

# NEWSLETTER

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**AUTUMN 2004  
NUMBER 7**

*Ed: Bryan Both*



## AGM

### Advance Notice of Date of AGM

In accordance with Clause 11.1 of the Constitution of the Friends of Waite Conservation Reserve Inc, members are notified that the Annual General Meeting of the Friends will be held at Urrbrae House on **Wednesday 19 May 2004 at 7.30 pm**. Please record this date in your diary now.

If any member wishes to propose a motion for consideration at the AGM, it must be lodged, in writing and signed by both the proposer and another member who seconds the motion, no later than 21 April 2004, and should be delivered or posted to Joe Haslam, Hon Secretary, Friends of WCR, at 9 Anglo Avenue Parkside 5063.

In accordance with Clause 11.3 of the Constitution, an Agenda for the AGM, including a copy of the audited financial statements for the year ending 31 December 2003, will be posted to members at least 21 days before the date of the AGM.

**Guest speaker : David Paton**

### **Fire in Stone Reserve**

On 17 December 2003 a grass fire, believed to

have been started by sparks from an electric fence on the abutting property, burnt several hectares of flat, open land on the Reserve. Prompt attendance by the CFS limited damage, although two large gums, and possibly some recent plantings by Waldo Bushman of *Euc.viminalis*, have been lost.

Some regrowth of both native and exotic species has occurred in the blackened area, and seeds of *Themeda sp.* have been scattered. This site is likely to be of interest to regular working bee participants, both to inspect the regrowth in the near term, and to participate in selective weeding and care in the longer term.

### **Au revoir Tanja**

At the last committee meeting, Tanja advised that she must reluctantly tender her resignation from the Committee. She has accepted a research position at Macquarie University in Sydney, and will leave Adelaide in mid March 2004. Members thank Tanja for her outstanding contribution to all aspects of the Friends - her helpful and wise contribution to Committee meetings, regular participant in working bees, as newsletter editor and in many other ways - and wish her every success in her new position.

## President's Page

During one of the few cool days amongst the heat of February I went for a walk up Wild Dog Glen and the old coach road. It must have been cool because to my surprise there was even a bit of mist in one of the nearby gullies. A neighbor coming the other way described how he had spent his Saturday walking along the Yurrebilla track to Belair National Park before returning. The section of the Yurrebilla track in the Waite reserve is particularly attractive. The scenery varies from quiet valleys dotted with red and blue gums to rocky ridges overlooking the city and sea.

Some of the Friends of the Waite reserve have helped with the GPS mapping of this and other tracks. The resulting maps will help both the walkers using the reserve and the ongoing management of the park. Also helping the management efforts is the setting up of a collection of dried plant specimens. One folder of weed specimens from the park is unfortunately quite large but thankfully the other folders of native plants found in the reserve are even larger. These identification folders will be very useful for both work crews and working bees.

The dead olives and areas cleared of weeds along my walk were testimony to the achievements of working bees and the Green Corps and Work for the Dole crews. Over the last 12 months it has been a case of a little bit at a time having a big cumulative effect. The change in Wild Dog Glen over a ten year timescale is very impressive and it's good to see olives being replaced with trees and understory. A particular priority in 2003 was to

remove the olives in the very sensitive areas. These are the pieces of bush that contain many understory plants surviving from earlier times. One of last years working bees took great delight in removing the young olives around an old red gum. This tree and the hundreds of bright yellow bulbine lilies found underneath it are no longer choked by olives and now have a chance to grow and to set seed. In this case as on all working bees the Friends' group is grateful for the guidance that they receive from the Reserve Management Group which coordinates all restoration work in the park.

The grants that we have attracted to help restore the park pay for the tools, herbicide, and interpretive signs. In addition the Friends group supplies the community labor and input that counts as "a contribution in kind" to attract grant funding. Not everyone has the time or the physical ability to help on working bees but their support of the friends group as a member is important and appreciated.

While walking through and enjoying the wonders of the bush in the park please remember that you have the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing bush regeneration either directly at working bees or indirectly through membership of the friends of Waite conservation reserve.

Chris Kaczan

## FOXES AND ALTRUISTIC BAITING

Imagine wandering up Wild Dog Glen to the rustling sounds of bandicoots darting off into the undergrowth. But in the words of Darryl Kerrigan: "You're dreamin!" The rustling of Southern Brown Bandicoots in Waite Conservation Reserve and many other parts of the Mt Lofty Ranges was silenced long ago by the arrival of foxes!

Today however, bandicoots appear to be making something of a comeback in the hills thanks to sustained fox baiting programs by NPWSA and others. It is now commonplace to see bandicoots at Cleland summit for example and I have even recently seen roadkills on the freeway and elsewhere. Several parks close to home now have healthy bandicoot populations including Cleland and Belair, each less than 2 km from WCR.

So, how long before we can expect to hear the patter of tiny feet on our patch? After all, Bryan and Steve have been systematically baiting foxes in the reserve since 2000. I hate to be pessimistic but I suspect that the answer is... never! I'm not saying we won't ever see the odd bandicoot. I am always on the lookout for the distinctive scratchings of the odd straggler, and there was that possible sighting in the reserve not so long ago... But I think it unlikely that we will reduce fox numbers sufficiently to allow a self-supporting population of bandicoots to establish in the reserve. I just don't think the open, grassy understorey of WCR will ever provide the cover necessary to protect these tasty little morsels from even low densities of foxes. Of course, we could build a Walmsley-esque fence to protect the 6 km perimeter but that would require a benefactor the likes of Peter Waite to fork out the \$150 000 needed!

So, why spend considerable time and energy fox baiting in the reserve? Well, for a start there are other species susceptible to fox predation which

might benefit. Many eastern suburbs dwellers used to the night-time crashing of possums on the roof might be surprised to know that Brushtail and Ringtail Possums have declined considerably in range and abundance due to fox predation. Brushtails in particular must frequently come to ground to forage and to access new trees in open woodland habitats. On the ground they are at considerable risk of predation if foxes are in high densities. Under these circumstances even modest levels of fox control may be sufficient to substantially improve their chances of survival. Ditto for Echidnas, Antechinus and the various lizards that occupy the reserve.

The task of effectively controlling foxes is daunting however. The productive and heterogeneous Mt Lofty Ranges landscape is fox heaven, with likely post-breeding densities of at least 4 foxes/ km<sup>2</sup>. A little basic mathematics ( $\pi r^2$ ) translates this into a staggering 1200 foxes in an area of 10 km radius. How can we ever hope to protect our patch when it seems there is a never-ending supply of foxes ready to replace those few removed by baiting? Are we making a difference?

At this stage it is impossible to know. For this reason I would like to see baseline mammal and reptiles surveys conducted soon which might enable future evaluation of our baiting program. It is possible of course that we are already contributing to biodiversity recovery and we don't know it. I would like to think that our contribution to the regional fox baiting program is at least adding to the general draw down of foxes in places like Belair and Cleland. So, while we might not be doing much for bandicoot conservation in WCR, we might just be contributing altruistically to the health of bandicoot populations elsewhere in the hills. I vote we keep baiting!

***The committee welcomes Peter Bird***

## ***Reflections of an ordinary member***

I had known about the reserve of course.

My wife Barbara had worked at CSIRO on Hartley Grove for a number of years, and she introduced me and the kids to a pleasant walking trail in the hills behind the Waite campus.

The steep bit up that gully, the lovely views from the top, initially to the gulf in the west, and later to the Belair ridge to the south, and then that difficult downhill bit past the big water tank, where the pebbles on the path were like ball bearings under your feet. Yes, I knew the reserve.

But it was only a walking track to me, through some pleasant scrub. I could tell a wattle from a eucalypt, and I could recognise that prickly bush that you shouldn't brush past, but that was about it.

Fortunately, I saw a notice advertising the initial meeting called to form the Friends – exactly three years ago as I write this. I attended, and a whole new world of interest opened up to me.

It is a world of native plant species and introduced weeds, of little pockets of remnant native vegetation which were all that remained after decades of intensive grazing, of dedicated scientists and amateur bush carers, and perhaps most of all, a sense of the long term, of the timelessness of nature.

At about the same time I retired, and joined the Friends of Urrbrae Wetland too. Here I started to learn about a range of native trees, shrubs and grasses which had been specially selected

as being typical of what would have existed prior to European settlement. They were all set out in relative isolation – easy to see and identify.

So armed with this limited knowledge, beginner's knowledge it is fair to say, it has been a real joy to me over the past three years to participate in working bees in the Waite Reserve and to come across many of those same species in the wild. And when you see them in the natural bush, it makes you realise how precious these remaining areas of woodland are.

Sure, I've still got plenty to learn, but it adds a new dimension to my awareness of nature to now be able to see and identify a little yellow *hibbertia*, a chocolate lily *arthropodium* or a *dianella* when previously I wouldn't even have noticed them. I would have just enjoyed that nice walking track.

It has also been good to get involved with weed eradication. I now know about the terrible spread of olives in the Adelaide Hills. But how is it that an intelligent person like me never previously recognised this as a major issue?

I am mildly angry that my primary and secondary education taught me about the glorious British colonies marked pink in the atlas, made me remember and recite the names of the major European rivers from the Vistula to the Guadalquivir, and served up truckloads of English poetry and other literature, but didn't give me any understanding of nature.

Happily, that situation is changing significantly for the better.

And even those darned olives have given me pleasure in the Waite Conservation Reserve. Why is that, you ask?

Because of one of my happiest memories in recent times is of a working bee in April 2003. A majestic red gum on the track from the top of Wild Dog Glen to the Southern boundary was surrounded by a thicket of juvenile olives. Over the years birds had sat on the branches, and dropped olive seeds which then germinated. There were scores and scores of them, from small seedlings to specimens about 2 meters high.

If they were not removed, the gum tree would have been starved of water and nutrients, and most probably would have died.

We pulled out the littlies, and cut and dabbed the larger specimens, and killed the lot.

On revisiting six months later, not one olive plant was to be seen. In their place, just as Waldo had predicted, was a carpet of bulbine lilies, rejoicing in the sunlight which had previously been blotted out by the olives.

I felt a sense of renewal, and of satisfaction that I had contributed to something good that would last far beyond my lifetime.

That's why I am a Friend of the Reserve.

**Joe Haslam**

## BOTANICA

### New plant record for WCR.

*Lobelia gibbosa* (Tall Lobelia), is a native annual plant that is sometimes mistaken for an orchid. It has pinkish stems and vivid sky-blue flowers with distinctively shaped curved petals (see photo). It is widespread in South-eastern Australia but is generally not abundant.



It was long predicted that this plant would be found in the Reserve, but it had remained elusive probably due to its summer flowering period. Early this January, Fred Distasio discovered it growing on the northern side of Hardy Block East. Together with Waldo he counted about 20 plants occurring in a strip about 8m x 2m.

This species has an interesting biology, being one of the few annual plants adapted to flowering in the heat of summer when the ground is bone dry. It initially comes up while the soil is still moist and grows rapidly as a fleshy stalk that then progressively dies off from the base as it starts flowering. If the dried straw-like bases are uprooted from the ground, the plant will remain fresh for several weeks and continue to flower and set fruit regardless, drawing on the moisture retained in the upper part of the stem.

*Photo and text by Peter Lang.*

The committee would like to acknowledge and thank Hal Osman, Honorary Auditor.