NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2011
NUMBER 22
Editor: Penny Paton

President: *Peter Bird* ***Secretary:*** *Helen Pryor* ***Treasurer:*** *Lynda Yates* ***Membership Secretary****: Meg Byrt*
Committee: *Peter Barnes, Jennifer Gardner, Peter Lang, Stephen Wait, Penny Paton*
Address: *Friends of Waite Conservation Reserve, Uni of Adelaide, Waite Campus, PMB 1, GLEN OSMOND 5064*
Phone: *8303 7405* ***Fax:*** *8303 6826*
Email: *jennifer.gardner@adelaide.edu.au*
Website: *www.waite.adelaide.edu.au/reserve/*

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

President's Page

This spring looks like being another belter. After a record wet start followed by reasonable winter falls the reserve is poised for a second consecutive boom year. The Blue Gums are flowering prodigiously and their branches holler and gyrate with the collective madness of a thousand lorikeets and red wattlebirds high on sugar.

During drought, moisture-starved plants suspend growth and nutrients slowly accumulate. Stand back though when the rains finally come because the combination of water and massed nutrients is a potent brew. 'Ka-boom' is the word which springs to mind when I see the amazing growth in the reserve since last year's drought-breaking rains. In Leafhopper Gully, Sticky Hop-bushes scattered as seeds into piles of burnt olive prunings just two winters ago, now stand taller than me. Importantly they are starting to form small thickets which hopefully will nurture Fairy-wrens and other small bush birds in future. Red gum saplings have also gone crazy.

Unfortunately there is another plant currently jumping out of the ground. Seedling olives are coming up by the truckload in areas recently cleared of parent plants by Stephen and the university work crew. It is important we get these before their roots inveigle their way into the rocky substrate and become impossible to pull. I urge you to take the opportunity to do a little olive weeding whenever you go for walks in the reserve. Consult Stephen's map inside this issue for a good place to start. It shows where olives have recently been cleared and where no doubt there will be plenty of seedlings to tackle.

It isn't often that the reserve features in the national media, let alone local and state newspapers, radio and television. All the fuss was over a herd of 14 Fallow Deer that had taken up residence. The university has been pursuing control options, mightily assisted by Andy Baker who has spent many hours in the reserve carefully studying their movements.

This edition includes an invitation to a bat box building workshop & barbeque at my place on 17 September. The plan is to construct 14 bat roost boxes to erect in the reserve, but more so to catch up with fellow Friends members. All welcome. Another postponed event, a bat survey with Terry Reardon, has again been deferred until next year due to Terry's ongoing commitments.

In an effort to engage better with community groups the *Weed Management Society of SA* has bestowed complimentary membership on Friends of Parks groups including FWCR. The society is running a 'Practical Environmental Weed Management' Seminar at Waite campus on 19th October and will include a guided walk through the reserve. Registration details are not yet available but email shauna.potter@sa.gov.au for further information.

Peter Bird

Ornithologica II

Penny Paton

As spring is the time that many bird species breed, I will focus on some of the birds that are likely to breed in the reserve. One of the most evocative sounds of the late spring is the incessant begging calls of juvenile Australian Magpies. Magpies have already built their largish untidy stick nests by now and some will have eggs or young in the nest. Swooping magpies can be a problem at this time of year and I wonder if you have ever experienced this behavior on your walks in the Waite Conservation Reserve. Although magpies generally place their nests quite high in trees, presumably to protect their progeny from predators, they are still susceptible to nest predation. Several years ago when walking through the Adelaide Parklands I witnessed a Brush-tailed Possum taking young birds from a magpie nest in broad daylight.

Australian Magpie, North Parklands (Photo: Lydia Paton)

Tree Martin, Coongie Lakes (Photo: Lydia Paton)

Striated Pardalote (D. Paton photo collection)

A bird with a very different nesting style is the Striated Pardalote. This species is more often heard than seen, with the 'chip chip' call alerting the careful observer to this tiny bird, gleaning from the leaves of eucalypt. While pardalotes have been recorded nesting in holes in buildings and walls, they are most likely to nest in tree hollows with small openings. Here they lay three to five (usually four) eggs in a nest lined with soft dry grasses and finely shredded bark. The eggs are white, as are many eggs of hollow-nesters.

Another small hollow-nester is the Tree Martin. These supremos of the aerial world are often confused with the more common Welcome Swallow but they are slightly smaller and have a squared-off tail (not forked as in the swallow) and a pale rump. They are listed as one of the declining birds of the Mt Lofty Ranges as their population seems to have decreased markedly over the past 20- 30 years. Once flocks of several thousands gathered on power lines in our part of Gilberton in autumn preparatory to their migration to warmer climes, but now an exceptional year will see barely one hundred. The reasons for this decline are not known, but a reduction in their insect prey has been suggested as one likely cause. Tree Martins lay usually four eggs on a saucer-shaped mattress of small dry leaves in a hollow, generally in a horizontal branch. If the hollow entrance is too large, the birds will fill it with small pellets of mud so that the hole is only 50mm across.

The Waite Conservation Reserve is well provided with hollows in the grey box and river red gum trees and another hollow-nester is the Crimson (or Adelaide) Rosella. This common Hills bird chooses hollows that are seven metres or higher from the ground and lay four, five or rarely six eggs on wood-dust at the bottom of the hollow.

Crimson Rosella (D. Paton photo collection)

Clues for nesting birds are many and varied – birds hanging around in one spot for a length of time, (for hollow-nesters) birds inspecting or visiting hollows, adult birds carrying nesting material or food, and calls of young birds either in the nest or from fledglings. While it is thrilling to observe birds nesting, it is important that we do not inadvertently prejudice the outcome of their nesting, so don't draw attention to the nest site by staying too long or interfering in any way with the nest. Birds will often nest again if the first attempt fails, and some species will nest multiple times in a season, especially if the late spring/summer weather is mild, as it was over 2010-11.

Corporate Clothing – Peter Bird

The other day I was called upon to do my Presidential duties and speak to a group about the reserve. Thinking there may be the odd prospective member (and wanting to look sharp) I went via the local printing shop and had the Friends blue devil logo emblazoned across my chest (actually on a T-shirt – I'm still not quite ready for a tattoo). Our logo is an eye-catching bit of artwork and I wore it proudly as I shared my passion for the reserve.

People often walk past us at working bees. Sometimes we engage with them, sometimes we don't. I wonder whether we might better promote our group to these prospective members by advertising ourselves via the Friends logo.

Printed T-shirts, the cheapest option, are hardly a suitable garment to keep out the winter cold or protect against summer UV. Long-sleeved work shirts or polar fleeces are a better option but can be pricey. One way to circumvent this is to print the logo onto a top you already own. Alternatively, given our typical pose at working bees - head down, bum up - you might choose to print the logo where it will most likely be seen …on the seat of your pants! I welcome your thoughts.

BIRD'S BACKYARD BAT BOX BUILDING BASH

Saturday 24 September 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: cordless drill, hammer,
Food: salad or dessert to share; drinks.
Bread & meat supplied

AGM – May 25th 2011

A very successful AGM was held on 25th May 2011, with an inspirational address by Dr Peggy Rismuller about echidnas (see below for a summary of her echidna information by Peter Bird).

There was also the celebratory 10th Anniversary Cake, made by Committee member Meg Byrt and we thank Meg for the magnificent milestone memorabilia – photo below.

Echidnas – curiouser and curiouser

At first meeting Echidnas can be a little prickly. Perhaps this is why they are still so poorly known despite being the most widespread of all Australian mammals. In case you missed our wonderful AGM speaker, Dr Peggy Rismiller, here are a few facts about this amazing and enigmatic member of the Waite fauna:

It took 92 years before Europeans discovered that Echidnas lay eggs

Echidnas have mechano-receptors in their feet through which they feel vibrations, thus warning when a predator is near

Their optimal body temperature is 31-33°C, the lowest of any mammal

They are the only mammal with backward facing hind-limbs enabling them to dig vertically downwards

Even experts find them impossible to sex

'Trains' of up to 10 males follow in single-file behind an oestrus female but she mates only once

Their cloaca is extendable allowing the single egg to be deposited directly into the pouch

A baby Echidna (puggle) weighs just 1/3 gram at birth, equivalent to 1/8 the weight of the Aussie 5 cent coin which it adorns.

The female leaves the developing puggle in a burrow and returns to feed it once every 5 days, at which time it consumes 37% of its body weight.

Echidnas become sexually mature at 5-12 years and live for 50.

Updated Plant List for WCR

Many thanks to well-known botanist and Committee member, Peter Lang, for putting together an updated plant list for the Reserve. This is a large amount of work as there have been multiple versions of the list for a number of years and a lot of checking and taxonomic changes to pull together.

The list will be available on the Friends website soon. There have been 387 plant species recorded for WCR (of course not all are native species) and Peter has provided threatened status, where appropriate, and occurrence in the Reserve.

A new bird for the reserve

Aptonym *n.* A proper name that aptly describes the occupation of the person, especially by coincidence. eg. Peter Bird, ornithologist.

It's true, there is a word to describe people like me whose name befits their occupation! I have been a bird-watcher since forever and have worked professionally as an ornithologist during part of my biological career, so yes my moniker is an *aptonym*.

And at the risk of stealing our ornithological Editor's thunder, I want to report a new bird for the reserve, an Olive-backed Oriole. Red of bill, stripy of breast and yes, olive of back, this elegant Miner-sized bird was seen in upper Wild Dogs Glen in July.

Immature Olive-backed Oriole, Newland Head CP (Photo: Lydia Paton)

ObOs are very uncommon visitors to South Australia so it was quite exciting to see one in our patch. Reminiscent of a honeyeater, the oriole's closest relatives, though obscure, are probably cuckoo-shrikes and whistlers. They feed mostly on fruit and insects which they generally obtain from the forest canopy.

I note that orioles are known to eat olives, so wonder whether the bird was in the reserve for this reason. Thankfully it was sitting in a Grey Box and not an olive at the time or I doubt I would have seen its olive back among the foliage. Reminds me of the joke: Why did the elephant paint his toe-nails red? Answer: to hide in a cherry tree!

Peter Bird

Working Bee report and plans

Working Bees are continuing on the first Saturday and third Sunday of every month in the Reserve, meeting at 9am.

It rained on the July working bee days this year, so one was completely abandoned and one was understandably attended by fewer friends. Still, we managed to continue with plantings, as was the case in the first August working bee.

The emphasis switched more to weeding for the Sunday August bee, and we weeded the spurge and Tangier Pea growing above Wild Dogs Glen, as well as then planting, and finally weeding Cape Tulip from amongst lilies on Pultenaea Hill.

For the forthcoming working bees in September and October we will be meeting at the driveway to Springwood Park, off the Eagle on the Hill road. Most of the activity will be hand weeding around the Urrbrae Ridge and Pultenaea Hill areas, with some additional planting in September. This time of spring is when certain weeds become apparent, particularly Cape Tulip and African Weed Orchid.

The November working bees, and the final one for the year on Saturday December 3rd, will be at Netherby Knoll, where we will be weeding and watering the revegetation site there. That site is now fairly well established after two years, so I envisage it will become less of an emphasis for the Friends Group from next year. Meet at Gate 82, off Hillside Rd, Springfield for the November and December working bees.

Seedlings

The Reserve has boxes of seedlings which need to be cared for over summer ready for planting next year. These have already germinated but are not robust enough to be planted out this year. They include wattles and bursaria. Anyone who is able to take some and water them over summer could contact me on 0410 695 719. Likewise, anyone who wishes to grow some plants themselves from seed should contact me. We can supply the materials and seed.

We also have a number of grey box seedlings which are surplus to our requirements in the Reserve. If anyone would like some for their home or property, or for revegetation in another reserve, please contact me. They are all grown from local seed.

Stephen Wait

Olive Weed Control in the Waite Conservation Reserve

More than eleven years ago I was asked by Scott Field, who was interested in the Waite Conservation Reserve (the Reserve), for some advice on olive control. I knew Scott from elsewhere, and I was working for a bush regeneration and environmental weed control company at the time, so Scott was interested in my opinion. We went for a walk, beginning in Wild Dogs Glen, and I was confronted by an overgrown mess of felled olives, failed olive control, olive seedlings and bridal creeper. Besides the enormous task itself, I saw access enabling work as a major issue, and so one of my first pieces of advice was to burn some of the material. A walk up Wild Dogs Glen today is a totally different experience, with the Glen free of olives, with space and regeneration, and with very little bridal creeper.
I was asked to write an article for this newsletter on the subject of olive control, and particularly to explain some recent mapping which has been done of olives in the Reserve. Since that first walk with Scott, I have worked in the Reserve with many others, both paid staff and volunteers. I began working with Bryan Both, whom some may remember, and once he left I have managed and planned weed control in the Reserve. It should be noted that the University's commitment and funding of weed control in the Reserve is exceptional. Many parks, including National Parks, receive only sporadic funding for weed control, or are solely reliant on the efforts of volunteers and grant funding.

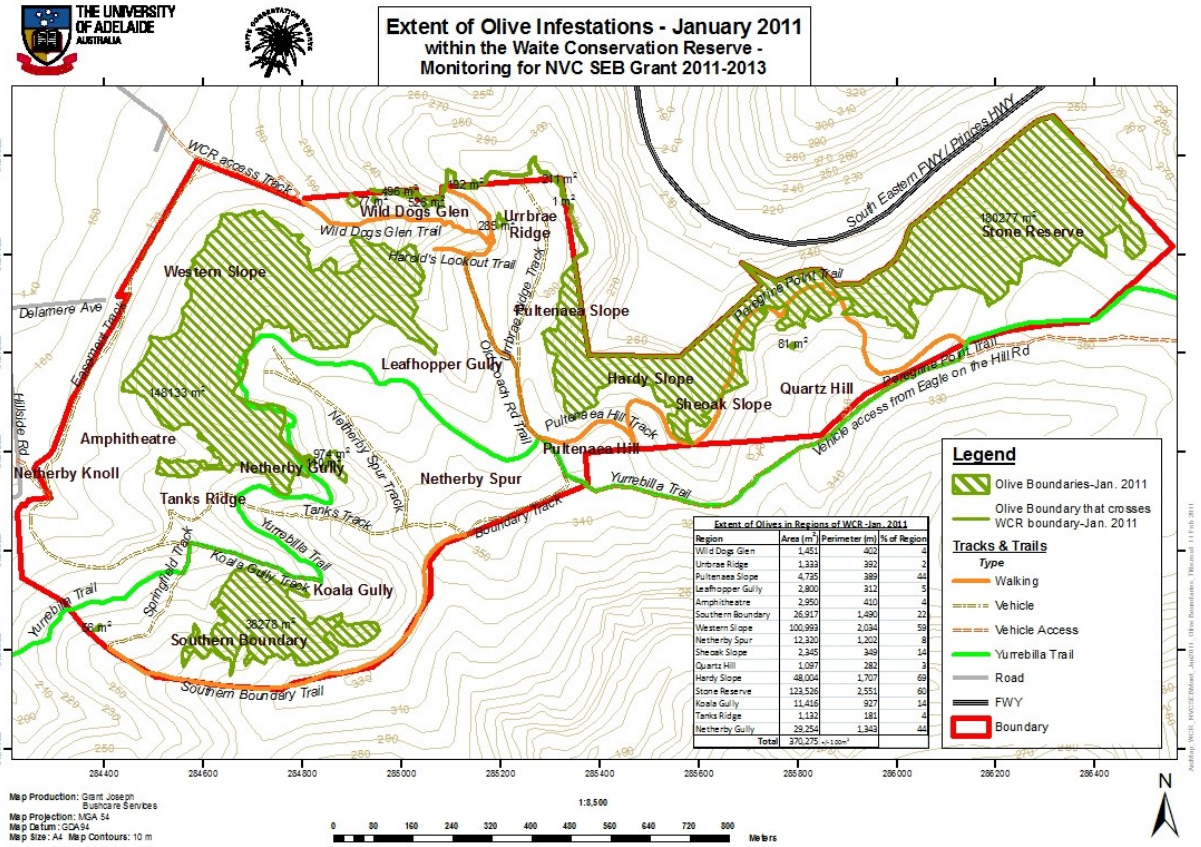
Because of my role in the Reserve, I am very aware of the presence of olives and also aware of the absence of olives in areas we have worked. The casual visitor often only sees the olives which remain. The methods I use do not leave evidence or monuments to past weed control, so after a year or two it is as if there were never olives there in the first place. I regularly meet walkers in the Reserve who comment and compliment on all the good work we have done over the years, and how much better it looks. I also meet walkers who say "What are you going to do about all the olives?", or "Every time I come up here there are more olives". Conversely it has been questioned whether I am removing the olives too quickly because they provide bird habitat, and some people are sentimental about olives because they like the fruit.

I believe the best way to understand olive control in the Reserve is to take a walk through it, and I am happy to show interested people around. Also helpful in illustrating effective olive control are maps and some time lapse photography. I will begin with some photos of Netherby Gully, showing work done there over the last year and a half. The work done in this area also shows in the maps which follow.

Photo . Netherby Gully in February 2010, before commencement of weed control

Photo 2 Netherby Gully in February 2010, after weed control

Photo 3 Netherby Gully in June 2011, 14 months after initial weed control



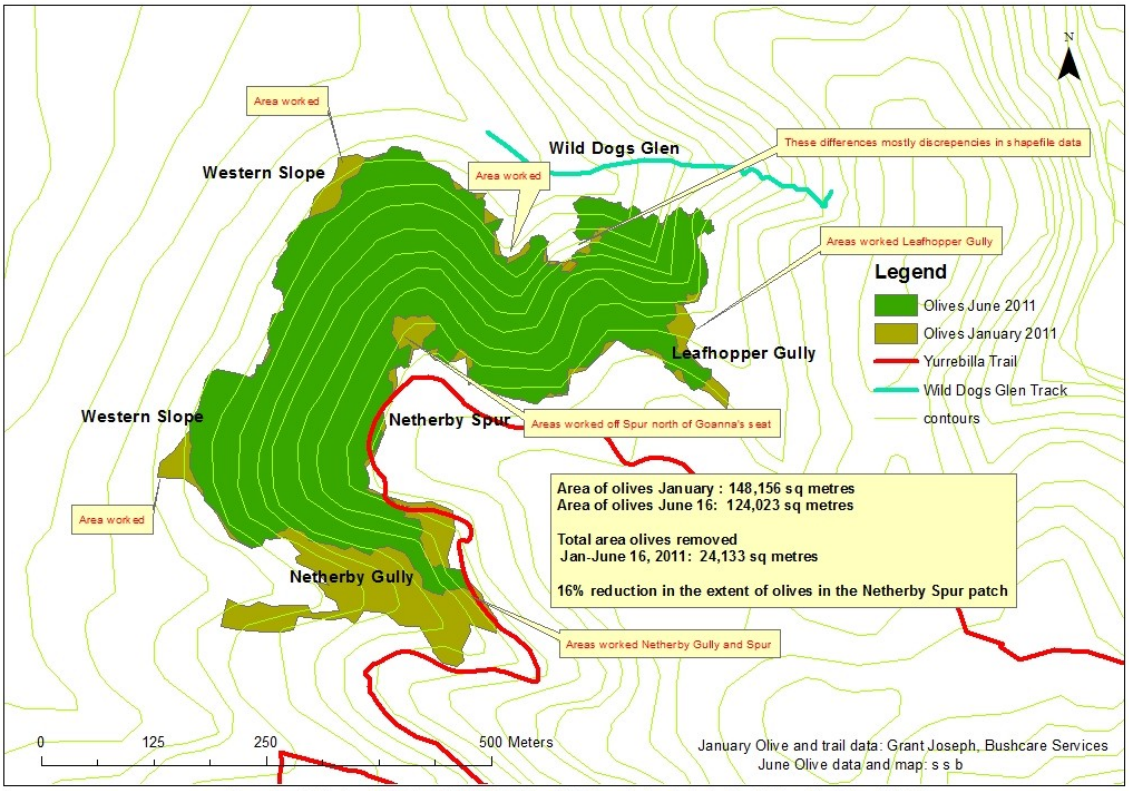
The Extent of Olive Infestations map shows the extent of olives in the Reserve, January 2011. The map was produced by Grant Joseph of Bushcare Services for the University of Adelaide. The method used to produce the map was walking the boundaries of the olive infested areas, plotting the coordinates using a GPS. Using mapping software, the area was then mapped and quantified. The plan was to produce this type of map every year to show changes in the extent of olive infestation.

The January 2011 map shows three distinct areas of olives remain. The largest extends from Stone Reserve through to the gully beneath Urrbrae Ridge. The second largest patch is the Netherby Spur patch, and the smallest is the patch from one side of Koala Gully to the Southern Boundary.

It should first be noted that work on olives over the past ten years has reduced the olives to these three distinct patches.

The spaces between these areas show where olives have been removed because prior to beginning my work in the Reserve these areas were all joined. Olive control had been undertaken before my time, but unfortunately while it was well meant, it was ineffectual. In some cases olives were not poisoned, only cut down to re-grow. In some cases poisoning was attempted, but without knowledge of an effective technique. The result was re-growth of poisoned olive trees together with a whole new generation growing in amongst the debris.

Extent of Olives, Netherby Spur Patch, Waite Conservation Reserve, Jan and June 16 2011



The Extent of Olives , Netherby Spur map is one I made in June this year, using the same methods as the in the original map. It is only of the Netherby Spur patch, and shows a 16% reduction in the area of olives over the six months from January to June 2011. Since this map was produced work has continued in Netherby Gully and Leafhopper Gully resulting in further reduction of olives. More recently (and not included in the subject area of the above map), work on olives has been undertaken in Koala and Mistletoe Gullies.

Olives are the primary weed in the Reserve, and it follows that the control of olives is a very important part of management in the Reserve. However, it is not the only component of Reserve management, or an end in itself. It forms part of integrated weed control, pest control and revegetation programmes. I look forward to a day when management of the Reserve will be less about olive control and more about gradual and sometimes subtle improvements in the vegetation. I have never had a deadline or a timetable to complete olive control in the Reserve. Instead, my aim is to be thorough in the areas I work, and leave them secure from re-infestation by olives. Using this method, clear lines of control have been established, which are the boundaries seen in the maps. Areas once cleared can begin to rehabilitate, be treated for secondary weed control of other selected weed species, and natural regeneration can begin in the better areas. All this is subsidized with an intensive revegetation programme which focuses on replacing the missing midstory and lower shrub species. With current levels of funding and using these methods I believe we will remove the patch of olives from Koala Gully altogether within two years.

Chris Kaczan, then President of the Friends group, once said in a committee meeting, “We need a vision, we need a plan”. This is my vision, this is my plan.

Stephen Wait

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

		Sun.	Sept 18th
Sat.	Oct 1st	**Sun.**	Oct 16th
Sat.	Nov 5th	**Sun.**	Nov 20th
Sat.	Dec 3rd		

9 am – 12.30 pm

12.30 – 1.00 pm FREE SAUSAGE SIZZLE

Meeting place

For September and October working bees, meet at 9 am at the driveway to Springwood Park, off the Eagle on the Hill road.
For the November and December working bees, meet at gate 82, off Hillside Rd, Springfield

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

Andy and Liam erect a new table and chairs at the bottom of Wild Dogs Glen, part of the celebration of 10 years of the Friends of the Waite Conservation Reserve. (Photo: Peter Bird)