

Convenor's report, Friends of the Aranda Bushland 2013

Ian R. Falconer February 2014

We had an eventful and progressive year in 2013. We were awarded a Commendation for Environmental Stewardship in the Sustainable Cities Awards, and were Highly Commended in the Qantas Landcare Innovative Community Group Awards. These reflect the quality and activity of the Friends in caring for the Aranda Bushland and Snow Gums over the past years, and their recognition by the community.

Looking into the future to clarify our aims and the routes to achieve them in conservation and enhancement of our bushland, we held a 'Forum on the Future' in June. Our speakers included Daniel Iglesias, the Director of the Parks Service, Sarah Sharp, Michael Mulvaney, David Tongway, Jean Geue and Kevin McCue. A detailed discussion resulted in 52 suggestions, which are being progressively discussed and implemented. Many lie in the future, including the most important, the consolidation of the two formerly Rural Lease blocks lying between the Aranda Bushland and the Snow Gums, into Canberra Nature Park as part of the Aranda Bushland. The northern and eastern parts of these blocks are very high value for endangered species and are Yellow Box/Red Gum grassy woodland, itself an endangered ecosystem.

The Friends have always contributed to ACT-wide strategy and planning, and currently under review is the ACT Trails Strategy 2014-2024. Our submission on this emphasised the priority of nature conservation over recreational use, while recognising the recreational needs of the society. The Strategy as presently proposed is focussed on developing recreational use of ACT public land, which has inevitable effects on land degradation. The new Centennial Trail passes through Aranda Bushland, with an alternative walking path across the Snow Gums. This together with the development of the Molonglo suburbs across William Hovell Drive will increase the use of Aranda Bushland, so we will need to revise and energise our strategy for track maintenance.

Our on-ground work over the last year has had some notable successes. In conjunction with CNP Ranger staff a massive blitz on Paterson's Curse took place in spring, and a similar effort against St. John's Wort in early summer. As a result of us holding ChemCert. accreditation, Jim Arnold, Roy McAndrew and myself were able to use spot spraying of Brushoff and Starane, which are by far the most effective methods of weed control. We will never get completely clear

of these weeds because of long-lived seeds in the soil, but we now have real weed control in place.

Another notable work was the construction of an erosion barrier at the end of the west-east gully, which had developed into a deep waterfall. Kevin McCue applied for a grant to fund the work, and coordinates the erosion control activities. These include bank stabilisation and flow-slowing coir logs to raise the height of the gully base.

This year we have extended our long-standing step-point monitoring of vegetation in the Snow Gums coordinated by Mary Falconer into the more intensive VegWatch program set up by Sarah Sharp for the Molonglo Catchment Group. Mary and Jenny Andrews will continue to coordinate both programs, which are complimentary, and will allow us to quantitatively assess vegetation changes, good or ill!

The kangaroo exclusion areas which were set up by Dr. Don Fletcher and ourselves in the grassland clearly demonstrated the recovery of kangaroo grass and the overall pasture productivity when the 'roos are kept out! With the current grazing the ground is bared and invaded by weeds. We are intending to set up more extensive exclusions in the future to enable the seeding of kangaroo and other native grasses, and hopefully the recovery of the grassland.

During the year we have conducted a eucalypt walk for Heritage Week, lead by Jean Geue and myself, and an orchid walk in the spring. Two groups of CIT students lead by Hannah Selmes visited the bushland, as part of their courses on biodiversity and land restoration. We have had great support from year 10 Radford students this year, who are doing some of their volunteer hours in the bushland through attending our working parties.

Jean Geue organised a very successful multi-Friends groups demonstration at Jamison shops in September. The Indian Mynah trap gathered particular attention! This is one of the best ways of publicising the activities of Friends groups in our area, and hopefully leads to increased active membership.

Next year will be eventful, when hopefully the new areas are added to Aranda Bushland. Our workload will increase considerably, as will the diversity and attractiveness of the area within Canberra Nature Park. With increased help from CNP ranger staff we look forward to the challenge. We invite any people interested in nature conservation to join us in our activities, with working parties on the third Sundays in the morning, and the Committee on the fourth Thursday evening. Details can be found on our website www.friendsofarandabushland.org.au, an excellent and diverse site, including

frog and birdcalls, managed by Keith Pantlin to whom we owe considerable thanks.

I also wish to thank our committee, Jenny Andrews, our Secretary; Diana Brown, our Minutes Secretary; Peter Mellor, our Treasurer; Kevin McCue, coordinating erosion control; Jean Geue, coordinating planting; Mary Falconer coordinating vegetation monitoring; Luke O'Connor and Peter Ormay who together have achieved a great deal. I wish to thank Jim Arnold and Roy McAndrew, who with ranger Anthony Hart did a herculean task of weed control. We greatly appreciate the support we received from Parks and Conservation Service, especially Craig Wainwright and Anthony Hart, under whose guidance we operate.