



Friends of the Aranda Bushland Inc

to conserve and rehabilitate the bush

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Friends of Aranda Bushland Annual Report 2005/6

It is my great pleasure to present the 2005/6 report for Friends of Aranda Bushland. It has been a very busy and successful year, with an amazing 60 members and friends actively contributing over 2,000 hours in a wide variety of activities.

Our activities have covered our core work of weed control in the Aranda Bushland, Snow Gums Site and in the Rural Lease; and in addition we have made major advances in the Education project, monitored both flora and fauna; maintained our walking tracks, completed our fire fuel assessments, made a number of submissions on conservation issues and held two wild flower walks in October.

We held 3 working parties in the Aranda Bushland this year; did our regular track maintenance and fire fuel assessments and began a new project to control the *Phalaris sp.* growing in the Bindubi Street/Finnerans Road corner of the bushland. The last activity was fun – it attracted a crowd of 15 helpers and was very reminiscent of hay-making days of the beginning of last century!

The main work of weed control has been done by individual volunteers who monitor weed development and act before the weeds have the opportunity to flower and set seed. We would welcome regular walkers in the bush to join this team. Often, all it involves is carrying a weed wand on your walk and dabbing weeds in the early stage of growth.

Nine of our regular working parties have taken place in the Snow Gums Site. We are very conscious of the benefits of attacking St. John's wort and Paterson's curse in the early vegetative stage and then collecting seed heads before the seed ripen and are added to the existing seed bank in the soil. As usual we use the Bradley principle of working on the better areas first and moving out into the denser infestations. Leaving the worst areas until last, means that there is always a great challenge ahead!

During the winter we were very conscious of the number of Paterson's curse plants -infected with weevils and we had hoped that there would be fewer plants coming to maturity. The much welcomed spring rains made sure that those plants which survived the weevil attack grew large and made up for their smaller numbers! Certainly weed control was much simpler during the drought.

Another weed which had not been a problem during the drought was wild mustard, but this year it grew strong and tall and produced an abundance of yellow flowers. The purchase of the new weed mower by Ginninderra Catchment Group gave us a mechanical means of at least preventing seed production. In November and December our working parties included people rostered on both Saturdays and Sundays to use the weed mower over a large area. We had hoped to have the rest of the *Phalaris* mowed under contract, but to date this hasn't happened.

We are concerned to improve the condition around the old up-stream stag (dead Snow Gum) as we are growing a number of Snow Gums seedlings to plant there in the autumn or spring this year. This had been planned to take place in 2003 but was postponed because of the drought. You will have noticed a number of plant guards in the Snow Gums area. This is part of an on-going program of seed collection, propagation and planting to improve the quality of the grassland.

This year, Sarah Sharp, of the ACT Wildlife Monitoring team, introduced us to a simple and very effective method of plant monitoring in the Snow Gums area, the step-point method. This means we have a numerical method of assessment to add to our photographic monitoring in the Snow Gums area. We also have six plots to

monitor the effectiveness of different methods of St. John's wort control.

The highlight of our year must surely be the Education Project, aimed at increasing the knowledge base and stimulating interest in the Frost Hollow to Forest Walk.

In July we held a display of the winning entries in the Art Competition, and an amazing display of wildlife sculptures made from recycled materials by Robyn Thomas and the Education Website was launched. We are deeply indebted to the many people who contributed to this project, the writers of website material, volunteers who assisted children from a number of schools use the materials in the field, judges and participants in the Art Competition and many, many more. I have avoided naming names, but there are two people without whom the project could not have reached its achievements. They are Hanna Jaireth the project manager and Bill White the web master. A very sincere congratulations and thank you to both of them.

It is interesting how one activity stimulates another and how one achievement challenges a group to new degrees of difficulty. This is how I account for Friends of Aranda Bushland responding to the question "How many is a lot of kangaroos?" seen grazing in the Snow Gums Site during the winter.

We had 28 volunteers turn out early one Sunday morning to answer that question. There was a lot of planning and preparation prior to the event, especially as we could see a number of major problems arising from the fact that the site was bounded on 3 sides by main arterial roads and the Aranda houses on the fourth. All went well and the answer is 156 eastern grey kangaroos and 13 swamp wallabies. There is detailed write up of the event in our website www.friendsofarendabushland.org.au

We have also been involved in Frog Watch training and monitoring, and the compilation of data on bird and reptile populations as part of the Education project.

This year we held two successful Wild Flower Walks in October, one for the general public and the second for a class from the Adult Migrant English Program. It was a great opportunity to introduce new migrants to our natural and cultural heritage and a different aspect of volunteering.

An annual event is our contribution to weed control in the Rural Lease, in recognition of the right to use the walkway between the Frost Hollow and Forest. This year we joined forces with Conservation Volunteers Australia and Environment ACT and worked for 4 days, clearing briars and enormous hawthorns from the waterway along the boundary to Aranda Bushland. It was an impressive achievement, though as usual there is still more to do.

Over the 15 years of Friends of Aranda Bushland's existence we have accumulated a wide variety of materials, an extensive collection of photographs, a collection of laminated photographs for display, a dried herbarium specimen collection, maps and much, much more. Keeping a track of our possessions has become a task in itself and Pam Macdonald has agreed to be our archivist. If you have FoAB material in your possession or material you would like to donate, please contact Pam (6251 2978)

Another important aspect of the work of Friends of Aranda Bushland is to comment on plans which are likely to impact on the conservation of biodiversity in our community. We have made written submissions on the Molonglo Valley project, the Busway project, wildlife corridors and proposed new suburbs in East Gungahlin, and commented on the Draft Management Plan for Namadgi National Park. We have also been well represented on the Conservation Council, our peak body for the environment.

As I said in my introduction it has been a busy year! And this is not the work on one individual, 60 individuals contributed to our achievements (that must be a record!). The team who work month by month deserve special mention and thanks and this year the committee has been fantastic and I cannot thank them enough for their enthusiasm and hard work.

Mary Falconer
Convenor
January 10th 2006