

FOAB Annual Report 2017-18

2017 has been a busy, enjoyable year for us, and here are some of the highlights:

Weeding:

The year 2017 began with a weeding frenzy. Every Sunday morning in January and early February, we gathered at the snowgums grassland and pulled up all the St John's Wort plants that we could see. By the following Sunday a new crop would have appeared. However we saw a great reduction in the incidence of this hated weed.

However we had to resume our weekly weeding sessions in mid-November, alarmed by the explosion of St John's Wort after the spring rains. These will continue into February, in the hope of preventing new seed from entering the soil. Special mention must be made here of the heroic efforts of Jim Arnold, who put in 100 hours in December alone. Sonja Lenz, Kevin McCue and Mary and Ian Falconer also did a great deal of extra weeding.

We began a campaign to control St John's Wort in the adjoining area that was formerly a rural lease (block 1550), and is now being held by PCS as a future offset. We had help with this weeding from the Telstra Volunteers, but in places the infestation was too thick for us, and was recently dealt with by PCS spraying contractors.

Our February work party entailed pulling out fleabane from behind Mirning Crescent after the ill-controlled fuel-reduction burn of 2016, and so far it has not returned.

Fence removal:

In January we employed the Green Army to take out 600 metres of unwanted fencing from the snow gums reserve. They did a great job and all that remains now are a couple of fence posts, a gate and a lonely stile.

Then in autumn we partially removed another 600 metres of fencing, but we had to leave the posts and the top strands of wire, as this fence marks the border between the CNP and block 1550.

We finished the year by completely removing another fence, between Finneran's Road and the snowgums, greatly improving the appearance and amenity of this piece of grassy woodland.

Erosion control:

We continue to work on controlling erosion in the deep gully that cuts through the Snowgums Reserve. In an effort to form a chain of ponds, we put up leaky weirs, using star pickets and netting from the fence removal, across the gully floor in a double-V formation, and packed branches and debris behind them.

Kevin McCue successfully experimented with making coir logs from discarded mattresses, with the help of a grant from Molonglo Catchment Group, and these logs have now been placed at the end of the embankment near the apple boxes.

We dedicated one winter work party to clearing out and reconstructing the rollovers on the tracks in the steep forested area. However, one work party was not enough, and next winter we will probably have two.

Work continues on replanting a bare patch left by the removal of the radiata pines last year. Ian and Mary have collected and germinated seed from the native pines nearby and some of these have been planted out, while others are still in pots. Pam and Colin Macdonald have also contributed hakeas and lomandras for this patch, and had them planted out.

Monitoring:

In 2017, Sarah Sharp's Vegwatch program did not take place, and nor did Michael Mulvaney's orchid survey. The reason given in both cases was that the data from last year had not been processed yet, which seemed to us an inadequate response.

However, we conducted our usual twice-yearly step-point monitoring in the snow gums reserve, in April and October. This program was initiated by Mary and we now have records going back for a decade.

Our sharp-eyed members are always on the lookout for escaping garden weeds, such as arbutus, privet, honeysuckle and Cootamundra wattle, and any invaders are quickly removed.

We participated in the kangaroo count in the Aranda Bushland in May. Two previous counts had been conducted, at approximately six year intervals, and the results of those two were both less than 200 animals, but this year the count was over 400, which is a worry, as culling is not permitted in the Aranda Bushland.

Before the fuel-reduction burn last April, which was on the eastern flank of Aranda Bushland, we were able to fence off several orchid-rich areas, with the help of Cath Busby from FOMP and our new Parkcare Ranger, Phil Selmes. The firemen were sympathetic to our concerns, and also did their best to burn in a mosaic pattern, as well as to protect habitat trees.

Our kangaroo exclusion zones, suggested and designed by Mary, have produced an abundance of native grasses, principally kangaroo grass, and are now due to be moved.

Community events:

In July, as part of the NPA Bushfire Symposium, we held a walk in the Aranda Bushland, which has areas that have been burned at different times, to illustrate the process of post-fire regeneration (or damage).

As usual, Jean Geue organised the successful Parkcare display at Jamison Plaza in September. As a result of this, we became involved in the local primary school's G-Force program. Jenny Andrews escorted a group of children through the bushland for a couple of hours and showed them all sorts of things.

Our annual orchid walk on the 15th October attracted 25 people, although this year, after the dry, frosty winter, the orchids were thin on the ground. We were led by three walking guidebooks – Cath Busby, Matt Mullaney and Ian Falconer.

For this year's joint work party with Friends of Mt Painter, we helped them plant yellow burr-daises on the slopes of the mountain. It was a well-run and enjoyable occasion.

Another community event that occurred in our patch was the Ngunnawal Pathways walk, run by Molonglo Catchment Group and led by Wally Bell. We were shown many stone tools, some in situ, and a "water tree", carved to direct rain into a central reservoir. Wally also pointed out traditional routes across the landscape, and the wonderful "ring tree" on Bindubi Street.

Finally, we are really enjoying the new seat supplied by PCS for their 25th anniversary. It is at the highest point in Aranda Bushland (at Keir Trig) with a view through the trees of the distant Brindabellas. It is particularly appreciated by a 92-year-old original inhabitant of Aranda, who walks up there every day, and would not be able to get that far without the seat to rest on.

Thanks:

As convenor I have been greatly helped by the committee - Diana Brown our minutes Secretary, Peter Mellor our treasurer, Jim Arnold, Mary Falconer, Jean Geue, Pam MacDonald, John Brickhill, and Kevin McCue, who all bring their own expertise to the group (Sheridan Maher is a member in absentia, and we hope she will reappear). I also thank our dedicated work party members, who put so much time and effort into enhancing the quality of our bushland.

We really appreciate the support we receive from the Parks and Conservation rangers, although they come and go at an alarming rate (we started the year with Ant Hart, moved on to Chris Lambert, then had a gap while Chris went to fight fires in Canada, and our present ranger is Michelle Nairn). Phil Selmes, Parkcare Ranger, is ever available and helpful, as is Alison McLeod, the Parkcare coordinator.

One of the best things about our group is that we enjoy each other's company so much. I can vouch for this as convenor, because I have great difficulty breaking up the sociable chatter when it is time to start work again after morning tea!

Jenny Andrews, convenor, January 2018