

# FRIENDS OF WAITE CONSERVATION RESERVE Inc.



## COMING EVENTS



THE UNIVERSITY  
of ADELAIDE

## President's message

### Farewell Jennifer

It is the end of an era. Jennifer Gardner 'retired' on 24 February 2017 after 31 years as esteemed manager of the Waite Arboretum. She inspired and supervised major innovations in the 'Arb' which led to it (and her) achieving an international reputation for excellence. For this and for services to conservation and the environment she was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) earlier this year. I could not think of anyone more deserving.

But it was her vision, passion, dedication and sheer hard work that led to the creation of Waite Conservation Reserve and ultimately to our Friends group that for us deserves celebration. Simply put, without her I doubt I would be sitting here writing this, for the reserve would not exist.

With Waite Director Harold Woolhouse, Jennifer co-founded the reserve and over the next 20+ years presided over a million things including the removal of sheep, securing Heritage agreements, training bushcarers, attracting significant grant monies, employing staff and contractors, writing management plans and creating superb Arcview maps.

She has established and monitored photo points, managed the website, conducted bushfire threat mitigation, created

interpretive walks with signage and pamphlets, attended working bees and engaged with researchers. But above all she created, liaised with, supported and championed the Friends group. It was always an absolute pleasure to work with her: committed, always professional, always fun.

Over her time at the helm we have seen the reserve transform from a series of grazed sheep paddocks to a large and Nationally important remnant of living, breathing Grey Box Grassy Woodland.

I wish Jennifer, our Jennifer, a wonderful retirement, of sorts, because I know she has many projects, including hopefully remaining an integral part of the Friends group. And fittingly, it is with great pleasure that I announce that Dr Jennifer Gardner (OAM) has very kindly agreed to be Patron of the Friends of Waite Conservation Reserve.

As Jennifer moves on, Dr Kate Delaporte is Acting Curator of the Arboretum and manager of Waite Conservation Reserve.

Welcome Kate.

*Peter Bird*

# Working Bees

Last year's working bee season ended up with 28 of us contributing 500-odd volunteer hours to control seedling and re-growth olives and other weeds on 85 percent of the reserve.

The first working bee of this year will break with tradition and be held on the **fourth** Sunday, **23 April**, due to a clash with Easter the previous week. Thereafter working bees will revert to the **first Saturday** and **third Sunday** of the month through to December. Put the dates in the diary now!

Just when we thought it was safe to go back in the reserve after hammering olive seedlings for the past three years, the coming season is shaping up as a nasty one for olive germination. Just as the very wet spring and summer have been a boon for germinating native plants – I have particularly noticed seedling *Acacias*, *Bursaria*, *Einadia*, *Atriplex* and *Enchylaena* – so it has also been for olives. Rather than being a bad thing, this 'big olive year' presents a great opportunity to seriously deplete the seed bank. All we have to do is do them!

This means you. With the first working bee still 6 weeks away, I urge you all to take a walk on the next cool day and make a start on the hordes. Rather than starting with a plan of walking 3 or 4 km, why not start instead with a goal of pulling 200 olive seedlings. It shouldn't take long if you head to the Netherby Gully/Mistletoe Gully/Southern Boundary areas.

See the map for the meeting place.

Wear clothing/boots suitable for the day. Bring a drink and something to eat so that we can have a chat at the end of the walk.

Phone 0418-853-834 for further information.

*Peter Bird*

## Autumn/Early Winter Walking Bees 2017

**April:** Sunday 23rd

**May:** Saturday 6th and Sunday 21st

**June:** Saturday 3rd and Sunday 18th



Jennifer in her element: controlling olives.

John Montessi photo

# Basal Bark Treatment Grant

FWCR has recently secured a Community NRM Action Grant of \$5,000 to investigate the potential for Basal Bark Treatment to control feral olives. The committee has agreed that we contribute an additional \$2,000. BBT involves spraying the stems and lignotuber with a mix of triclopyr herbicide and bio-oil (see article in Newsletter 33). Early trials suggest it might be very effective on olives and much cheaper than the usual 'drill-and-fill' method used by contractors in the reserve. However it is still a relatively new technique for olives, and we all know how resilient they are, so it is in our interest to establish and monitor trials over an extended period. Our project is in three main parts:

## ***Procure a contractor to undertake 3 days of BBT olive control***

We have contracted experienced BBT practitioner Greg Donovan (pictured) of Donovan's Earthcare to undertake the control work. Greg has already conducted 2 days on the western slopes, chosen for its accessibility for the workshop and because there are few native plants that might be affected by the herbicide. The fate of selected sprayed trees will be monitored for 10 years to determine the long term efficacy of the technique.

## ***Conduct a BBT workshop***

Greg will demonstrate the technique at a workshop Thurs 30 March 9.30am-12.30pm meeting at Gate 61 into Wild Dogs Glen. RSVP to me on [pjbird1@bigpond.com](mailto:pjbird1@bigpond.com), but you may be disappointed. Participation will be capped at 30 and we already have 25 registered.

## ***Purchase materials for FWCR to undertake additional control***

Contractors are expensive. Volunteers are cheap. Already I have commenced treating an area in Pittosporum Gully with chemical, oil and spray equipment supplied to us by Greg Donovan.

*Peter Bird*



**Greg Donovan demonstrating the BBT technique**

## Have You Seen??

Anyone with a passing interest in birds cannot have failed to notice the sudden appearance of Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos on the Adelaide Plains over the past 14 years. At Gilberton we first recorded this species in January 2003, with two birds seen flying over, and they were about until early February of the next year. In late 2003 the birds appeared early, with the first record in October and sightings of up to four birds continued until early February. This pattern of arrival in late spring/early summer and disappearance in late January/early February has continued until the present, with the exceptions of the spring/summer of 2004/05 (only one record on 27/12/04) and 2008-09 (only one record on 16/11/08).

Birds were almost always seen flying over in numbers from one to a handful but, in one year, a flock of about 12 was seen drinking from a horse trough in the North Parklands and larger numbers have been seen at other locations on the Plains. Numbers around suburban Adelaide increased notably in the summer of 2009-10, with the biggest flock to date being about 50 birds at Kooyonga Golf Club on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2017 (G. Carpenter pers. comm.). In addition on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2015 three birds (probably a pair and an immature bird) were roosting in a large river red gum *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* in Gilbert Street adjacent to the River Torrens at dusk and I suspect they stayed the night there. As far as I know this is the only record of over-nighting on the Plains. The typical pattern of behaviour at Gilberton is for birds to be flying north west in the morning and south east towards the Hills in the evening. When they are seen perched on the Plains it is almost always in pine trees, where they are feeding on seeds within the cones.

Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos breed in the forests of the Mt Lofty Ranges and from the earliest times they appear to have come to the Plains to forage although the numbers and regularity are difficult to ascertain; one of the early records was from the Reedbeds, where Captain S.A. White (1919) reported: "My father records this bird for the early days, and there is little doubt that they visited the *banksia* scrubs which existed then."

Samuel White, the father in question, was seven years old when his family arrived in the colony in 1836 and he died in 1880 (Linn 1989). Thus the period we are talking about for the cockatoos was the middle of the nineteenth century. In a review of the parrots in the Adelaide region, Symonds Clark in 1889 regarded it as an occasional visitor to the plains near Adelaide (Carpenter 1911).



**Yellow Tailed Black Cockatoo**

David Cook Wildlife Photography

There are more records from the Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu Peninsula, but even so the numbers of birds seen are small and the fact that observers bothered to note them suggests that they were unusual. Writing about the period from 1880 to 1915, Crompton (1915) says of the Stonyfell district: "This bird has almost disappeared. Years ago they were fairly plentiful in the stringy bark ranges." The only other comparatively early record was of Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos at Humbug Scrub in September 1916 which was unusual for this locality (Bellchambers 1917). All other records in the 1920s, 1930s and early 1940s relatively close to Adelaide are of small numbers of birds.

# Yellow Tailed Black Cockatoos

They include Kuitpo (1920), Ambleside (1926), Scott's Creek, Blackwood and Marble Hill (1928), Inman Valley (1929), Bridge-water (1935) and Basket Range (1946). Apart from the Humbug Scrub record there is only one record from north of Adelaide - a resident at Salisbury reported one cockatoo at the end of August 1944 (Crompton 1944).

Nearly all these records are from spring and summer (like the Adelaide Plains visitations in the early 2000s) and in fact Symons (1946) specifically describes Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos as a summer visitor from his two year survey, 1945-46, from a Willunga property where he lived.



YTBC with their new favoured food: a pine cone.

Photo: R.Plumtree

Early on the close relationship between Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos and introduced pines was noticed, with White (1920) reporting: "There seems to be quite a number of these birds which spend most of the year in the forest [Kuitpo], they have discovered the oily and sweet pine seeds. ...These birds prefer the seeds of *Pinus maritimus* (now *P. pinaster*) to those of *Pinus insignis* (now *P. radiata*), this is easily understood when we know that the seeds of the former are larger and much more easily got at in comparison to the latter tree."

Presumably as the birds' native food, seeds of banksias and hakeas and grubs in yacca stems, became less common through clearance, they had no option but to switch to the introduced pine seeds. The cockatoo's favourite food on the Plains over the past 14 years is the Aleppo Pine (J. van Weenen pers. comm.).

Why have the cockatoos suddenly re-appeared on the Plains? It has been suggested that the adult birds come down to the Plains to feed (and particularly to feed their young which are produced in summer) due to a dearth of food near their nesting hollows. Their appearance coincides with the beginning of the Millennium drought (which may still be in progress despite our wet 2016-early 2017) and this may be no more than a coincidence.

Another theory is that so many wild pine trees have been removed in the Ranges to improve the condition of native vegetation that there is insufficient food close to nesting sites for the population. An alternative hypothesis is that the population is increasing and therefore adult birds are being forced to find new foraging sites, but the paragraph below suggests that this is not the case.

Counts of the species in the Adelaide/Mt Lofty region over the last few years have come up with a total of about 2000 birds but, as they are long-lived birds, this is no cause for complacency. It also is dwarfed by the record of tens of thousands on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1932 at Bucks Camp (now in Ngarkat Conservation Park in the Upper South East), a place with "rich loam growing sheoaks and huge narrow-leaved banksias" (Harvey 1933).

What this story of the Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo in the Adelaide/Mt Lofty Region over the past 150 years highlights the importance of non-native plants for some native fauna and the ease with which some species can find and exploit new food resources. In the meantime enjoy the sound and sight of these magnificent birds on the Plains over summer.

*Penny Paton*

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**Peter Watton**

Trees For Life does more than just plant trees. Since 1994 Trees For Life has established a network of over 300 Bush For Life sites where dedicated volunteers rehabilitate important remnants of native bushland across SA using minimal disturbance bush regeneration techniques.

Peter Watton is the highly respected Operations Manager for the Bush For Life program. Through his huge commitment to conservation, he has been able to influence hundreds of people into taking "hands-on" action to contribute to biodiversity conservation.

Come and hear Peter speak on **"Advances in Bushcare"** at our AGM: Wednesday 3rd of May, 7.30pm at Urrbrae House. Supper afterwards.



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