

NEWSLETTER

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Editor: Penny Paton



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New members are welcome. Contact Jennifer Gardner, Manager Waite Conservation Reserve, above

President's Page

Another year...but not just any year. This is the 10th anniversary of the Friends and the 20th since the Waite Conservation Reserve emerged as a twinkle in the eye of then campus Director Harold Woolhouse. The Friends officially came into being following a meeting at Urrbrae House on 26 February 2001.

If you were an engineer or property developer you might think that nothing much has changed in the reserve over the last 10 years. There have been no major developments - just the odd seat added - including a new one donated by the Goannas Walking Club reported overleaf. But if you are an ecologist or simply interested in the environment, you couldn't help notice the massive changes that have occurred. The dense olive shrubland of 10 years ago is rapidly disappearing, replaced by open grassy woodland like it used to be. Yes, some of those understorey species are exotics but we're working to run them out of the reserve.

The native grasses will be important allies in this quest. To find out who these allies were, resident botanist Peter Lang led a very successful Native Grass Survey in November. Thanks to Peter, Stephen Wait and visiting grassologists Rosemary Taplin, Tanya Milne and Ann Prescott for leading groups on the day. Peter's report inside confirms what we suspected, that the reserve continues to

support a very diverse assemblage of native grasses.

Not to be outdone Penny Paton, our Newsletter Editor and well-known ornithologist, has introduced a new segment: "Ornithologica" in competition to Pete's long running "Botanica" and more recent "Entomologica" series. In her first offering Penny talks about some of the 60-odd birds known from the reserve.

We had earlier promised a mid-summer night's bat survey with Terry Reardon. Unfortunately, time constraints prevented this happening and it will be re-scheduled next summer, perhaps as a Christmas gathering in December. In the meantime see inside for an invitation to Bird's Backyard Bat Box Building & BBQ Bash at my place in Thebarton on 21 May. The plan is to construct 14 bat roost boxes to erect in the reserve.

Don't be dissuaded by the AGM tag on the meeting advertised in this newsletter. After a very brief meeting we get down to the real business which is listening to our invited guest, Peggy Rismiller. Peggy is a world authority on echidnas and goannas having researched their ecology on Kangaroo Island for many years.

And of course with the coming of the cooler weather it is time again to engage with our patch every first Saturday and third Sunday of the month. The enclosed flyer calls these engagements "Working Bees" but this is simplistic and disconcerting for those for whom "work" is not the

most inspiring word in the dictionary. Yes we do work but working bees are so much more. Think of them instead as opportunities for exercise, learning, comradeship, and physical, emotional, spiritual and environmental health. Instead of calling them “Working Bees” perhaps we should call them “Wellbeing days”.

Peter Bird

Committee Member Profile – a regular report

Featuring.... Meg Byrt (Membership Secretary)

The Waite Conservation Reserve means a lot to Meg. It started as an ideal place for a one hour fitness walk 2 or 3 times a week, but then she thought her ‘gym’ fees were due and, after hearing about the working bees, decided this was a suitable way to pay them. So for the past 5 years at working bees, Meg has enjoyed not only weeding and planting, but data collecting, learning, and just appreciating the WCR, and all in the company of very skilled and knowledgeable fellow workers as well as beginners like herself. This has been very important to her because the previous 20 years living in South Aust. had been spent driving past the typical uninspiring ‘invasive weed roadside display’ with no idea what was being lost.

A few years ago, Meg and her husband bought land near Hindmarsh Falls on the Fleurieu Peninsula and are revegetating the now-fenced off kilometre of Riparian Zone. Meg has a Bush for Life site at the Falls, and this is a good reference point for her nearby revegetation project, and it also helps being able to contrast this area with the WCR.

Meg would love to see more South Australians recognize and enjoy their local native plants, propagate them where appropriate, and actively contribute to reducing the impact of invasive species by informed land management and voluntary weeding. Since retirement Meg has been a keen ‘composter’ and has successfully disposed of invasive weeds such as bridal creeper, watsonia, flowering scabiosa and flowering thistles in ‘hot’ compost heaps, and then fed the humus to her organic vegetable garden.

In June Meg is expecting to be a first-time grandmother and is likely to have considerable weekday childcare commitments, but what an opportunity to introduce another generation of South Australians to our beautiful flora!



Meg Byrt in her garden

The History of the Waite Conservation Reserve

by Enid Robertson

The following brief history of the Waite Conservation Reserve is based on a talk given by Enid Robertson at Urrbrae House on 26th February 2001 at a meeting to form the Friends of Waite Conservation Reserve.

History is fascinating:

“Never rely on secondary sources – go back to the original, the primary source.”

I find I have lived in historical times and oral history is what I remember of the events I have lived through and experienced.

Edgeloe’s excellent book (a secondary source, 1984), ‘The First 50 Years of the Waite Institute’, does not give me a mention, although some of the work I did is referred to in some detail. He refers to “the extensive advisory service given to other public institutions and bodies, and to private enquiries; over the two years 1952/53 for example, this service comprised 980 specimens [identified] requiring 255 formal reports.”

I worked at the Waite in the late 1940s and early 1950s and it was I who identified those 980 specimens!

Professor Trumble was then head of the Agronomy Department when I took over from Con Eardley, the systematic botanist at both the University of Adelaide North Terrace and Waite campuses. Con was on sabbatical leave and I, the raw recruit, a recent graduate, acted as botanist at the Waite. My duties included the role of weeds adviser to the Minister of Agriculture, until Hector Orchard began this job in the Department during my time at the Waite.

My first contact with the Waite Hills was in those early days of the late 1940s. I worked with wallaby grasses, *Danthonia* species, which we collected extensively from the Waite and elsewhere in South Australia, as well as from the Australian Alps, for breeding experiments. But this was not the first time that Waite staff had studied wallaby grasses. Ray Specht (now Emeritus Professor of Botany at Queensland University) recently wrote to me... "I searched in vain [in 1980] for the original *Danthonia* pastures behind the Waite which Jack Griffiths-Davies had studied in 1930..."

But let's move on... In 1990/91, as a member of the Mitcham Open Space Advisory Committee which was developing walking trails throughout Mitcham Council, I met with Harold Woolhouse, the then new Director of the Waite. The Waite was also interested in walking trails at this time and I was invited to join the Waite Campus Walking Committee (WCWC).

Harold was also very interested in work I was doing in restoring grassy woodlands using minimum disturbance methods, on the National Trust Reserve, Watiparinga, and in Belair/Eden Hills. Together with Jennifer Gardner, I had long walks in the Waite Hills land with Harold, finding many similarities between the grey box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*) grassy woodland of the Waite land and that of Watiparinga. In January 1992 Harold asked me to supervise students, experienced on Watiparinga, to remove environmental weeds (including small olives) from a good area of grassy woodland in the Hardy Block. The students made considerable progress in a short time and mapped the areas of pest plant removal and rare plant sites. They found the patch of blue devil (*Eryngium rostratum*) which is now the logo of the Friends of the Waite Conservation Reserve.

Harold was favourably impressed with the students' work and asked me to supervise further work, but instead I asked Harold to wait until Phil Shearman (a student who had worked on Watiparinga with me) returned from overseas, as he could both work and supervise. Minutes of a February meeting of the WCWC noted that Phil was to commence work

with some of Joan Gibbs' students from Salisbury Campus. The pay rate was \$7 per hour, from the \$10 000 allocated to weed control. And so began Phil's mammoth commitment, which is continuing, to the Waite Hills land – now the Waite Conservation Reserve.

In March 1992 the Waite Hills Management Committee was formed. Sheep were progressively removed from the hills land – and with them miles of fencing. A Heritage Agreement was applied for in March 1994 to protect forever this wonderful bushland; documentation was approved by Department for Environment and Natural Resources in January 1997 - **but signing is still pending, and has yet to be finalised.**

With Harold Woolhouse's untimely death on 19 June 1996 we lost the Reserve's staunchest advocate.

Phil Shearman's work has continued, funds continue to flow and beautiful gum trees are now released from the clutches of olive trees. An informal Friends group, fully supported by Prof. Malcolm Oades and Vice-Chancellor Mary O'Kane, was begun in February 1997.

The time is now ripe for the formation of an enthusiastic, vigorous Friends group to support and nurture the 160 hectares of Hills Face land – 'The Waite Conservation Reserve'.

I now make a formal proposal:

"That the Friends of the Waite Conservation Reserve be formed."



This **pesky pheasant** has terrorized several people in the WCR over the past few months. It is a Reeve's Pheasant, presumably an escapee from an aviary, as the species is endemic to China. First seen before Christmas 2010, there were still reports at least until February 2011. According to Wikipedia, this species is known to be aggressive towards humans, animals and other pheasants.

The Goannas Walking Group Seat

The Goannas walking group has donated a seat to the Waite Conservation Reserve. This seat commemorates the life of Jenny Prider (1940-2010), who for many years was the leader of our group. She died in July, 2010 as a result of severe injuries sustained in a road accident. Jenny was a very keen walker, and frequently went on 7-10 day treks all over Australia. She had walked the entire length of the Heysen Trail, and her ashes were scattered along it. She frequently walked in the Adelaide Hills. The seat has been installed by Stephen Wait and his crew beside the Yurrebilla Trail on Netherby Spur. It was made by members of the Goannas from recycled steel and recycled *Eucalyptus diversicolor* (Karri) timber.

Kevin Handreck

8272 3371



Goannas and seat (above and below)



Ornithologica

By Penny Paton

Over the past few years we have had Botanica and Entomologica, descriptions of plants and insects of the Reserve penned by Peter Lang, as well as an

article on skinks by Peter Bird in the Spring 2009 Newsletter. So I thought – what about a series of articles on some of the birds of Waite Conservation Reserve? Thus I begin a series of ornithological musings from a bird-watcher of some years, but one who has little systematic knowledge of the Waite birds – so if you think I have it wrong, I would love to hear from you – pennypaton@adam.com.au.

As it is autumn, I thought I would begin with observations peculiar to this time of the year. The archetypal tree of the Reserve – the grey box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*) – flowers in most years in March and April. The extended drought and the unusually wet spring-summer of 2010-11 have led to some changes in eucalypt flowering times generally and it seems that the grey box is flowering later this year too.

When grey box covered much of the southern Adelaide area, it must have been an exciting time for bird-watchers, with honeyeaters, lorikeets and Swift Parrots in great abundance. These honeyeaters would have included the spectacular Regent Honeyeaters – now regrettably no longer seen in this state. Likewise the endangered Swift Parrot no longer visits the Mt Lofty Ranges and rarely the South-East.

Now we are more likely to see Red Wattlebirds, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and White-naped Honeyeaters using the blossom, as well as the now ubiquitous Rainbow and Musk Lorikeets. You may also notice honeyeaters probing under the bark of grey box and SA blue gum (*E. leucoxylon*) for alternative carbohydrates, like honeydew. Apart from grey box, the major source of nectar in autumn for nectarivorous birds is the box mistletoe (*Amyema miquellii*). The honeyeater most likely to be seen probing these elegant reddish flowers high in the canopy are the New Holland Honeyeaters, with their distinctive yellow flash in the wing.

The Biological Survey of WCR in November 2008 recorded 45 bird species and Red Wattlebird and Rainbow Lorikeet were two of the four most frequently recorded species. Both of these large and aggressive birds have probably increased since European settlement, with the Rainbow Lorikeet, in particular, making spectacular inroads in suburban Adelaide over the past 30 years. It is likely that their increase, together with invasions of Noisy Miners, has led to the decline of some smaller birds like Red-rumped Parrot, the smaller honeyeaters and several of the thornbills. Loss of habitat, and fragmentation and degradation of the remnants, has hastened these declines. While the ongoing

habitat restoration activities in the Reserve will benefit the native plants, it will be interesting to see if there is any concomitant improvement in the richness of bird species using the Reserve – my opinion is that it probably will not, as the birds using the Waite lands are partly a reflection of what is happening in the greater landscape, where we are destined to lose many passerine bird species without large-scale habitat creation.



Musk Lorikeet – an increaser species



Noisy Miner – another increaser species



Yellow-faced Honeyeater (Photo: Lydia Paton)

BIRD'S BACKYARD BAT BOX BUILDING BASH



Saturday 21 May 2011
10.00 am – 1.00 pm
BBQ lunch to follow

3 Ross St, Thebarton

Join Peter Bird in his back yard to help build 14 bat roost boxes, one for each vegetation community represented in the Waite Conservation Reserve.

RSVP: 8352 3046
or pbjbird@chariot.net.au

BYO:

Tools: panel saw, hammer, cordless drill
Food: salad or dessert to share; drinks.
Bread & meat supplied

Working bees are held on the 1st Saturday & 3rd Sunday of each month

Sat. May 7th
Sat. June 4th

Sun. April 17th
Sun. May 15th
Sun. June 19th

9 am – 12.30 pm

12.30 – 1.00 pm FREE SAUSAGE SIZZLE

Meeting place

Meet at 9 am at Gate 82 into the Reserve, which is off Hillside Rd, Springfield, next to water tanks. See map overleaf.

Activities

Anticipated activities include continuing revegetation of the building landfill site on the western slope of the Reserve, now known as “Netherby Knoll”, and ongoing revegetation and weed control in Koala Gully and Carrick Hill slope.

Contact

Stephen Wait

0410 695 719

*Working bees are your chance to get to know the reserve better.
Come and help us protect and reinstate the original vegetation*