

Narputungup News

2007 No 1
February

from the Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park



AGM March 17th at 10 am

It's that time of year when the Friends get together at Twertup to elect our 'management team' for the next twelve months, to discuss what has happened, is happening now and may happen in the near future in the Park, to enjoy some food, drinks and conversation - and listen to some very interesting speakers. We can also stay overnight and/or do a bit of walking and get into that feeling of enjoying the park in our own special way.

The morning starts at 10 am with BYO and shared refreshments; then promptly at 10.30 we will listen to our two speakers :

- **Dr John Bannister**, who was Director of the WA Museum and is an internationally recognised expert on right whales, will give us the benefit of some his vast experience on the subject

and

- **Malcolm Grant and Maria Bell** will between them present the background to the proposal to fence the Bell Track phytophthora infestation and some detail of its implementation

(More details of the speakers are on page 2.)

After lunch the AGM will be held, with reports and the election of office bearers. A general meeting follows this and the agenda looks as if it is going to be an interesting one. Some agenda items are listed on page 6.

In the event of the weather not being suitable for Twertup the AGM will be held at the Gairdner hall which has been booked provisionally for all day Sat. 17th, until Sunday 18th mid-day. It includes BBQ and shower facilities. Camping costs \$5-00 per person per night. If in doubt contact Anne Gadsby 9837 4063 or Mark Moore 9835 5043

Next issue: May 2007

Speakers at the AGM: profiles

John Bannister, educated at Oxford University, came to Australia in 1964 to work with CSIRO on sperm whales being taken at Albany WA. Before that he had spent 6 months in 1960-61 as a whaling inspector/biologist at South Georgia in the South Atlantic, and four months at Durban, South Africa, in 1962, collecting biological material from whales for the UK National Institute of Oceanography.

In 1967 he became Curator of Mammals at the WA Museum and then successively Deputy Director (in 1971) and Director (in 1975).

Since retiring from the WA Public Service in 1992, he has continued his interest in whales in ongoing programmes of aerial survey along the south coast on right whales between Cape Leeuwin, WA and Ceduna, SA, and on humpbacks off Shark Bay, WA. From 2000-2006 he took part in a joint programme on blue whales in the Perth Canyon west of Rottnest Island.

He has been involved with the International Whaling Commission for many years, twice as Chair of its Scientific Committee (1989-91, 1997-99), and recently as an Invited Participant to Scientific Committee meetings. Most recently he chaired a review of the Japanese whale research programme under Special Permit in the Antarctic. He is a Fellow and Honorary Associate of the WA Museum and Adjunct Professor (Marine Mammals) of Southern Cross University, NSW.

John has recently been funded (by the Commonwealth Government) to continue his right whale programme during 2007 and to write up the results of over 30 years work on right whales, including those that frequent the coast at Point Anne and Point Charles in the Fitzgerald River National Park

Bell Track Dieback Management: (proposal to fence infected area)

Malcolm Grant and Maria Bell will between them present the background to the proposal to fence the Bell Track infestation and some detail of its implementation. Malcolm has the distinction of being DEC's first permanent appointment in

Ravensthorpe, a position he took up in 1999 coming from Albany. He rapidly became well known as DEC's 'officer for everything'. In 2006 he became state team leader for Dieback under the State Biodiversity Conservation Initiative.

Maria came to Ravensthorpe in 2006 from Geraldton where she worked under the Salinity Action Plan; prior to that she was a dieback interpreter at Manjimup. Currently Maria is project officer for the Bell Track project under the State Biodiversity Conservation Initiative.

Sampling completed for rivers water quality project

After 2932 km driven, 80 water samples dispatched and 432 instrument readings recorded, the sampling for the rivers water quality project is complete. What does it all mean and what has changed with these rivers since 1983?

I have had a quick look at the data and formed some provisional conclusions. For the Fitzgerald, Hamersley, West Rivers and Twertup Creek the mean monthly salinities are down. I expect this is due to major flooding in January 2006 from ex-tropical cyclone 'Clare' which also flooded Lake Grace and washed away the Fitzgerald River bridge on the highway. Phillips River alone shows a mean monthly increase on 1983 data, - noting that over this way we missed most of the rain. This shows how difficult interpretation of these data is with respect to salinisation of rivers, because the primary determinant of river salinity is recent rainfall history not so much what is happening in the landscape.

The data indicate that total phosphorus has increased in all rivers; the Phillips River for example has gone from a mean of 0.02 to 0.06 mg/l since 1983. Once again caution is required in interpreting this change; we know from other studies that very high nutrient levels can be recorded in south coast rivers quite independent of clearing and agricultural practices in the catchment. Total nitrogen was not measured in 1983, but levels in 2006 were quite high. Other data recorded were temperature, pH, turbidity and dissolved oxygen concentration. A more complete analysis will follow, so stay tuned

Andy Chapman

In our backyard ...

Notes from the Rangers at Fitzgerald River National Park



The Whoogarup Range fire

2006/7 Fire Season update

The fire season has kept all Ranger staff extremely busy with numerous fires in the FRNP and also in other parks mainly around DEC's Esperance district.

As a result of these fires the park has suffered much damage to infrastructure not to mention the loss of vegetation and habitat.

At present we have closed recreation sites at Quoin Head, Mylies Beach, East Mt Barren, West Beach Point, 4 Mile campsite and West Mt Barren.



Quoin Head recreation area after the Whoogarup fire

We are working on having these sites open as soon as possible, but for the time being we would request that for safety reasons, and to allow for effective rehabilitation of these sites, the public observe site closures.

The park also received heavy rainfall during January resulting in substantial damage to Hamersley Drive and the steps that provide access to 4 Mile Beach. The road and the steps have been repaired and are now open for public use.



Road damage caused by heavy rain

Trigelow Beach access from the Pt Ann end also suffered damage from high seas and remains closed until repairs can be undertaken. Please keep clear of this area as there is huge potential for further damage to dune system by vehicles.

Dibbler Recovery Project

As part of the dibbler recovery program DEC supports The Perth Zoo's captive breeding program. One integral part of the recovery plan involves provision of a small number of dibblers to prevent high inbreeding levels within the colony. The animals enter the colony for 2-3 years before being released along with the captive-bred animals into reintroduction sites, such as Peniup and the Stirling Range National Park.

The Zoo has recently requested that 3 animals be provided from the Fitzgerald River National Park for enhancing genetic stock in the captive breeding colony. This is the first request for two years. The Zoo will be provided with two males and one female before the next breeding season.

Culham Inlet Management Plan

Community representatives are being sought to help prepare a management plan for Culham Inlet. Culham Inlet is a large lagoon located in the Shire of Ravensthorpe, just west of Hopetoun, and on the edge of the Fitzgerald River National Park. The Inlet is an attractive feature when viewed from the park and Hamersley Drive, and at one time was an important Black Bream fishery.

The management plan is being prepared to identify the social and environmental values of Culham Inlet, recognise the threats to these values, and to propose management actions that enhance and best protect the Inlet. The plan will be the first of its type for Culham Inlet.

The management plan is being co-ordinated by the Department of Water using funds provided by the South Coast Regional Initiatives Planning Team (SCRIPT).

Expressions of interest, and further enquiries about the Culham Inlet management plan, should be directed to Mieke Bourne or Chris Gunby at the Department of Water, PO Box 525, Albany, telephone 9842 5760.

Closing dates for applications is 22 February 2007.

Continued on page 4

FRNP Management Plan

Unfortunately the 2006 application to the Department of Local Government and Regional Development for WARIS funding, to enable commencement of the review process for the Fitzgerald River National Park Management Plan, was unsuccessful. Although the department has again been unsuccessful in attracting WARIS funding, the review of the Fitzgerald River National Park Management Plan remains a high priority for the Conservation Commission of WA and the Department of Environment and Conservation..

Fire in Western Ground Parrot habitat, FRNP - from Mike Barth

A lightning strike on November 16th 2006 started a wildfire to the southwest of one of the Western Ground Parrot (WGP) populations. The fire burnt in a north easterly direction from the ignition point to the southern end of the known Western Ground Parrot habitat. It looked as though the fire crews might be able to track the fire in a NW direction, thus saving some of the vegetation along the west side but strong south-westerly gusts picked up and blew the fire quickly northward, burning all the 30+ year old vegetation up to Old Ongerup Rd.

All this was happening at the same time that another larger fire was burning in the Cocanarup area along the South Coast Highway and was a potential threat to Ravensthorpe townsite. Resources for the fire in the FRNP were therefore very precious. Local fire brigades and DEC crews lit back burns along Old Ongerup Rd. shortly before the fire front arrived, thus slowing its momentum, but the fire hopped over Old Ongerup Rd. into old vegetation between the road and wheat paddocks to the north. Greg Freebury was incident commander on-site and he and the fire crews (including air support) there should be commended on their efforts to save the WGP habitat despite the trying conditions. It is through their efforts that the ground parrot habitat on the eastern side of Short Road was untouched by fire, as it could have easily jumped the track if they had not been there to slow its progress eastward.

At 1630, I watched a Western Ground Parrot walk out of the heath onto the gravel road approximately 50m ahead of the flames in a swirling cloud of grey smoke. It hesitated in the centre of the road and turned around as if to walk back to where it had come from, but then turned and quickly ran across to the eastern side of the road and disappeared into the vegetation. We also observed dozens of small mammals (mostly honey possums), a bearded dragon and a bardick snake scurry across Short Rd. to the unburnt east side.

Afterwards I tried some WGP playback along Short Rd. to see if we could elicit any responses on the unburnt side, but had no response. At 1830, we walked around in the burnt area near the permanent WGP listening sites and observed many Hakea and Banksia species with seed pods split open. The fire appeared to have burnt hottest in the dense mallee thickets but only moderately hot elsewhere, allowing seeds to withstand the burn. We listened for WGPs on the eastern side of Short

Rd. just north of the permanent listening sites from sunset, but did not hear any.

It was difficult to watch such valuable habitat go up in flames. However, it seems like this was inevitable with such heavy fuel loads there. Our last survey effort of this area was March 2006 and at that time we could only locate a couple of WGPs on the west side of the track (perhaps one pair) and most WGP activity was on the east side – the side that was saved. If the west side pair was nesting this year, it is hoped that any young should have fledged late in October and would have been as capable of escaping the fire as any adults. This fire represents yet another opportunity to learn more about the WGP and its relationship to its fire prone habitat. With the permanent listening sites and vegetation plots already in place, we will be able to continue to monitor any recolonization by WGPs into the burnt area, just as was done on the eastern side of Short Rd after the 1989 and 1998 fires which burned that side.

Year of the dolphin

Did you know that 2007 is the Year of the Dolphin? The UN Convention on Migratory Species has declared 2007 the Year of the Dolphin. The aim is to raise awareness of dolphin species, educate and inform decision makers and work together with local communities to promote a greater understanding of these animals and their needs. The biggest threat facing dolphins is incidental entanglement and death in fishing nets. It is estimated that world-wide over 300,000 whales, dolphins and porpoises fall victim to fishing nets each year. Full details of the Year of the Dolphin can be found at

<http://www.yod2007.org>

For Park Enquires contact :

Mark Moore (Jacup) 9835 5043

Garry Carr (Gairdner) 9837 1022

Stephen Mills (E Mt. Barren) 9 838 3060

Migrants

They leave their tracks, the little ones.

The tiny white and silver birds
which chase on matchstick legs
across the shining sand to follow
the receding waves.

They feed.

They fly in autumn, back across the oceans
to leave their tracks in northern lands.

I hope they will return.

Anne Gadsby

Carnaby's Black Cockatoo recovery project

Birds Australia is coordinating the extension of the Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project into the South Coast region with the help of regional group SCRIPT. The Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo Recovery Project aims to conserve and protect these birds and their habitat throughout the South West region of Western Australia.

Found nowhere else in the world, Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo is one of three Black-Cockatoos endemic to South West of WA. Classified as Endangered, the population size of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo has declined by at least 50% in the last half century; largely due to clearing of extensive areas of their breeding and feeding habitat. Although we still see flocks of Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos and think 'they can't possibly be endangered'- they are! The population is an aged one and with the loss of breeding habitat they are producing fewer chicks. When this generation dies out the population will decrease even further and with fewer birds breeding their situation will be dire.

These enigmatic birds have a very strong social structure and they mate for life- (they live for up to 50 years). They mainly nest in Eucalyptus tree hollows including Salmon Gum, Wandoo and Marri. Such hollows may take at least 150 years to develop. Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos typically feed on the seeds of proteaceous plants such as Banksia, Hakea, Dryandra and Grevillea.

To keep this iconic West Australian local flying in our skies, it needs your help.

The first stage of the project is focusing on the identification of nesting areas of the birds. If you have had Carnaby's Black-Cockatoos visiting your property between June and December and/or would like to be involved in the Recovery Project, please contact us and help us in the conservation of these special birds.

Funding is available for landholders wishing to help protect Carnaby's Cockatoo habitat through fencing, habitat rehabilitation and hollow repairs on their land.

For more information or to report nesting areas, please contact Raana Scott, South Coast Recovery Project Officer on 08) 98420011 or email r.scott@birdsaustralia.com.au

Help ! the Friends need a website

With more and more people interested in the Fitzgerald Biosphere and the Park we feel it is time to have our own web-site. What we need is a volunteer to design it for us.

If you have expertise in this area and would like to help would you please contact one of the following current committee members:

Angela Sanders	9846 4173
Andy Chapman	9838 1149
Gil Craig	9887 1071

Fitzgerald Biosphere maps

Don't forget that these beautiful maps are for sale and can be posted to you.

How to order a map

Send your money order or cheque to;

The Treasurer
Friends of the Fitzgerald
River National Park
1190 Nanarup Rd
Nanarup 6330



Folded maps, folded (22x15 cm) in a plastic envelope with a card

\$15 + \$1.00 postage**\$16**

Flat maps, (84 x 59 cm) rolled in a cardboard tube:

\$15 + &2.00 for tube + \$3.80 postage **\$20.80**

Flat maps are suitable for laminating.



Conservation Week March 17th - 25th

This is the 40th anniversary of the WA Conservation Council and it is holding its third annual Conservation Week. The Friends have listed our AGM as one of the events. We have been members of the 'Cons Council' for some years and have been able to call on their help from time to time when needed.

If you are interested in participating in Conservation Week you are invited to check the website - www.conservationwa.asn.au

Conservation Week is all about celebrating our unique environment and promoting sustainable living in WA. Our environment is currently under an extreme amount of pressure and it's up to us to take charge to ensure we protect and preserve an environment that our children and our children's children will thank us for.

Here are just a few ideas or events or projects you could organise during Conservation Week

- a 'walk or cycle to school or work' day
- a tree planting/weeding/cleanup or guided tour in your local bushland reserve

- host an environment-themed display at your local school, library or environment centre
- invite a guest speaker to present a talk/seminar/workshop with an environmental theme
- or simply just host a celebration of your group's achievements in protecting the environment.

AGM Agenda

Some of the items listed for the general meeting are:

- Prescribed burning
- New 'Who needs Friends' brochure
- Hopetoun's increasing population and its effects on the park
- Development of a FFRNP web site
- Friends' activities for 2007
- merchandising, including the Biosphere map
- possible action on seismic exploration in the Bremer Basin off the FRNP coastline

Post Print approved pp 607742/010 Surface Mail

If undelivered please return to:
The Editor – P Broadbent
Narpulungup News
C/o Post Office
Bremer Bay WA 6338

**Postage
Paid**

Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park PO Box 199, Ravensthorpe WA 6346