

FRIENDS OF WAITE CONSERVATION RESERVE

NEWSLETTER



AUTUMN 2002
NUMBER 4

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Waite Walk With Nature: A Great Success

The Nature Conservation Society of SA's Walk With Nature in the Waite Conservation Reserve, held on Sunday 28 October last year, was a great success. The weather was reasonably kind and in the face of stiff competition from competing events in Adelaide on the day, a total of around 180 walkers saw the sights of the reserve. After stepping through an antiseptic bath to prevent the spread of the fungus *Phytophthora cinnamoni*, walkers toiled up through Wild Dog's Glen, then along Urrbrae Ridge to Wylie Trig and around the southern boundary track before descending to the easement and following their noses to the sausage sizzle awaiting them at the walk's end. The walk provided a great opportunity to showcase not only the wildlife and scenic highlights of the reserve, but also the many achievements that have been made through management efforts over the past ten years. A display board advertising the activities of the Friends attracted great interest and several new members signed up on the spot. NCSSA book sales were also brisk and the sausage sizzle turned a tidy profit to help sustain the Friends' ongoing efforts. The event was such a success that it may be repeated in future years, so if you missed last year's, stay tuned - and start studying to be a leader on the next one!

WALKS WITH NATURE 2001

WAITE CONSERVATION RESERVE: 28 OCTOBER

(The following are the walk-leaders' notes prepared by Scott Field. They may be useful as a self-guided tour of the Reserve used with the Walking Tour Guide, available from Urrbrae House.)

Introduction

The Waite Conservation Reserve occupies around 125 ha of land in the Hills Face Zone and contains a grassy woodland formation (dominated by grey box and red gum) typical of this area of the Adelaide foothills. Prior to conservation works commencing in 1992, much of the reserve had long been subject to grazing and the native understorey had largely disappeared as a consequence. However, a few areas of the reserve survived with minimal disturbance, and the removal of pest plants (principally olives) in degraded areas has seen impressive regeneration of native species. At present a total of 289 plant species (178 native and 111 exotic) have been recorded from the reserve, among which 43 have state or regional conservation status. Native grasses are well-represented, with around a dozen species of **speargrass** (*Austrostipa spp*) and eight species of **wallaby grass** (*Danthonia spp*) present, including several that are rare. A dozen species of mammals, 68 species of birds and 10 species of butterflies have been recorded, with most of the remaining fauna still to be documented. Significant financial contributions to the reserve management have been made by the Waite Campus, Save the Bush, the Natural Heritage Trust, Transport SA and the Mitcham Council.

The Walk

The walk is about 4.6 km in total – not a long one, but the first 500m up Wild Dogs Glen is quite steep, so things will get off to a slow start. Fortunately there is plenty to see early in the walk, so pause often to point things out while people catch their breath. There are numbered wooden posts along the trail – these form part of a guided walking trail and will be referred to in the notes below.

Station 1 - Just 20 m or so up the track, pause at Station 1 and note the prolific regeneration of **eucalypts** along the side of the track. Prior to the removal of sheep from the reserve in 1992, this area was grazed bare but since that time, the large **redgums** in the surrounding area (two particularly magnificent specimens can be seen up the hill to the left) have recruited vigorously and formed a thicket of saplings.

Before entering the thicket, keep an eye out for **grey fantails**, a relative of the **willie wagtail**, which has a magnificent fluting call and is often seen acrobatically foraging for flying insects. Passing through the thicket, keep an ear out for the tiny brown and yellow **weebill**, which, at just 8-9 cm in length, is Australia's smallest bird. Their quirky whistles and harsh chirping calls are often heard in this area. Typical suburban birds like **magpies**, **kookaburras**, **red wattlebirds** and **adelaide rosellas** should be calling from the tall trees and **rainbow** and **musk lorikeets** will be screaming overhead. **Koalas** have recently been heard bellowing in the gully to the right of the track, so keep an eye out – they may be spotted anywhere along the route.

Emerging from the thicket and passing an old fenceline, you enter what was formerly a thick forest of olives. As with many areas in the Adelaide foothills, **European olives**, *Olea europea*, were planted commercially by the early settlers, but when the bottom later fell out of the olive market and the orchards were abandoned, they became feral and have wreaked ecological havoc. They form dense low forests with virtually no understorey, dramatically reducing native plant diversity. Native birds such as the **black-faced cuckoo shrike** will feed on olives and disperse them short distances – but the introduced starling transports them much further, swallowing the fruits whole and later regurgitating the seeds potentially a long distance away. **Foxes**, a feral occupant of the reserve, are also key dispersal agents.

As you keep climbing, more results of olive removal become evident. The large bushes covered with white flowers are **sticky boobialla** (*Myoporum petiolarum*), a native species which has cascaded down the gully from just a handful or parent bushes at the top of the hill. Watch for **superb blue-wrens** zipping between them – they previously used the olive thickets for cover and nesting, but have now switched to the native replacement. Listen also for their explosive high-pitched trilling call emanating from the bushes. The high-pitched peeping of the **silvereve** may also be heard from the bushes or overhead.

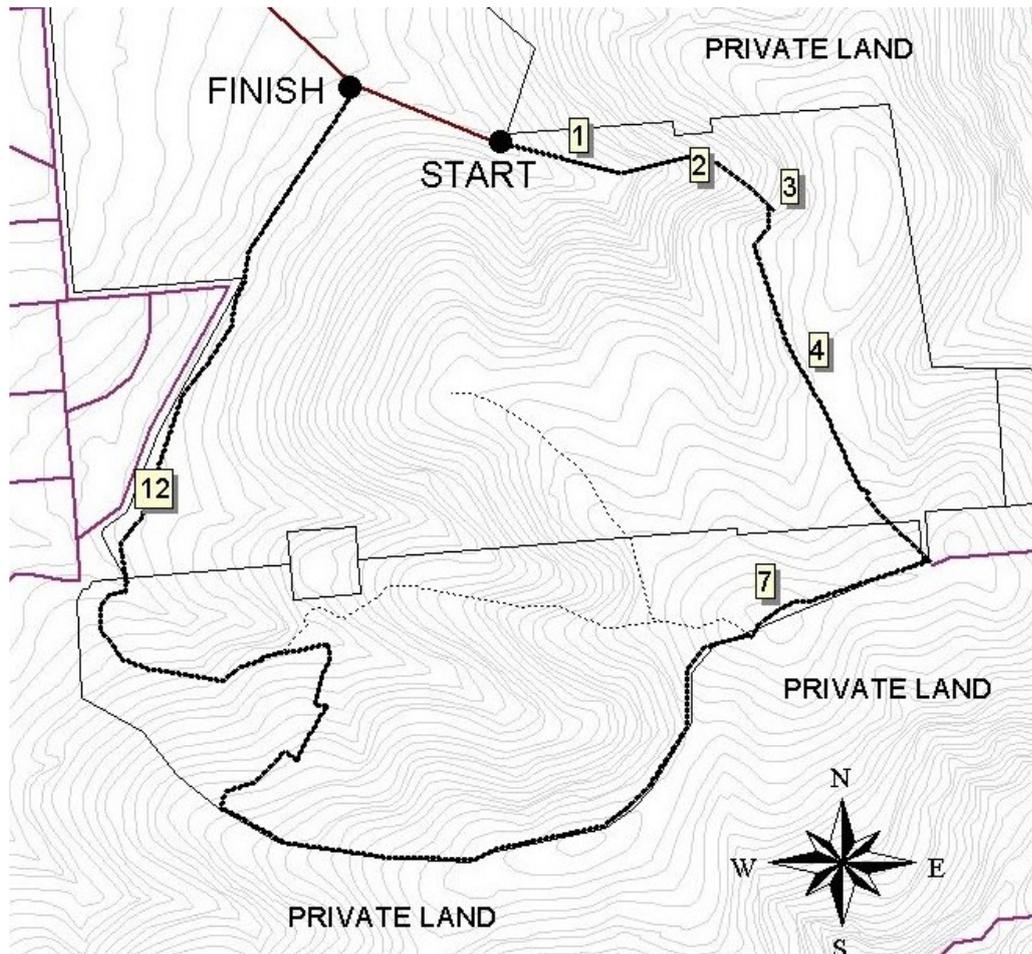
..... Further up the valley, note several large specimens of the native **Australian hollyhock**, *Lavatera plebeia*, with an impressive show of white flowers. Again, their success comes as from olive removal – the open grassy area around you is riddled with olive stumps that have been cut and poisoned. Olives are extremely difficult to kill, and require diligent follow up in the years following initial treatment. Until recently, the cleared areas you see around the stumps were impenetrable thickets of cut branches and tangled regrowth that resprouted after the parent trees were felled ten years ago. Dedicated slashing and burning by the Friends of the reserve has cleared the way for future control of the many secondary weeds that have now taken their place.

Station 2 - Reaching the bench at Station 2, pause to turn back down the valley and admire the emerging view. Twenty metres across to the left, note the two **blackwoods**, *Acacia melanoxylon*, small trees with very straight trunks and dense green foliage. These commonly grow along damp gullies in the hills and will hopefully recruit well into the newly cleared areas. Lift your eyes further up to the end of the rocky outcrop on the escarpment and pick out the graceful light green weeping form of *Pittosporum phylliraeoides*. Called **native apricot** because of its distinctive bright orange woody capsules, this species was once common on the Hills Face, but is now classified as rare in the region. Rocky outcrops which were out of reach of sheep served as refugia for this and many other native species in the reserve and now are a source of seed for regeneration. In several areas where olives have been removed, native apricot seedlings have regenerated in spectacular fashion. The **black-faced cuckoo-shrike** may be seen hunting insects around the cliff face. Below and to your right, the pink flowers of the **dog rose**, *Rosa canina*, can be seen – one of many garden escapes on the loose in the hills.

While you catch your breath, listen for bird calls – **yellow-faced honeyeaters** may be calling from the tall trees on the slopes and **superb blue-wrens**, **grey fantails** and **silvereys** moving among the bushes further up the gully.

Continuing on another 25m after the right hand bend above the bench, note the climbing plant that is densely covering the lower part of a tree just to the left of the track. This is "**old man's beard**", *Clematis microphylla*, which comes out in a dense profusion of white flowers in spring male and female flowers are on separate plants. Also scrambling up the tree after the *Clematis* is the weed **bedstraw**, *Galium sp.*

To the right is a patch where a huge pile of olive branches were burned last winter and it has now been colonized by several species that recruit well after fire. Two species of *Senecio* daisies are present – one a native species, the **blue-green cobwebby-leaved cotton senecio** (*Senecio quadridentatus*), the other a serious weed of the Adelaide Hills, **South African daisy** (*Senecio pterophorus*), which flowers over summer. Due to the similar climate and shared biogeographical origins, South Africa and temperate Australia have exchanged large numbers of environmental weeds in recent times. The bright purple pea-flower of **common vetch**, *Vicia sativa* can also be seen in this area.



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The last section of the climb passes a huge fallen eucalypt and then through a dense thicket of **boobialla**. On the right is a fresh burn patch, the result of recent work by the Friends to clear a particularly nasty patch of olive regrowth. It's hard to believe now, but by this time next year, this patch will be overgrown with weeds and pioneering natives just like the one below.

Station 3 - Reach the bench at Station 3 at the top of the hill and take a well-earned rest. Looking down 10 years ago you would have seen a forest of olives below the eucalypts – now, observe the forest of eucalypt regeneration in the foreground. You are now on “Old Coach Road”, built in 1861 by Arthur Hardy, an early owner of the property. This was one of the first roads from Adelaide to Mt Barker, starting near the Old Toll House at Glen Osmond – reputedly one purpose of the road was to avoid the tolls. It rejoins the main track just below Eagle on the Hill.

From here set off in a southerly direction along the track and note the long flowering stalks of the exotic weed **ribgrass**, *Plantago lanceolata*. On the right hand side there are also some tall native **speargrasses**. Approaching the right-hand bend, note the patch of yellow flowers up the hill on the left hand side. These are **cut-leaf goodenia**, *Goodenia pinnatifida*, an uncommon species in Mt Lofty Ranges. The patch of white flowers to the right belong to another plant in the same family, the **fanflower** *Scaevolea albida*, which has large green serrated leaves and flowers with five petals - as the name suggests - shaped like a fan. The drooping pale purple flowers of the **vanilla lily**, *Arthropodium strictum*, are also present. You now enter another thicket of boobialla regeneration and after emerging you will see on the right hand side one of the treasures of the reserve, a thriving patch of the regionally rare clustered **everlasting**, *Chrysocephalum semipapposum*. This is a species more often found in drier areas such as mallee, but which is thriving in several places in the reserve.

A little further along on the right is a small walking post - pause here to admire the magnificent view down to the city. On the pleasant clifftop knoll in front of you can see why this habitat is referred to as “grassy” woodland - note the many native grasses, especially the fluffy, wispy **speargrasses** (*Austrostipa* spp). Several species of **wallaby grass**, *Danthonia* spp, which are smaller with bristly seed-heads are also present and there is a smattering of **kangaroo grass**, *Themeda triandra*.

The reserve is home to no fewer than 43 plant species of conservation significance, and in this clifftop harbours several of them –including two rare **speargrass (corkscrew and rough speargrass)** and **spur velleia**, *Velleia paradoxa*, which is responsible for the patch of small yellow flowers just below the track. At your feet along the edge of the track you will see a microcosm of the species in this area: the dark green hill **raspwort**, *Gonocarpus elatus*; **kangaroo grass**, *Themeda triandra*; the introduced **quaking grass**, *Briza maxima*; several species of *Austrostipa* – look especially for the black seeds of the rare **corkscrew speargrass**, *Austrostipa setacea*; **velvet wallaby grass**, *Danthonia pilosa*; and the tiny white daisy flowers of the fuzzy **New Holland Daisy**, *Vittadinia cuneata*.

Rounding the left-hand bend in the trail, note the abundance of **finger rushes**, *Juncus subsecundus*, growing on and around the track. Most members of this genus are confined to permanently wet areas, but this species is unusual in its ability to grow all over the hills. Pause on the right hand side to inspect the workmanship on a section of old stone wall constructed by the builders of Old Coach Road. As you look down into the gully where **golden wattles** *Acacia pycnantha*, are abundant, keep an eye out down the for the large raven-like form of the **grey currawong**, *Strepera versicolor*, flying with deep pulsing wingbeats and graceful swoops and emitting its loud, distinctive call - a single descending whistle followed by a ringing ‘chling chling’. The metallic trilling of the **black-faced cuckoo shrike** may also be heard.

Continue on and you are now enveloped in one of the few remaining examples of “black forest” in the Adelaide region. The dark-barked trees surrounding you are **grey box**, *Eucalyptus microcarpa*, which once covered much of the Adelaide foothills, as well as the plains south and east of the city center (hence the suburb name “Blackforest”). On the plains they have been cleared almost entirely to make way for residential development, while their hard, durable close-grained timber also made them targets for logging in the hills. This area has probably been logged at some time in its past, as evidenced by the multi-stemmed (coppiced) regrowth typical of trees that have regenerated from a stump. The result is trees that are spindly and small in comparison to the probable size of the originals. Nevertheless, the stand of grey box in this reserve remains one of the best examples in the region and is of high conservation value. The yellow flowers of the native **bulbine lily**, *Bulbine bulbosa*, can be seen along the track.

Station 4 - Reaching Station 4, examine the lone and rather dilapidated specimen of **native cherry**, *Exocarpos cupressiformis*. Despite its pine-like appearance, this native tree has nothing in common with conifers. It is in the family Santalaceae whose members are hemi-parasitic, usually on the roots of surrounding plants. In spring and summer the fruiting stalklets enlarge to form sweet, succulent, edible 'cherries'. Note that the understorey along the ridge in this section is dominated by a particularly fine stand of **kangaroo grass**. Note also that the grey box trees are now mixed with many large **river redgums**, *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* – although they are usually associated with rivers and creeklines, this is one of the few areas in which they also grow on hilltops – perhaps due to a low water table. You will see that many of them are dead in this area – and many also have olives, or the remains thereof, around the base – the legacy of bird dispersal. The olives can place even mature trees under great water stress, which leaves them vulnerable to insect attack. Examine the dead trunks and note the dense networks of 'mines' left by bark-boring **longicorn beetles** of the family Cerambycidae. Outbreaks of these insects on already-stressed trees may have caused their demise.

Further along, tiptoe around the guard that protects a tiny population of **short wallaby grass**, *Danthonia carphoides* ssp. *carphoides*, a rare species that is hanging on for grim life right in the center of the track. Listen for the distinctive 'choop-choop' call of the **striated pardalote**, a tiny bird with brilliant yellow and red markings that snaps insects and **lerps** from the gum leaves with astonishing efficiency. They normally inhabit the canopy, but if they descend you may even hear the snapping of their bills.

Further along as you move back into a strip of **grey box**, the track is lined either side with a thick infestation of **cocksfoot grass**, *Dactylus glomerata*. To the left is a trail that leads to more rugged and ecologically sensitive areas of the reserve. These areas have survived the years with less disturbance from logging and grazing and are a haven for many rare species of plant. Note the numerous hollows in the grey box trees to the left of the track, and the feral honeybees using them – competition for hollows puts extra strain on birds and mammals already crammed into small remnants like this.

Emerging across an old fenceline into an open area used for grazing in the past, note the abundant wallaby grass near the track and also the pasture weed **salvation jane**, *Echium plantagineum*. You now reach the fence of the adjoining property, which contains two significant threats to the reserve: cattle, which frequently break through the inadequate fencing and rapidly destroy the understorey by grazing and trampling; and a vineyard, which is in the process of being planted while plans for a larger one are being contested in court. One portion of the vineyard is located only 50m from the most sensitive area of the reserve, causing great concern due to issues such as spray drift and native bird control measures.

As you walk along the fenceline, scan through the trees on the other side of the fence looking for koalas. Many of the trees on this slope, which overlooks Brownhill Creek, are **manna gums**, the favoured food of **koalas**. The unearthly bellowing of the males should be heard at some time during the walk. A koala with joey was seen in the grey box to the right last weekend. Koalas are introduced in the Adelaide Hills and there are some concerns their populations could explode with disastrous ecological consequences, as has happened on Kangaroo Island recently and other islands in the past.

The trees and shrubs on the right are a mixture of plantings and regeneration. Note the **sticky hop bush**, *Dodonaea viscosa*. This plant takes its name from its shiny, sticky bright green leaves – note also the rich red four-winged papery capsules. Nearby are **drooping sheoaks**, *Allocasuarina verticillata* – the female plant with woody cones and the male without.

Station 7 - Pause at the picnic tables near the twin tanks, Station 7 (we skipped 5 and 6) – you are now at Wylie Trig, the highest point of the reserve. Observe the results of logging in the multi-stemmed form of the **grey box** next to the table – the open area in the middle of the stems gives some idea of the girth of the original tree. The majority of the trees composing the meagre 10% remaining forest cover in the Mt Lofty Ranges are 'coppiced' like this.

Continue downhill along the track next to the fenceline, with the Belair escarpment on the horizon to your left and keep an eye out for **wedge-tailed eagles** soaring over the valley, hotly pursued by **ravens** and **magpies**. On your right are many large **red and blue gums**, but the understorey is composed almost entirely of **exotic grasses**, the result of many years of sheep grazing. Under the canopy there are also very few young trees growing – but note the profusion of regeneration in the open area as you pass the head of Koala Gully. Continue along the fence with the majestic gum woodland on your right – there is one particularly massive **redgum** alongside the trail. Note the stout, spiny bush called '**apple of Sodom**' (*Solanum hermanni*) alongside the track. Reaching the top of the hill, the city once again comes into view across the valleys on your right – and by turning 90 degrees to the right, from the same position you can see the Mt Lofty escarpment with the white blip of Flinders Column and the twin peaks of Mt Lofty and Mt Bonython (Yurrebilla in the Aboriginal legend).

Starting to descend now, the trail passes several more patches of native **wallaby grass** and **speargrass** mixed in among the dominant exotic grasses. By strategically slashing areas like this in spring before the exotics have set seed, the native grasses, which generally have a longer growing

season, can be favoured. This is one strategy for restoring the natural vegetation without the need for applying damaging pesticides.

The trail continues along past two more stands of grey box trees (one with a couple of **African boxthorn**, *Lycium ferocissimum*, growing nearby), with the Brown Hill trig point to the left at the end of a carpet of salvation jane. WATCH YOUR FOOTING, as the ground is rocky underneath the grass. Turn right onto the descending road which takes you to the bottom of Koala Gully. Pause under the transmission lines to examine the **box mistletoe**, *Amyema miqueli*, a native hemi-parasitic plant whose distinct bronzy-green leaves droop down from the eucalypt branch their roots have tapped into. Many of the grey box trees in this area contain mistletoe infestations. Mistletoes are dispersed by numerous birds, but especially the co-adapted mistletoebird, which wipes the sticky seeds on host tree branches when excreting them. Note also the ferocious olive regrowth up the gully to the right, and the purple flowers of **Tangier pea**, *Lathyrus tingitanus*, carpeting one of the olive thickets.

Turn left at the bottom of the hill along the trail that finally connects to the easement track below some **lemon-scented gums**. On the easement, look for Station 12 – this shows a magnificent old **grey box** tree, which is on the National Trust Register of Significant Trees and may predate European settlement. Follow the easement back to Hartley Grove and the car park.

Scott Field

BUILDING A GIS FOR WEED MANAGEMENT IN THE WAITE CONSERVATION RESERVE

I am an honours student in the Department of Soil and Water, University of Adelaide. Throughout this year I will be researching how to develop a long-term strategy for weed management in the Waite CR, by combining Geographic Information System (GIS) tools with decision-making techniques.

Since European settlement much of the Waite Conservation Reserve has been ecologically degraded, mainly due to grazing of domestic stock, logging, quarrying and horticulture. These disturbances of the natural ecosystem have opened a pathway for a wide variety of exotic plant species to invade and become infestations that effect the regeneration and health of native species. Due to the variety of exotic species now present, and the varying biodiversity value of the areas the problem of how best to allocate scarce management resources has become quite difficult. A management plan that takes these factors into account is needed to effectively restore the reserve.

Information about how vegetation is distributed in space and how it changes over time can be stored in a GIS database. The database can include maps of vegetation associations, distribution of species with conservation status, terrain, soil types, and weed distributions. These maps can be put together as visual layers and with the aid of decision theory tools, be used to produce a plan for prioritising weed control.

The aims of this project are:

1. *To build a GIS database to be used primarily as a support tool for management of the Reserve.*

This will involve bringing together existing data including cadastral, topological, soil type and some weed distribution data. Some original surveying of vegetation associations and weed distributions will supplement this. Criteria that will be considered when mapping weeds are factors such as: The area of infestation; the long-term implications if the weed species are not managed now; and vegetation quality of the surrounding area.

2. *To integrate the GIS with Multi-criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) tools to prioritise areas for weed control.*

MCDA can be used to weigh up and analyse many different criteria (e.g. age of weeds and area of infestation), allowing an objective set of management priorities to be devised.

The Waite Conservation Reserve is a large area of varying terrain and contains approximately 136 weed species and 192 native species. Currently, the task at hand is determining the most feasible method for surveying major weed infestations and vegetation associations.

Hafwen Pearce

HERITAGE AGREEMENTS

Heritage Agreements have finally been signed on 131 hectares of the Waite Conservation Reserve. The Agreement on the 21 ha Stone Reserve was signed by The Minister on 11 December 2001. This Agreement was initiated by Transport SA before the transfer of the land to The University of Adelaide in 30 August 2000. The Agreement on the rest of the Waite Conservation Reserve east of the Hills Face Zone line (110 ha), was signed on 25 January 2002. This brings to a satisfying conclusion a long process initiated by Phil Shearman in March 1994 and persistently pursued since that time.

Jennifer Gardner

HONORARY AUDITOR SOUGHT

The Friends require the services of an auditor. If there is an accountant among the Friends who would be willing to take on this job, will they please contact the Secretary, Andy Baker, on 8357 8028.

MEMBERSHIP

If you wish to continue your membership of Friends of the Waite Conservation Reserve we would like you to complete the form below and return it with any subscription/ donation enclosed. Cheques should be made out to The Friends of Waite Conservation Reserve.

Return to: The Friends of Waite Conservation Reserve, The University of Adelaide – Waite Campus, Glen Osmond, SA 5064

[CUT].....

Membership Application Form
(please print clearly)

Name/s.....

Address.....

.....Post Code.....

E-mail.....

Membership is free. However **voluntary subscription rates** are as follows:

- \$10 Individual
- \$5 Individual concession
- \$15 Family
- \$40 Corporation/ Institutional

I enclose a voluntary subscription of \$.....

I enclose a donation of \$.....

Total \$.....Date.....

Membership Questionnaire

Please complete questions that apply to you. Where not applicable leave blank.

- I would like to participate in **working bees**, please keep me informed.
If you are interested in participating **working bees** which day suits you best: No preference Saturdays Sundays
- I am interested in **fundraising**.
- I am interested in **organisation** and **administration**.

Do you have any specialised skills/ relevant experience to contribute? Any suggestions or comments?.....

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.....

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Waite Conservation Reserve will be held on:

**WEDNESDAY, 22 MAY, 2002; FROM 8-10pm
IN THE DRAWING ROOM, URRBRAE HOUSE**

Speaker to be arranged. Fliers will be posted closer to the time.

Nominations for the Committee of The Friends of Waite Conservation Reserve are now being accepted. See below for the form to complete if you wish to nominate.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS FOR COMMITTEE

Nominations are now called for membership of the Committee of The Friends of Waite Conservation Reserve.

If you wish to put your name forward, please complete the form below and forward it to the Secretary, Andy Baker, c/o the address given above for the Friends.

I wish to nominate for the Committee of The Friends of Waite Conservation Reserve:

Name.....

Signed.....Date.....

NEXT WORKING BEE: SATURDAY 23 MARCH

STARTING AT 9AM (OR AS SOON AS YOU ARE ABLE TO) AND CONTINUING FOR AS LONG AS YOU WISH TO WORK. MEET AT WILD DOGS GLEN, TOP OF HARTLEY GROVE. (IF ARRIVING LATER, A NOTICE WILL BE LEFT GIVING DIRECTIONS) .