



Friends of Aranda Bushland Inc

to conserve and rehabilitate the bush

Convenor's Annual Report AGM Monday 22 February 1999

Committee activities have included submission writing, lobbying of politicians, consultation with allied groups, promotional displays of *Our Patch*, distribution and financial management of *Our Patch*, planning for the Aranda Snow Gums Heritage Site, photographing eroded walking paths and even a little weeding. We have held monthly meetings and have developed an effective and focused team, sharing tasks and working in subcommittees for specific tasks.

I would like to express my warm appreciation to Dave Kelly (Secretary), Robert Langdon (Treasurer), Pam Macdonald, Judy Kelly, Colin Macdonald, Peter Ormay, Geoff Manley and Trevor Dowling. Without their cooperation and support we would not have been able to defend the conservation values of Aranda Bushland.

Horse Access

Aranda Bushland has been a 'conflict hot spot' in the debate over horse access to Canberra's nature reserves. The *Land (Planning and Environment) Act* sets management objectives for 'nature reserves' and gives priority to 'conservation of the natural environment' over 'recreation, education and research' (Section 195 (4 & 5) and Schedule 1). Under the *Nature Conservation Act*, horse riding is prohibited in 'nature reserves' without the consent of the Conservator. As there is considerable evidence that horses damage natural areas, introducing them to nature reserves appears in conflict with the *Land Act* and the precautionary principle.

Horse access has been an issue since September 1993 when the cavaletti (horse step throughs) were removed from Aranda Bushland without consulting either horseriders or parkcarers. In February 1998 there was a four day Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) hearing on horse access into Aranda Bushland. This resulted in a stay of action with the matter to be decided as part of the *Draft Management Plan for Canberra Nature Park*.

Conflict centers on recommended horse trails criss-crossing Aranda Bushland, the Pinnacle and Mt Painter. The trails were added in December 1997 by the Conservator of Flora and Fauna in the last few weeks before submitting the *Final Draft Plan* to the Minister. After the AAT, your Committee alerted other conservation groups about the changed attitude of Environment ACT. It appeared that Canberra Nature Park was being sacrificed and the public was welcome to 'love it to death'. We were ready when the Standing Committee on Urban Services (Hird, Corbell and Rugendyke) called for submissions and fronted the public hearing on 3 July 1998 supported by parkcarers and other conservationists.

The Standing Committee produced a favourable report in September, but the government held its response for three months then passed the ball to CSIRO Wildlife for a scientific review of horses and Canberra Nature Park by Dr Jill Landsberg. The review is to be presented to the government and then the Legislative Assembly in March.

Aranda Snow Gums/Frost Hollow Heritage Site

Friends of Aranda Bushland initiated a proposal in 1994 for heritage listing of the Snow Gums (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*) in the Frost Hollow below Aranda Bushland. The Aranda Snow Gums were formally gazetted to the ACT interim Heritage Places Register on 26 June 1998.

We developed a management plan for the site in October and discussed it with Environment ACT this month. As we need funds for secure fencing and rabbit control, we plan to submit a grant proposal to the Natural Heritage Trust before the end of the month and in cooperation with Canberra Nature Park North of the ACT Parks and Conservation Service.

Our Patch

Friends of Aranda Bushland's field guide (*Our Patch*) was launched in December 1997 after five years of photographing the flora and collecting herbarium specimens. The beautiful photos and the combination of whole plant pictures with close ups is a great selling point, appealing to beginners as well as enthusiasts.

The book sold over 1,000 copies in the first year (out of a print run of a bit under 3,000). Debits for the 42 loans for the printing were paid off early June 98 and other outstanding commitments met in later months. Our best sales locations are the Botanical Bookshop and Yarralumla Nursery. It is also in Collins, University Co-op and a number of tourist outlets. We sell it ourselves - but only at the recommended retail price (\$15) so we don't undercut the market.

We developed laminated display photos to promote the group and *Our Patch*. 1998 displays were in Jamison (with Mt Painter/Pinnacle groups on 3-4 April and 4-5 Sept), Belconnen Public Library (9-30 April), Environment Fair at Garema Place (30 May), Fyshwick Markets with fund raising (30 August), Mt Painter launch (12 Sept), Weedbuster Week launch (11 Oct), Gungahlin Grasslands (22 Nov) and Yarralumla Nursery (native plant Saturdays 3 Oct, 7 Nov, 5 Dec).

Conservation Council

After all debts were cleared, Friends of Aranda Bushland formally joined the Conservation Council for the South East and Canberra. They supported us effectively in the AAT and after.

National Biocentre

Your committee was alerted to the fact that the Nature and Society Forum had revived a 1965 proposal for a National Biocentre and wished to locate it in Smith's Paddock. They needed a 80 ha site for a conference centre with sustainable technology displays. We meet with them in October and it seems as if they and the National Planning Authority have accepted that it is not a suitable site for their purpose. It is fortunate that we found out early in the planning process.

Weeding

We claim that Aranda Bushland is 95% free of weeds, but need continuing followup to keep it so. There were six weeding bees in Autumn, two in Spring and a Summer one last week. Together with spot weeding by individuals, this totaled 240 hours.

Jean Geue, Convenor

19 February 1999