

Friends of Aranda Bushland Annual Report Jenny Andrews, January 2017

This was my first year in the role of convenor and I want to start by acknowledging the invaluable support that I have had from Ian Falconer, our previous convenor. He helped me unobtrusively for several months until I got used to the job, and he still does.

As usual our main occupation during the year was removing weeds, mainly St John's Wort, Paterson's Curse and thistles. It is a never-ending battle, but we have been greatly helped by CNP contractors, who recently sprayed the lower grassland and also the former rural block 1549, which is under the control of the Land Development Authority and was a forest of St John's Wort loaded with almost-mature seed. Showing admirable dedication, the contractors finally boom-sprayed it at 4 am on Christmas Eve, which was a great relief to us.

In March a controlled burn was conducted in the forested part of Aranda Bushland behind Mirning Crescent. We were not entirely happy with this burn, as it seemed to be too hot in places, and we are now watching with interest the return or otherwise of the vegetation. Admittedly it is difficult to strike a balance between protection of property and protection of the natural environment, but we felt that the burn was too far from the houses to make much difference to them in the event of a wildfire.

In the autumn, our wonderful Parkcare Support Officer, Craig Wainwright, managed to get all the remaining *Pinus radiata* quietly removed from Aranda Bushland, an outcome that we have been aiming at for years. We hope to fill the space with native pines (*Callitris endlicheri*) from seed collected nearby.

The winter and spring of 2016 were particularly wet, and the result was a spectacular flowering of orchids, lilies and daisies (as well as weeds, of course). Our annual orchid walk in October attracted 32 people and was ably guided by Matt Mullaney and Ian Falconer.

During the year we marked out the route of a proposed new track in the former rural block 1550, which was transferred to the Parks and Conservation Service in February 2014. This loop track is marked with flagging tape and we hope to install interpretative signs along it in due course. This would be the second such track in our patch, the first one being the Frost Hollow to Forest walk, which is very popular.

After marking out this track, we were surprised to discover later in the year, that block 1550 is not yet actually part of the Canberra Nature Park. It is being held in reserve as an offset for future development, which could take years. Meanwhile we are looking after it as if it were part of the CNP.

Another project that has a bearing on the status of block 1550 is the removal of unnecessary fences in the snowgums reserve. We have permission to remove all the internal fences, but not the one along the edge of block 1550. We hope to engage the Green Army to help us with this work.

Our annual joint work party with Friends of Mount Painter in August was well attended by our friends from across Bindubi Street, and we carried out a lot of repairs on the tracks in

the bushland. After that the Green Army finished the job, renewing the remaining rollovers on some of the steeper tracks, and we sincerely hope that they will not be disbanded in the near future.

Work on erosion control continues steadily and we are now seeing the fruits of our labour in the return of stable vegetation in places along the banks of the main gully, but more needs to be done. We thank David Tongway and Cam Wilson for their guidance on this matter.

Twice a year we conduct step-point monitoring along seven transects in the snowgums reserve, to compare the prevalence of different plants in different years. We have also begun to monitor the effects of high kangaroo numbers on the health of the grassland. We have erected two narrow exclosures, and seen how the native grasses have flourished without the constant depredations of kangaroos. We have hopes of trialling a bigger exclusion zone later this year.

Our website www.friendsofarandabushland.org.au is surprisingly well patronised, probably because of its many articles on the local flora, birds, frogs, reptiles, soils and geology, as well as information about our current activities. Our webmaster, Keith Pantlin, has done a wonderful job bringing this almost defunct site back to its present exemplary state.

During the year we had to farewell one of our founders, the legendary Peter Ormay, who was revered throughout Canberra for his knowledge and vision. He succumbed to cancer in April. Not as tragically, but still sadly, we have also lost our lovely Sheridan and Nick, who have moved to Seattle. Not to mention the departure of Craig Wainwright, who has been our point of contact with the CNP for several years and will be greatly missed.

Our little group is energetic, friendly and harmonious, and is very enjoyable to belong to. It runs smoothly thanks to the contribution of all the members who come to work parties, including recent arrivals like Fiona Austin and Jorge Gapella, who have introduced us to new weeding methods.

Special thanks are due to the committee, which is made up of Ian Falconer (outgoing convenor and well-known water expert), Peter Mellor (longstanding treasurer and post box minder, also husband of our esteemed auditor Di), Diana Brown (author of our minutes, amongst other things), Kevin McCue (coordinator of the erosion programs), Mary Falconer (in charge of monitoring), Jim Arnold (who does an unbelievable amount of knapsack spraying), Sheridan Maher (our secretary until events overtook her), Pam Macdonald (one of our founding members and a great source of cakes and hospitality), John Brickhill (an experienced and knowledgeable new member) and Matt Mullaney (orchid expert and representative of the rising generation).

In all our dealings with the staff of the Parks and Conservation Service, we have found them always prompt and helpful. We thank Anthony Hart and Nic Mikhailovich, who have gone out of their way to assist and advise us. We especially thank Craig Wainwright, who has been with us for years, acting as the conduit between us and the powers that be. We are very sad that he is leaving, but we hope to see him back in his real job one day.