

## **Convenor's Report- Friends of the Aranda Bushland -2014**

This has been a very good year for Friends of the Aranda Bushland, with a major increase in our area and biodiversity through the South Aranda Woodland being transferred into Aranda Bushland.

**South Aranda Woodland.** The highlight of 2014 was the transfer of 32ha of South Aranda woodland from rural lease to Canberra Nature Park. This area was part of Glenloch Station resumed for Molonglo Stage 3 housing. It lies west of Caswell Drive, and is mainly open woodland with old yellow box and Blakely's red gum trees, eucalypt regrowth and a swampy area of ti-tree, as well as heathland and a dry ridge of red stringybark. The creek from Black Mountain runs below the ridge, and there are three dams with almost permanent water. It has an extensive bird population due to the diversity of habitats, and resident swamp wallabies. The endangered small purple pea has been recorded there, and may be able to be protected from kangaroo grazing to increase the plant numbers.

This area is a major asset and not a great increase in work load with only moderate weed populations, and some old gully erosion. As part of our agreement with the former lessee, we have been removing woody weeds and blackberries for a decade. We will be developing a walk through the woodlands in association with Canberra Nature Parks, to show off the area. We now have wedge-tailed eagles, as well as the Australian Hobby, nesting in our area.

Canberra Nature Park staff and contractors will be carrying out weed and rabbit control in the woodland, and have already killed most of the blackberry thickets. We, and they, are working on removal of Japanese honeysuckle from the swamp area.

The inclusion of the South Aranda Woodlands in Aranda Bushland will be a lasting legacy of our cooperation with Canberra Nature Parks, and earlier with Neville Stuart, in the maintenance of the ecology of the area.

**Weed control.** Walking round the Aranda Bushland in December I am struck by the absence of weeds! We really have to look for our arch-enemies St John's Wort, saffron thistle, Patterson's Curse. We know that there is a seed bank waiting for favourable weather to germinate, but can rejoice that the amount of new seed from this year will be minimal. This does not happen by accident, but as a result of hundreds of hours of weeding. We have ever better control methods, with Starane, Brushoff and now MCPA as herbicides for application, and weed wands, knapsack sprayers, a scythe - and the standby for sensitive

areas -pulling the weeds out! We owe Jim Arnold a big thank you for his work with the scythe and knapsack, and all the regular weeders for their most successful efforts in 2014.

Our senior ranger, Anthony Hart, has done a great job with slashing saffron thistle and spot spraying St.J.W. This is particularly evident in the Block1399/William Hovell Drive corner paddock, which has been atrocious in the past with an assortment of waist-high weeds in the summer.

**Erosion control.** The erosion control coordinated by Kevin McCue with advice and help from Dr David Tongway has made great strides this year and the fruits of the efforts can be clearly seen. The gullies are re-vegetating, runoff is slowed, gully extension reduced and the area progressively stabilised. The massive effort on the end waterfall has yet to be tested by a flood, but looks good. Unfortunately the contour bank above the laneway has not been repaired, so a really heavy rainfall can still flood down into the gully. This western land is now in the hands of the ACT Economic Development Directorate, who have not resolved how it is to be used. This makes engineering work much more difficult to negotiate.

**Kangaroos.** Kangaroos are probably the most problematic part of our ecology. Our counts show relatively little change in numbers over ten years, with a recent increase due to a better winter season with less mortality. Because of the population density of about 5 'roos/ha over the better grazing, *Themeda* scarcely has a chance of seeding, and is decreasing in the grassland. Our circular 1 m exclusions showed that *Themeda* rapidly recovered once grazing was prevented, and seeded freely.

We are now working with Anthony Hart and other CNP staff to construct 3 rectangular exclosures of 1m wide and 10m long, so that a band of seed will form and *Themeda* can repopulate the grassland. The concept is to move the exclosures at 3 year intervals, to progressively replenish the *Themeda* seedbank and hence the pasture. The first of these exclosures is in place near the first interpretative sign on the walk from the Black Mountain car park. The *Themeda* is seeding, though sparsely this first year..

The long-term answer to excessive 'roo populations is unclear. If they are simply fenced out, the *Themeda* pasture will thrive, and need controlling by fire (preferably) or slashing. Stable low population densities are ideal, but in Aranda Bushland, impossible to achieve with present methods. Shooting is not feasible due to proximity to three major roads and a suburb. The population is simply

controlled by winter starvation. Development of an anti-fertility vaccine would seem the most attractive option for the future.

**Monitoring.** Our regular 'step point' vegetation monitoring programme coordinated by Mary Falconer has now run for a decade in the Snow Gums, and has been supplemented by 'Vegwatch' a detailed protocol for plant monitoring. From our present data it is clear that climate is the key factor controlling vegetation composition, with marked changes between droughts and wet years. Exotics and introduced grasses increase in wet years, drought reduces their abundance.

**Displays.** Jean Geue again coordinated a highly successful joint Parkcare display at Jamison shopping centre. There was ongoing interest from individuals in what plants are present in our parks, and in the work of Parkcare groups in enhancing the natural environment.

**Controlled burns.** The fire fuel reduction operations for Aranda Bushland burned the majority of the southernmost part of the eucalypt forest last autumn, and Parks intend to burn most of the northern part close to the suburb next autumn. While this is part of the fire safety planning for the ACT, it renders areas of attractive bush a burnt desolation for a year or so afterward. We hope to be able to mark some areas to be protected from fire in advance of the next burn, and also set out some pre- and post-fire monitoring.

While there have not been fires in the Snow Gums area, limited controlled burns in *Phalaris* dominant areas of the pasture may enhance the ecology, moving the balance towards native grasslands. Work by Dr. Ken Hutchinson, and the recent book by Bill Gammage, point towards the benefits.

**Interpretative Walk.** We have seen a steady increase in walkers along our interpretative walk. The Snow Gums component is now part of the Canberra Centennial Walk, and the boundary road –Finnerans Road- is open for both cyclists and walkers. Near the first sign close to the Black Mountain car park we now have a brochure box, thanks to Anthony, so that walkers can pick up a brochure on the Frost Hollow to Forest Walk, another on the Aranda Bushland, and a guide to identifying the eucalypts by Peter Ormay.

**Appreciation.** Without the dedication of the FoAB Committee members the Friends would not function and my sincere thanks go to the Committee, particularly Jenny Andrews our Secretary (and statistician), Diana Brown our Minutes Secretary, Peter Mellor our Treasurer, ably supported by Jim Arnold, Mary Falconer, Jean Geue, Pam MacDonald, Kevin McCue, Peter Ormay and

Luke O'Connor. I also thank our dedicated working party members and the students from Radford College, who put so much time and effort into enhancing the quality of our Bushland.

We greatly appreciate the support we receive from the Parks and Conservation Service, especially Craig Wainwright and Anthony Hart, under whose guidance we operate, and the coordination role of Jasmine Foxlee.

Ian Falconer, Convenor, Friends of the Aranda Bushland. January 2015



Kangaroo enclosure, June 2014. Rangers Luke, Tyson and Anthony  
Ian Falconer, Convenor, Friends of the Aranda Bushland.