

Narpulungup News

May Issue
Number 2 2010

from the Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park

www.fitzgeraldfriends.org.au



Next Issue:
August 2010

VALÉ RON TAYLOR With great sadness and an acute sense of loss the 'Friends' record the passing of one their most stalwart and consistent supporters. Ron passed away in Ravensthorpe District Hospital on Saturday 17 April after a prolonged illness. 'Friends' extend their sympathies to Helen and family. A memorial service will be held on Saturday 22 May at 11.00am in the Hopetoun Town Hall, Veal Street. An obituary for Ron will be in the next issue.

FROM THE AGM—PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The turnout for the AGM was fantastic and even more amazing that we had to vote for positions to the committee! This indicates that the Friends is a thriving group which attracts both young and old, and that there continues to be keen interest in the Park. It was especially pleasing to see many new people attending, coming from as far away as Perth as well as nearby Bremer Bay and Jerramungup. The day started with Ron Wooller giving an interesting talk on Honey Possums (see page 3) and finished with quiet talks under the stars. The provision of the historic Quaalup Homestead by Karin and Carstin Richelmann for the day was much appreciated.

One of the main business items discussed at the AGM was the **\$40 million Fitzgerald River National Park Improvement Project**. Letters have since been written to senior executives within the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), the Conservation Commission and to the local Members of Parliament outlining our position which is that any developments or upgrades should be sustainable, with effective integration of social, economic and environmental considerations for the benefit of future generations. We have great concern that the *FRNP Improvement Project* will not properly achieve this. Specific points are:

1. **Road Upgrades** - The Friends support upgrading of the roads from (a) Culham Inlet and Hamersley Drive, and (b) Bremer Bay to Pt Ann from gravel to bitumen as this will help to improve access to the FRNP and bring economic benefit to the region. However increased access is likely to result in significantly increased environmental impact if not accompanied by appropriate operational support; and
2. **2. Hamersley Inlet to Point Ann Coastal Walk Trail and FRNP Management Plan** - The Friends disagree with the DEC position that the proposed Bibbulman Track style walk trail will only require

minor amendments to the FRNP management plan (1991-2001) which is nine years overdue for review. The Friends believe that a walk trail of this nature has the potential to result in considerable and irreversible environmental damage to the pristine wilderness zone of the FRNP, particularly due to an increased risk of *Phytophthora cinnamomi* (Pc) infestation. Alternative walk trail development options should be considered such as opportunities to provide more accessible day walks that concentrate on East Mt Barren, Culham Inlet, Hamersley Inlet, Point Ann to Fitzgerald Inlet and other areas readily accessible by vehicle as well as loop walks that could incorporate the Twertup Field Studies Centre.

Further to the specific concerns outlined above, the Friends raise the following points of concern with respect to the improvement project and current management of the FRNP:

- **Lack of Comprehensive Review, Planning and Consultation-** it appears that the improvement project is being moulded to “fit” with the FRNP Management Plan without adequate community consultation and failing to provide Sustainable Regional Development (SRD) outcomes. In particular, consultation has been restricted to “open houses”, i.e. informal ‘drop-in’ style information sessions without professional facilitators and has by no means been comprehensive.
- **Conflicting Commercial Management, Regulation and Planning -** The Friends feel there are conflicting decisions being made relative to commercial opportunities near the FRNP, for example a house boat has recently been put into the small and largely pristine Hamersley Inlet Reserve 17544 (camping) with approval of the Shire of Ravensthorpe.
- **Misrepresentation of FRNP Conservation Values during Project EPBC Act Referral -** The Friends detailed in a letter to the Conservation Commission dated 9 April 2010 a number of items that had not been fully or accurately disclosed to the Commonwealth Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) in June 2009 as required as part of the improvement pro-

ject approvals process that addresses impacts associated with increased visitor pressure resulting from the improvement project has not been carried out. The most significant risk for the FRNP being the potential for introducing new Pc dieback infestations. A comprehensive risk assessment process will ensure all risks are identified and mitigated according to significance.

- **Current and Ongoing FRNP Management Resourcing –** The Friends believe that the current level of management of the FRNP is not commensurate with its size and outstanding biodiversity value. In addition, without a considerable increase in operational management, it is likely that future increased access resulting from the improvement project could lead to extensive environmental damage. The Friends have made numerous written representations to the DEC without response on its concerns, including:
 - failure to fill the Senior Ranger position at Jacup;
 - management of Pc dieback and lack of wash-down facilities;
 - failure to include the Friends ex-officio nominee, Andy Chapman, to the FRNP Advisory Committee since his application on 8/9/2007.

In conclusion, the Friends questions why approximately \$40 million is being spent on ONE tourist investment, when it could be spread across a number of more accessible investments which could provide greater economic return to the community. The only conclusion we can draw is that the DEC is intent on expediting the FRNP Improvement Project to impress its political masters rather than spend public money in a manner which has long term benefits for the Park and the community. The Friends would like to see management of this project that is both appropriate to its budget (given this is the largest amount of funding for a single project ever provided for a national park in Western Australia) and to its outstanding conservation value. Greatest skill and integrity must be employed and proper processes established and followed for meaningful public consultation, appropriate use of public funds and protection of environmental values. Ideally this would include the complete review and replacement of the current management plan as the logical platform upon which to base the sustainable

future of this iconic National Park.

If you too are concerned about the proposed developments and the way they are being managed (or not), please write to your local Member of Parliament.

Gillian Craig—President

FROM THE AGM—YOUR NEW COMMITTEE

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FROM THE AGM—GUEST SPEAKER'S ADDRESS

WHAT'S ON A HONEY POSSUM'S TONGUE?

The guest speaker at the AGM this year was Ron Wooller, Emeritus Professor of Biological Sciences, Murdoch University. Ron spoke about "Birds, Beasts and Banksias - nectar and vertebrates in the FRNP", with a special focus on honey possums. He said that unfortunately he could not speak about invertebrates in the FRNP, as regrettably not much work has been done on this part of the eco-system – apparently bugs are not sexy enough. The 'front room' of Quaalup was crammed with members who heard an interesting and informative talk. Ron's wife Sue most ably operated the PowerPoint presentation that accompanied the talk.

Coming from the UK some thirty-odd years ago, Ron said he found it curious that many WA birds were eaters of nectar, rather than eaters of insects or seeds. There are also mammals who eat nectar well! Ron then proceeded to devote the main por-

tion of his talk to examining the biology of the honey possum. These tiny creatures are palm sized, with females being slightly bigger than males.

Honey possums primarily feed on the pollen and nectar of banksias. Looking at banksias within the FRNP it was found that the various species have staggered flowering times. This ensures that the possums have a food source throughout the year – an example of marvellous adaptive behaviour for survival. However, Ron pointed out that there are also possible lean times when the overlapping window of two flowering species is very small, and delays in flowering, or poor flowering, mean the possums struggle to find food. Ron also made comment that the timing and severity of fire in possum preferred habitat has a critical impact on food sources and thus survival of these small creatures – as with all life.

And how exactly do honey possum's feed? One of Ron's PhD students has done some work on this area, examining the tongue of a possum under an electron microscope. The image shown by Ron was extraordinary. This was perhaps the highlight of the presentation. It showed the fine brush-like hairs of one length at the tip of the tongue which are used to scrape the nectar from the flower. Another set of hairs further along the tongue allow the nectar to be passed, or wiped along the mouth towards the stomach. It was astonishing to see this mechanism, plus take in the fact that a possum's tongue moves incredibly rapidly to take the small amounts of pollen and nectar available on each flower. We also were reminded that possums move quickly from flower to flower when feeding. They don't have the ability to chew insects, and are the world's only non-flying mammal to survive on pollen and nectar. Little honey possums work very hard to obtain their food!

A very big thank you from all the 'Friends' goes to Ron for providing such an informative and enjoyable talk.

Contributed by Jenny Taylor and Geoff Young.

TWERTUP RESTORATION UPDATE

Great progress has been made with the plans to restore Twertup to its former glory.

Thanks to the grant of \$4,000 from the Great Southern Development Commission, we were able to engage a registered builder (Lawrence Cuthbert) to assist with the formulation of plans for the restoration. Bruce Pope kindly drafted the plans as a donation to Friends, and they have been specified to the satisfaction of the DEC.

The next step is to develop a Master Development Plan. Our application for a Royalties for Regions (Great Southern) Small Grant to employ Richard Hammond, a well-respected Landscape Architect, has been successful. An on-site meeting was held in April with representatives from DEC and Friends meeting with Richard to discuss strategies for fire and risk management, signage, interpretation of the site etc. These will be integrated into a draft plan which will be available for comment before finalised later in the year. Please phone/email me if you would like to be sent a copy of the draft for comment.

In addition, a major “contestable” grant application has been put in to Royalties for Regions, to employ a registered builder to oversee the restoration of the building. We should hear about our success (or otherwise) for this grant in mid-June. It is anticipated that Friends will provide a significant portion of in-kind labour and materials. Kevin Giles has already made a significant contribution by finding all the doors, windows and frames that are required. Two working bees have been held - the walls have all been pulled down and the blocks stacked and started to be sorted into sizes. Much of the concrete slab of the floor has been pulled up to reveal another cache of spongolite blocks below.

There are a number of small grants that Friends are pursuing for different aspects of the Twertup restoration. Applications have again been made to the *FaHCSIA Volunteer Grant* to assist with fuel costs and for a stone cutter, also to the *Environmental Community Grants 2010* for tables, benches, signage and boot cleaning station. *LotteryWest* are interested in providing a small grant to make a documentary on the restoration of Twertup. In spite of the outcome of any application for funding, members and video producers Steve and Geraldine Janicke have commenced

work on an historical video of the Twertup story.

By the next newsletter we should know whether we have funds to proceed with the restoration of the building. If so, the building committee will be wanting lots of assistance in working bees, cleaning up doors and window frames and other odd jobs – a full list and timetable will be provided for you to put your name against!



The walls come down.....




.... the blocks are stacked



.....and the old mortar removed. *Photos Gil Craig*



Department of Environment and Conservation

Our environment, our future 

In Our Backyard

— *NOTES FROM THE RANGERS AT FITZGERALD
RIVER NATIONAL PARK* —

Visitors

The Easter long weekend saw wet and windy weather and the forecast for worse to come which kept the campgrounds and day use areas quieter than previous years.

A group of keen birdwatchers attended the Birds Australia campout in Hopetoun over Easter, the group sighted 100+ species of birds, including the Western Whipbird, seen from the front verandah of the East Mt Barren Rangers' house.

Fires

In March Park Rangers and staff from DEC Esperance, Albany, Ravensthorpe and Kalgoorlie attended a group of large fires in Dundas Nature Reserve east of Norseman.

During mid April Park Rangers and staff from DEC Albany and Ravensthorpe conducted a prescribed burn in the southern section of the Hamersley River reserve north of Old Ongerup Rd. This area now provides a low fuel buffer between the Hamersley River reserve and the Western Ground Parrot population at nearby Short Rd in FRNP.

Wildlife

Large numbers of Black Swans have been calling Hamersley Inlet home. The swans have been absent from the inlet for over two years. A pair of White Breasted Sea Eagles is frequently seen along the coast at Culham Inlet, Four Mile Beach, Hamersley Inlet and out to Quoin Head. The pair has been seen feeding on young water birds at Hamersley Inlet.

Many reptiles are still active, Southern Heath Monitors, Carpet Pythons, Tiger Snakes and Dugites are commonly seen basking on the roads.

Nature Conservation

During March and April, Western Ground Parrot surveys have been conducted by staff and volunteers from DEC Albany. Ground Parrots were heard at both the Short Rd and Drummond Track monitoring sites.

The trials of the new Eradicat feral cat baits are continuing. Trapped feral cats and native fauna

have had radio location collars fitted. Preliminary results are in report on page 6. Park visitors can assist by reporting any dead cats or foxes seen within the Park to Park Rangers so that the carcasses can be recovered and examined by DEC research staff.

Staff

A temporary Conservation Employee, Colin Hawkins will be working at the Jacup Ranger Station until mid June. Colin will be assisting the Park Rangers and DEC Ravensthorpe staff in maintaining the facilities at Jacup and the Park recreation sites.

Maintenance

Hamersley Drive, Pabelup Drive and the 2wd spur roads received a maintenance grade prior to the Easter long weekend.

FRNP Improvement Project

Work will commence on the bitumen sealing of Hamersley Drive, the first stage of the FRNP Improvement Project on 19th April 19 2010. The southern end of Hamersley Drive between the Ranger Station and the East Mt Barren carpark will be closed to traffic from the 19th April until July 2010. Barrens Beach Rd will remain open and other Park sites can be accessed from the South Coast Hwy via Moir Track and West River Road. Please contact MRWA 138 138 for further information regarding the Project and Park road closures.

Easter Storms

Heavy rainfall on the Western side of park (35 mm was recorded at the BOM Jacup weather station) on Easter Saturday, resulted in Pabelup Drive being closed to traffic to prevent the spread of dieback. The Trigelow Beach track and rubber belting was damaged by heavy runoff.

Events

East Mt Barren Ranger Paul Cory attended the Friends AGM and gave a brief Park Ranger report to the meeting. It was good to see some new faces and office bearers elected. Congratulations to the Friends on their successful grant applications to continue planning the restoration of the Twertup Field Studies Centre.

For Park Enquires contact:

Paul Cory (East Mt. Barren) 9838 3060

Peter Van Schoubroeck (Gairdner) 9837 1022

NUMBAT TRACKING PROJECT

The 'Friends' have now undertaken independent numbat radio-tracking sessions in Cocanarup timber reserve in March and April and successfully tracked five numbats to their logs. This is our contribution to DEC's numbat translocation project. The work is interesting, rewarding and the timber reserve is always a good place to be out and about in. Anyone interested in participating please contact Andy Chapman 98381149.



Rodger Walker recording habitat data on numbat 'Kaleny' tracked to his log in March.

UPDATE ON FERAL CAT CONTROL

The previous issue described efforts by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) being undertaken to address the threat posed by feral cats in the Fitzgerald River National Park. These efforts have been driven by concerns of recent accelerated decline the western ground parrot but are expected to have much broader conservation outcomes.

The first cat baits being delivered under this experimental program hit the ground just after Easter, and already results are proving very encouraging. Two of the eight cats being radio-tracked have been collected dead, after apparently taking baits. On the other hand the chuditch, dibbler and bush rats being tracked are all still running around alive.

Over the next few months staff from DEC will continue to monitor predators and native species in the Fitz, with a full report on the first year of this exciting program to be collated over winter.

Contributed by Sarah Comer, DEC Albany.

UPDATE ON PARKS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

The planning of the first section of the upgrading and widening of roads in the Fitzgerald River National Park has been completed and road works have commenced. This forms part of the Fitzgerald River National Park Improvement Project, funded by the State and Federal Governments to enhance tourist access and facilities in the park and assist economic and social development in local communities. The project is being managed by Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and Main Roads WA.

\$40 million has been allocated to the project to deliver these outcomes:

- Sealing 16 km of existing roads from Culham Inlet to Hamersley Inlet;
- Sealing 66 km of existing roads from Bremer Bay to Point Ann;
- Redeveloping associated spur roads, car-parks, day use areas and camping facilities;
- Enhancing signage and interpretive information; and

Developing a coastal walk trail linking Hamersley Inlet to Point Ann

The first 3km section is being upgraded at the eastern end of the Park between the ranger station and East Mount Barren car park.

Considerable planning, design and studies have been undertaken so far. For example, road design drawings as well as clearing drawings have been compiled, and to address the potential environment impacts from the planned road works, a comprehensive Environmental Management Plan (EMP) has been developed which is being implemented by the On Site Environmental Officer.

The EMP has the following aims:

- Comply with commitments made by DEC and Main Roads WA with the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act referral and its conditions;
- Ensure that design of the road is such that environmental impacts are minimised;
- Minimise the extent and impact of vegetation clearing as required by the project;

- Prevent the introduction of dieback disease and weeds;
- Prevent and/or manage changes to ground and surface water hydrology;
- Maintain the biodiversity and distribution and productivity of vegetation communities and protect “at risk” species; and
- Keep to a minimum the disruption of access to public amenities

To compile the EMP, studies and investigations were undertaken such as vegetation, flora, fauna and dieback surveys, a road plan with key environmental features (clearing, Declared Rare Flora zones, key species, micro catchment boundaries, occurrence of *Phytophthora* species), aboriginal heritage surveys, and a visual assessment.

Concept plans are also underway for the recreation sites and coastal walktrail and will be available for comment in May/June once complete.

For further information on the Fitzgerald River National Park Improvement Project, please contact the DEC’s Albany office on (08) 9842 4500.

Contributed by Deon Utber and Janet Newell, DEC Albany.

NEWS OF RECOVERY PLANNING FOR THREATENED SPECIES AND COMMUNITIES IN FITZGERALD BIOSPHERE

The Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) is currently developing a recovery plan for the threatened species and ecological communities of the Fitzgerald Biosphere (Fitzgerald River National Park and surrounding catchments). There are 9 fauna, 30 flora (17 endemic) and one ecological community (endemic) in the Fitzgerald Biosphere, as well as 283 priority species and communities (68 endemic).

Traditional threatened species recovery planning has taken a single species approach but the Australian Government is encouraging regions across Australia to trial recovery planning at a regional scale. It is anticipated that planning for biodiversity outcomes at the landscape level will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of threatened species recovery planning and management.

Western Australia was one of the first states in Australia to look at the feasibility of regional recovery planning, and recently completed a *South Coast Threatened Species & Ecological Communities Regional Strategic Management Plan* that covers the South Coast NRM Region. Due to the high number of threatened species and large area covered, this Plan does not provide detailed on-ground actions, but provides the region with a strategic approach to improving the integration of threatened species recovery and threat abatement.

One of the recommendations of the Plan is to develop recovery plans for priority areas within the South Coast NRM Region. These are to take a landscape approach to guide management of biodiversity and provide detailed recovery actions that will take into account all the threatened species and ecological communities in the area and consider potential interactions between the species and threatening processes. The Fitzgerald Biosphere Recovery Plan that is currently being developed will be the first of such plans.

For further information on regional recovery planning for the South Coast, please contact the DEC’s Albany office on (08) 9842 4500. The draft of the Fitzgerald Biosphere Plan will be completed by mid-2010, at which time it will be released on the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts’ website for further public comment.

Contributed by Deon Utber and Janet Newell, DEC Albany.

WATER RATS DISCOVERED AT CULHAM INLET

Recently two biologists compared their field notes and concluded that they could announce that water rats definitely do extend as far east on the south coast as Culham Inlet. Previously they were only known east to Gairdner River.

Ben Chuwen, a fisheries biologist from Murdoch University saw one swimming in the Phillips River at Echo Pool in 2003 while he was conducting research on black bream. In 2009 local biologist Andy Chapman discovered some strange tracks in mud near the mouth of the Steere River that turned out to be those of a water rat.

The water rat whose indigenous name is ‘rikali’

is a large, native rodent that has the distinction of being the only amphibious mammal in WA. They are quite large at between 23—37 cm, weigh 340—1275 g and have webbed hind feet to assist swimming. Elsewhere they live in north and eastern Australia as well as Papua and New Guinea. In WA they live in the Kimberley, north west coast and the south west. *Contributed by Andy Chapman.*

PHOTO GALLERY



From top left:

Sunset on Hamersley Inlet
Osprey's nest at Quoin Head
Silver sunlight on Hamersley Inlet
Wildflowers and Barrens from Hamersley Drive

Photos—Andy Chapman

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