

Nerpulungup News

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from the Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park



The Fitzgerald Biosphere Reserve Biological Review: - an update

This review, a project initiated by the Friends and funded by Lotterywest, is now at about the half way point, and over the next few months a report will be produced summarising the information that has been found .

About 400 references have been unearthed, although many of these are not strictly "research" or indeed "new" information – many are either management plans which draw on other information, or are wider review papers which make some reference to the Fitzgerald area. They are being included in the project database in order to give as complete a picture as possible and make the database useful to a wide group of people.

Of the references identified so far the most frequent *geographical* reference is, not surprisingly, to the National Park itself followed by the coastal strip. However many of the coastal references are included in management plans rather than research or monitoring studies. Important areas such as the Ravensthorpe Range have been addressed most often as a result of mining-related investigations, and otherwise have been only briefly studied.

The most frequent *subject areas* are fauna, vegetation and flora, and management/ land use planning. Within the fauna studies, most relate to threatened species (including birds), with the Honey Possum being the only "common" species to have received much attention (thanks to the Woollers of Murdoch University and their students). Many of the ecological processes studies within the Biosphere area have arisen from the Honey Possum work. Fauna groups like invertebrates are noticeably scarce in the published and unpublished literature, while *Phytophthora cinnamomi* and other plant pathogens are also surprisingly poorly represented, considering their potential impacts on the area's natural diversity and conservation values.

The marine environment appears to be very poorly known and documented – perhaps reflecting the concentration of research effort in the South Coast area in the past on the altered estuarine environments like Wilson Inlet and the Albany harbours.

While tracking down the papers and other sources of knowledge that are being included in this study it became obvious that, as well as a database and a summary report, it would also be useful to have a physical collection of all the reference works available. I'm working on having that housed within the public library system so that it can be available for borrowing and others can be saved the effort it has taken to find them all.

The project ends in April 2005. By then I expect to have produced a summary report (including recommendations for future research and monitoring to fill the gaps), an on-line database summarising each reference and where to find copies of the full papers, and the complete collection housed within one or more libraries in the region. Anyone who may have information suitable for inclusion in the study, or who wants to find out more about what I'm doing can contact me:

Paula Deegan

Phone (9842 5232) or e-mail (pauladee@bigpond.net.au) anytime.

Next issue—February
2005



A very happy and environmentally friendly
Christmas to all our readers.

(Well ... these do look rather like gumnuts!)

You can't hide a parrot forever! Western Ground Parrot recovery news

It has been a long road since the Western Ground Parrot Recovery Project began in October 2003; a short history of ups and downs, knock-backs and successes. But in October 2004 the project received its first birthday present. After many months of solid focus on the biology and habitat requirements of this species, our knowledge took a giant step forward.

The monumental news of the first photograph of a Western Ground Parrot in the wild was well received by all. But this was just the beginning of our triumphant trip. We also located very young recently fledged birds which indicated that breeding had occurred and that nests were successful. Furthermore, we recorded the call of a young bird responding to an adult's call.

These were historic events that owed their success entirely to the many teams of hopeful volunteers and CALM staff who worked tirelessly in the Fitzgerald River National Park in 2004. One of the stars was Anne Gadsby (the FFRNP secretary), who attended more survey trips than any other volunteer this year.



Brent with a Ground Parrot feather

The information gained by researchers enabled the project to plan this nest searching expedition. A previously unknown population of birds was targeted for this work. The region was deemed suitable because it was known to hold a healthy population of birds that were moving in a predictable manner.

The eight person team selected to participate in this event was drawn from over 40 volunteers who had assisted in surveys during the previous year. Their particular skills in bird nest location and fauna observation were essential to the success. The head ranger of the park, Peter Wilkins, also volunteered his time to assist the team.

Some key players were Ray Garstone and Wayne Zadow who proved invaluable. Brenda Newbey (head of the community group Friends of the WGP) and Sarah Comer (CALM Albany) attended the trip and carried out much needed vegetation surveys.

Following the year's work in the park, we now have mapped locations of birds and confirmation of breeding in a recently located population. The timing of breeding is better understood and will allow us to be more fruitful next year in our efforts to locate and monitor a breeding event. This information will arm us against further loss of birds in these populations.

If we can stop the loss of any more individuals and maximise the number of new birds produced each year, we can save this species.

We must continue to forge forward with our investigations and build on the knowledge we have gained. Therefore, next year the project leader (Brent Barrett) and field assistant (David Chemello) will be moving to Esperance to begin surveys of Cape Arid National Park. This investigation will utilise the same methods developed in the FRNP but the effort will be aided by the smaller size of the park and the recent devastating fire history.



The nest searching team

A preliminary search of CANP, conducted in mid October, resulted in the flushing of three individuals. One of these birds was identified as a juvenile, thus proving that breeding is occurring in two of the main Western Ground Parrot populations. Suitable habitat was mapped during this trip and good community and CALM support has been pledged.

If you are in the region please consider joining this dynamic and fun team in their endeavours to save this unique and endemic parrot.

For further information please contact Brent Barrett at CALM Albany on 9842 4519 or brentb@calm.wa.gov.au

News from the Committee

- **AGM** .. the 2005 AGM will be held at Twertup on Saturday February 26th, commencing at 1.30 pm. In the morning there will be a presentation by a guest speaker, followed by lunch. More news in the February newsletter. **Put the date in your diary now!**
- **Illustrated map:** the FFRNP have received grants of \$5000 from Lotterywest and \$750 from the Shire of Ravensthorpe for the project to create an illustrated map of the Biosphere region. Local artist Vivienne Hillyer has been commissioned to produce the map with the assistance of a sub-committee. We'll keep you informed.
- **Committee phone numbers:**

Nathan McQuoid - President	0429 812 144
Gil Craig - Vice president	9838 1071
Anne Gadsby - Secretary	9837 4063
Angela Sanders - Treasurer	9846 4173
Robin Cail - Member	9835 2045
Andy Chapman - Member	9838 1149
Rosemary Jasper - Member	9838 1640
Priscilla Broadbent - Newsletter	9837 4004
Mark Jeffery - Twertup building	9836 6023

Jerdacuttup Environmental Studies Camp in the Fitzgerald River National Park

(Written by the Year 4-7 class)

Hopetoun to Twertup

The day dawned windy as the Jerdacuttup school children set off to the Fitzgerald River National Park for the long-awaited Environmental Studies camp. With a great deal of excitement last minute purchases were made in Hopetoun and on we went into the National Park for the first activities of the day.

The first stop was Culham Inlet to do human impact studies and water quality testing. We thought that putting the road over the river might have caused the algae bloom. We felt that perhaps an insufficient number of culverts had been built into the road system to allow for the water flow necessary for a healthy water system. The water had a temperature of 21 - 22° C. We also checked for macro-invertebrates.

At Mylies we went for a beach hike. Around the end of the hike we had a competition where we had to make works of art out of things we found on the beach. One group made an arrow out of rocks pointing to dead sponge and junk. The other art works were a butterfly and 'Just Fishing' made out of rocks, plants and a fishing line.

During the hike along the beach we saw a really big, steep sand dune. After the hike we slid down the dunes. Everyone started running and falling over. We crossed the river on a bridge and had our lunch. Then, ready to explore our new home for the next four nights, we set out for Twertup.

Twertup

The stay at the Twertup Field Study Centre was a historical yet comfortable experience. The boys stayed outside in the garage which was not as bad as we first thought. The girls slept in the two bedrooms. In the study centre there was a kitchen, a pantry with a packet of Pringles from 1984, a storage room, a garage, a lounge and front and back verandahs. There were also two long drop dunnies that were gruesome yet clean. Twertup is surrounded by trails leading into the National Park.

The first day when we first saw our dorms we thought they weren't so bad. We had to keep them clean. Points were given by the judges and scores were erratic with shocking bribery going on. The corrupt judges were given little piles of lollies on top of pillows for bribes.

On one superb morning it started to get hot and bees started to come around the hut. We went inside but Fez got stung on the finger and we were all worried. It was fun in the dorms when Alex

fell on Ross's camera and it took a photo.

We were amazed when we saw the huge quarries. When we saw the spongolite rocks we made a very interesting discovery about them. Spongolite was formed when the whole area used to be under the ocean and many sea fossils were found in the rocks. We saw how, when the quarry was being built, they had cut into the rock and it looked as though they had taken it out in blocks. After Ms Dodd had told us to "hug the wall" (of the quarry) we slowly made our way down and checked out the site. We all thought the quarries were excellent and we wanted to keep coming back.



The boys on the Horrie and Dorrie walk

Point Anne

On day 2 we went to Point Ann to go for a hike with Ranger Gary Carr. At first Megan and Tyler thought they saw a whale and then decided it was a rock. When we stopped we jumped out of the car and saw it was a whale. As we grabbed our cameras the F250 and Bill's car arrived and some of us got 12 photos but others didn't get any at all. We all walked up to the lookout on the left and got a better look. It was moving really fast. We saw the calf that was with it. Next we went to the other lookout and by then it was on the other side of the bay.

It was very interesting when we hiked along the Rabbit Proof Fence. We were with Gary Carr. We walked up to one of the lookouts and had a look at the bay then walked further up the track to look out to sea where we saw some little islands which Gary talked to us about. We hiked further along the broken fence and stopped at some signs to read about the Rabbit Proof Fence's history but some people needed to go to the toilet so Mrs. Clarke took them. Then we walked to the camp where we had lunch.

We also did vegetation studies on the plants around the coast. We were put into groups. My group chose a plant called shark tooth. It looked like a red Shark Tooth and was extremely sharp. We also we had an activity to identify plants and we found a lot of information about them.

We also went water testing and macro-invertebrate hunting with Max Michaels in the St Mary Inlet. It was so cool because we got to see a cadis fly larva come out of a sand-glued tube. The conductivity was very high at 135 ms compared to 45 ms for ocean water. This was a natural feature of the water system.

At Point Ann some of us went fishing. Alex caught a flathead. There were big rock pools with little fish. We also met Roger and Jenny Chambers who taught us about orienteering. We had a small competition using a compass. It was very hard running up and down the look outs.

Trapping with Peter Collins and Sarah

On day three of camp we did Western Shield trapping with Peter Collins and Sarah to see all the animals and the populations of some extremely rare ones. The year 6/7s went first to check the first twenty lure traps. It took quite a long time to get to the first trap and in it was a cute possum. There was nothing in the Alum trap. One by one we checked the traps to find another possum and six bush rats. Asha Ryan was asked to be the scribe and recorded all the data, male or female, the tags or even if they have been caught before. Some of the kids decided to walk to the traps and as we got to a trap Branden went and picked it up because he couldn't see anything, then a strange animal jumped out at him. He thought it was a bush rat but it had a pointy nose and a long thick tail like a bandicoot, but smaller. To our surprise it was a dibbler and until 1988 they were thought to be extinct, but when CALM started using 1080 fox baits they had a remarkable recovery. At the end of the day we had caught around ten bush rats, two house mice and one Western Mouse, two possums and two dibblers. Then the Year 4/5s took over and they had a wonderful time trapping too.

Visit to Bremer Bay

After trapping we went to Bremer Bay. The first thing that we did was go to the Bremer Bay Primary School because Ms Dodd had to talk to Anne Gadsby. Then we went to learn about Bridal Creeper from Mrs Broadbent. We learnt how to get rid of it with rust.

We went to the Bremer Bay Store and that is where we spent our \$10. Some people got balls. Lots of people got rings. Then the girls went with Mrs. Ryan and Mrs. Clarke and had showers. It felt good. We met the boys at the park. We played with the balls, and then we had dinner. It was fish and chips.

We were lucky enough to have Anne Gadsby tell us about Hooded Plovers. She told us how 4WD and motor bikes wreck sand-dunes and put Hooded Plovers at risk.

The night walk

On Wednesday, the third night of camp, the class

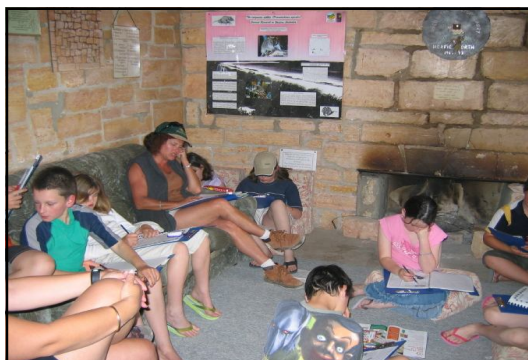
walked along a clear rocky bush path with our torches looking for nocturnal animals in the bush. We walked with Peter Collins, Gary Carr, Ellie, Sarah and Melissa. We walked for about thirty minutes and saw nothing. We all really enjoyed that experience. I especially liked it in the quarry when some of us howled at the full moon pretending to be werewolves, or was that lunatics?

On the way back from spotlighting we saw some Trapdoor Spiders. We did not see any spiders out of their homes although we did get to see two of them. One almost came out of his hole. The thing I liked most about the spider was its fangs. On the way back Ms Dodd accidentally ran over a few Trapdoor Spiders so that's how she got her nickname.

Concert under the stars and the games night

Many people stopped breathing from laughter on our hilarious concert night under the stars at Twertup. It was enjoyed by everyone with crazy plots from missing budgies to broken fingernails. Every skit was introduced by Branden Clarke, who threw in a few witty comments which added to the humour of the whole night. We were lucky enough to have a guest appearance by Roger from RAIN (Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiative Network) in Ravensthorpe who was very happy to be spending the night with us. Every play was very funny and received huge laughs.

We all went crazy on games night. Everyone was full of Jumping Jellybeans and really excited. The first game was my favourite. We had to put a blindfold on, have our hands tied behind our backs and eat all of the lollies hidden in the bowl of icing sugar. The other games we played were 'passing of the cheezel on a straw' game and shoving the coin between your rear cheeks game. We laughed the whole night and had heaps of fun.



Relaxing and working in the lounge at Twertup

Jerdacuttup Senior students caused a catastrophe amongst the male species at Twertup. All children at Twertup had great fun whacking Bill Walton, Fez Ryan and Roger. Bill got his super soaker. The girls scurried off to their rooms. That was when catastrophe really struck. Branden Clarke was the victim, cutting his toe on a rock and he had to bite on a cork because it was so painful.

Going home via Kundip

On the last day of camp we went on the Desmond to Kundip heritage walk. We only did about half the walk. Branden - lucky thing - didn't come because he had cut his toe. It was approximately 4 km long. It took us over an hour till we got to Kundip, first town site. Mrs Anne Williams came with us and told us about the history of the Hopton to Ravensthorpe railway. When we got to Kundip we had lunch, then we went back to JPS and went home.

The entire camp was an invaluable learning experience enjoyed by all. Many thanks to the many people who assisted in planning activities and talking to us throughout the week.

Special thanks to the camp helpers Gabbi and Fez Ryan, Janelle Clarke and Bill Walton.

A big 'thank you' to the students and staff of Jerdacuttup Primary School for this fascinating report on their school camp.

Wildflower Dieback and the FRNP

The Fitzgerald River National Park is currently recognised as one of the largest parcels of land across the South Coast Region of Western Australia not extensively infested by the introduced plant pathogen *Phytophthora cinnamomi*.

Surveys for the plant pathogen's presence across the National Park over the last fifteen years have identified only one infestation within and one adjoining the Park. These are the Bell Track and the Jacup Ranger station infestations respectively. The Bell track infestation has the potential to infest a larger area of the National Park than the 175 odd hectares currently exposed. The Jacup Ranger station is difficult to identify in the field and is very cryptic due to a paucity of susceptible plants in the immediate area down slope of the gravel compound yard.

Managers are aware that the biological values of the National Park are threatened with significant change should the pathogen be introduced into other locations. This knowledge is based on the known impacts that have and are continuing to occur within the Stirling Range National Park, Wellstead to Cape Riche reserve, and east around the Lake Shaster and Jerdacuttup Lakes Nature reserves.

In March this year the State Government established a Dieback Response Group as a sub-committee of the Dieback Consultative Committee. Its job is to identify priorities for management in order to address ongoing threats to biological values from the pathogen across the South West of the State.

The Bell Track infestation has been ranked as the number one priority for management across the State and is currently the focus of considerable attention and a range of funded activities. These are - the application of the fungistat "phosphite" to limit future autonomous spread, the realignment of the southern fire line management track around the northern portion of the infestation to avoid any human vectored spread of the pathogen, remapping of the infestation to identify the increase in area infested since the 1997 mapping exercise, a catchment hydrology study in order to determine the exact and precise locations of potential

off site surface escape of the pathogen during a significant rainfall event and the undertaking of research into engineering solutions to assist in managing the infestation. The research into engineering solutions will be implemented at locations outside of the National Park to ensure that the process of research does not exacerbate the existing infestation

Malcom Grant Conservation Officer
Ravensthorpe CALM Office

The impacts of Bridal Creeper on biodiversity within the Fitzgerald River National Park

Bridal creeper (*Asparagus asparagoides*) is a major environmental weed from southern Africa that has the ability to invade our native bushland.

A three-year research project investigating the impacts of this weed commenced this year. Bridal creeper has invaded a wide range of natural vegetation types within Australia, including coastal vegetation, wet and dry sclerophyll forests, heathlands and mallee scrublands, and it can be found along waterways within Fitzgerald River National Park.

A biological control program for this Weed of National Significance was initiated in 1990 and led to the release in Australia of three agents, a leafhopper in 1999, a rust fungus in 2000, and a leaf beetle in 2003. It appears these agents will go a long way in controlling this weed, but even so will landscape health be restored following weed control? This is an important question given that the goal of environmental weed control must be to control weed damage not just the weed.

Invasive plants can alter biodiversity, but removal of these weeds in isolation can also result in unexpected changes, with weed management practices themselves altering biodiversity. Even the control of one weed may lead to its replacement by another.

This PhD project, conducted by Peter Turner, will investigate this situation by first quantifying the impacts bridal creeper has on soil properties and on plant and insect biodiversity. Ants and other soil insects will be used as ecological indicators of landscape health. Monitoring plots have been set up in Western Australia and South Australia, including sites along the Gairdner River within Fitzgerald River National Park. Once impacts have been quantified, and the weed is brought under control through the actions of the biological control agents, monitoring will continue to evaluate the success of this weed control program and to ascertain if further restoration work will be necessary.

Contact: Peter Turner - PhD Researcher
University of Western Australia,
CSIRO Entomology and CRC for Australian Weed
Management

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Ph. 08 6488 7026 Fax. 08 6488 1040
Email: Peter.John.Turner@csiro.au

Nature News— from the Acting Senior Ranger

Over the last few months the park has been a hive of activity from road maintenance, building a boardwalk and Western Shield trapping and monitoring. The park roads have just been recently graded and also the road verges and corners have been slashed to make your visit safer and more enjoyable.

Last month we completed a new boardwalk and viewing platform at the Four Mile beach. Using local carpenter John Brouwer and myself it took approximately three weeks to complete. Anyone who visits the site, I think, will agree that it looks great and is user friendly. Many thanks to everyone who assisted in the completion of this project.



The new Four Mile Beach boardwalk

Over the last few weeks we have been conducting our Western Shield trapping on the west and east sides of the park. On our Twertup trap line we had amazing results with numerous species being caught and released. The uncommon ones were Heath Mice, Red Tail Phascogale and good numbers of the rare and endangered Dibbler. The more common ones caught were Western and Ash Grey Mice, Brush tail and Honey Possums, Bush rats, Quenda and an Echidna.

We were having good success over the first few days on our Moir Track trap line catching a number of Dibblers, Ash Grey mice, Bush rats, Bobtails and a Mitchell's Hopping Mouse which is very uncommon in these parts. Sadly the trapping had to be called off due to a large amount of rain.

Many thanks to all the school children from Jerramungup and Ravensthorpe schools for all their help and laughter.

The Jerdacuttup Primary School held a camp at the Twertup Field Studies Centre and students were involved in numerous activities throughout the park. There was spotlighting around Twertup, trapping, plant identification at Point Ann, bush walks and a history lesson on the old Rabbit Proof fence at Point Anne. Ranger Garry Carr enjoyed assisting and spending time with the group.

In the next few weeks roadworks will commence on Pabelup Drive, from the junction of Pabelup drive and Point Ann Road heading approximately 7km to the north past the Fitzgerald beach track. This will involve widening, realigning and resheeting the road. We ask all visitors to abide by all traffic signs, drive carefully and make your visit an enjoyable and safe one.

On a serious note, we have quite a few visitors who don't abide by our speed limits. The maximum advised speed throughout the park is 60km/h. We also do not appreciate people constantly cutting up in the park. The police have been advised and are willing to help us out if we catch anyone.

Finally for those who are interested in our native flora, there are a number of our wildflowers still flowering and looking very impressive on both sides of the park.

Hopefully we will be seeing you soon somewhere in the Fitzgerald River National Park.

Stephen Mills: Acting Senior Ranger: FRNP

Twertup Roster

December: Barbara Miller.
January: Broadbent

February: Nathan
& AGM

Editor's note ... an apology to Andy Chapman, who was not acknowledged as the author of the tribute to Bert and Babs Wells which appeared in the last issue. Thanks, Andy.

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