told us about the problems facing Carnabys cockatoos. As a bird living to 50+ years it is possible that most of those in the flocks we see are past breeding age and flock size is diminishing. The reason for this is well known, a shortage of breeding hollows in suitably aged trees combined with the requirement for breeding and feeding sites not to be too far apart. **Raana** aptly described the cockatoos as 'rock stars of the bird world' in that they are noisy, trash the place (when feeding) and then leave!

Adrienne Markey spoke of the 200 10m x 10m vegetation plots that have been installed in the Range and how the plants therein were documented. This study is part of a wider examination of the floral attributes of the banded ironstone

formation throughout the Yilgarn and goldfields and is partially a response to the increased demand for iron ore globally. We returned to this subject with **Patrick Veerbeek** at an exposure of sedimentary iron sulphide ore called a gossan on which grows the Range's iconic eucalypt - the warted yate. **Patrick** explained that in his view the gossan is not strictly iron ore nor banded ironstone formation because it is only predominantly iron on the surface with sulphides underneath. The sulphides make this resource less viable for exploitation.

We returned to a fauna theme with **Angela Sanders** who told us about her studies of tracking the heath mouse to establish that they have communal and multiple burrows in occupied areas. The heath mouse is one of several threatened mammal species in the Range and it is noteworthy that it was rediscovered here after being presumed extinct in WA. **Andy Chapman** spoke of biological surveys here which had revealed 18 species of mammal, 130 birds, 31 reptiles (including a small skink not known from anywhere else) and 8 frogs. These figures compare very favourably with those for Fitzgerald River National Park. **Karen Rusten** spoke about numbat releases in Cocanarup Timber Reserve. There have been three releases since 2006; 38 mixed captive bred and wild numbats from Dryandra have been released and radio tracked. At least seven have survived and spread to 10 km from the release site including one female that has bred and had pouch young. While this is a very good result the main problem for released numbats is predation by native species including chuditch, carpet pythons, goannas and birds of prey. Walking back to the highway we stopped to examine a termite mound. **Richard Harris** told us about these invertebrates; although only about 20 species are known from WA, they are widespread. In terms of their contribution to biomass and as recyclers of nutrients they are extremely important ecological contributors in WA's semi arid environments.

As the harsh Australian sunlight softened and highlighted the salmon gums, **Paula Deegan** spoke of the bold and innovative Gondwanalink project that seeks to reconnect the south west with the arid zone through Stirling Range, Fitzgerald River National Park and Ravensthorpe Range by land purchases and revegetation. A particular component of this is some 16 million hectares of semi arid woodland called the Great Western

Woodland between Ravensthorpe and Kalgoorlie that is the largest remaining semi arid Mediterranean woodland in the world. At the final stop for the day **Russell Barrett** demonstrated the distinctive and perfumed aroma of the lower leaves of sedges and postulated a new source of perfume for pharmaceutical use.

Friends of Fitzgerald River National Park thank all contributors to the day with particular thanks to Jenny Chambers, Elbe Coetsee and Rodger Walker of Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiative Network (RAIN) for funding morning tea, lunch and arranging publicity and logistics.



MORNING TEA IN THE RANGE



PAULA DEEGAN ON GONDWANALINK



NATHAN McQUOID ON EUCALYPTS

In Our Backyard

– *NOTES FROM THE RANGER AT FITZGERALD RIVER NATIONAL PARK* --

Recreation:

With the publicity the area has received following the closure of the BHP Billiton Ravensthorpe Nickel Operation, visitor numbers to the park have remain steady for March and show an increase through April over last years figures.

Over Easter, the Fishing Competition in Hopetoun saw large numbers of visitors fishing on the beaches on the Eastern side of the Fitz. Surprisingly, the Hamersley Inlet campsite was quiet, while the St Marys Inlet campsite continues to be very popular, and was again full.

The Coastal Wilderness Walk was completed by a determined bushwalker, taking a month to walk from 4 Mile to Bremer Bay and back via the Twin Bays hut. He completed the walk without water drops and managed to find water at various points along the way, the heavy summer rains filling rock pools and soaks. The hut and tank at Twin Bays was reported to be in good condition, and the tank full of water.

Park management issues:

The Southern sections of Hamersley and Pabelup Drives and the Pt Ann Rd were graded to improve the condition of the roads prior to the Easter break. This work was done by Smallys' Contractors of Ravensthorpe.

Staff from DEC Ravensthorpe are continuing fire-break maintenance, with the herbicide spraying of regrowth vegetation on the Northern and Southern Firelines.

DEC staff conducted aerial dieback interpretation surveys of the Fitzgerald, Hamersley, Sussetta Rivers, Copper Mine Creek, the Park boundaries, the Telegraph Track and earthworks associated with the January 2008 firefighting effort. Nine areas showing signs of plant death were checked on the ground and samples taken for testing to determine the presence of plant disease.

Staff from DEC Albany assisted by volunteers and Park staff conducted non-target species up-take trials for the Eradicat feral cat baits. Four

thousand Eradicat baits containing Rhodamine B dye capsules were dropped by aircraft along the Twertup, Drummond and Moir Track lines in early April. Trapping along these lines took place from 28th April to 3rd May. Hair samples from trapped animals will be tested for the presence of the dye to determine which non-target species have taken baits.

Park staff:

A new Ranger for the Gairdner River Ranger Station has been selected, Peter van Schoebroek has been recommended for the position. All going well, Peter will be in place by the end of May.

Ian Herford has been appointed South Coast Region Parks and Visitor Services Leader, taking over from Peter Fishwick. Ian was previously the South Coast Regions' Planning Officer and recently completed the Marine Strategic Plan for the South Coast.

Thanks to the Friends of the Fitz. for their continued interest and support.

For National Park matters please contact ranger Paul Cory at East Mt Barren on 98383060.

FORTHCOMING 'FRIENDS' ACTIVITIES...

On Sunday 13 September we will have a led coastal walk in FRNP. This will be the day following the Wildflower Show market day –so consider making it a weekend in the Ravensthorpe-Hopetoun area.

And on the weekend of 10, 11 October we will combine with Raana Scott of the Carnabys Cockatoo recovery project to go searching for nesting sites around Ravensthorpe.

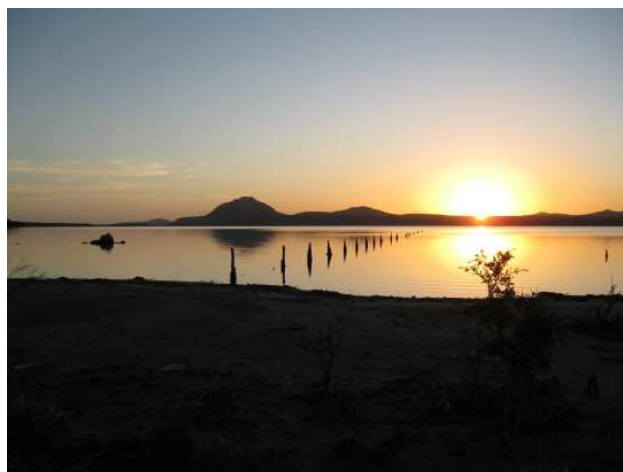
Further details of both these activities will be in the August edition of Narpulungup News.

DO YOU WISH TO PAY YOUR SUBSCRIPTION ON THE INTERNET?

If so you need to know the account name is 'Friends of Fitzgerald River National Park', BSB and account numbers are 306056/0046027. For invoice details use your name and please advise treasurer at email address:rcail@westnet.com.au

AND WE FINISH ON A SAD NOTE.....

'Friends' extend their condolences to the Wooller family on the passing of Shirley Gordon. Shirley and her late husband Douglas owned a property on the Gairdner River near Quaalup. They loved FRNP and were supporters of the 'Friends'. Shirley will be missed by all who knew her.



SUNSET ON CULHAM INLET

FFRNP MEMBERSHIP FORM:

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