

FOAB Annual Report 2018-19

2018 was, as usual, a year full of activity for us, and these are some of the highlights:

Weeding:

The year began with the now traditional short weekly work parties. Every Sunday morning in December and January, we gathered at the snowgums grassland to attack St John's Wort. A few dedicated souls came regularly to do what they could for an hour or two, before it got too hot.

Probably as a result of this extra effort, we were gratified to find at the end of the financial year that our group had notched up the most hours of work of all the 26 local landcare groups, with the exception of the Kosciusko Huts Association.

Our normal monthly work parties resumed in February but the focus did not change – St John's Wort was still flowering and setting seed, so we continued with our attack, bagging the seed heads for removal by the rangers.

From March we were able to turn our attention to other tasks, such as erosion control, planting and, removing saffron thistles from the lower grassland.

Not all our weeding effort took place in the Canberra Nature Park. For example, a dense infestation of *Acacia decurrens* on the corner of Bandjalong Crescent near the overpass was cut down and piled up for removal by TCCS. Also the spreading African love grass in the spine was confronted by spraying, cutting off the seedheads and most effectively, digging up.

In December 2018 we resumed our short weekly work parties, and will keep them going until the danger of St John's Wort is over for the season.

Erosion control:

We continued to work on controlling erosion in the deep gully that cuts through the Snowgums Reserve. We expanded our leaky weirs and planted the sides of the gully with tough endemic species. In the coming year we hope to install some gabions also.

We spent two winter work parties (May and June) clearing out and reconstructing the rollovers on the tracks in the steep forested area. Even that was not quite enough, and some members finished off the job in their own time

Planting:

We had two major planting sessions in 2018. The first one was in April and we planted *Lomandra longifolia* and *Acacia dealbata* tubestock, provided by Greening Australia, plus a few *Bursaria spinosa* seedlings. These were all put around the main erosion gully, and Phil Selmes, our parkcare ranger, provided a water cart, a power auger, water crystals, stakes and guards. Unfortunately the stakes and guards were not strong enough to withstand the onslaught of the kangaroos, and we lost many of our plantings.

Then in September we tried again. This was a joint work party with Friends of Mt Painter who came over to help us replace what we had lost in the first attempt. On this occasion the combined number of workers was 37 and we worked for 99 hours, which was a record.

This time we had stronger stakes and guards, and another very important advantage: we had discovered a thicket of tall, spiny young hawthorns in the former rural lease block 1549, and by cutting these out and carrying them down to the erosion gully, we were able to put up a formidable barrier between the new plantings and the kangaroos.

Our new parkcare ranger, Marty Bajt, supplied us with a water cube, which proved invaluable for the first weeks after the planting, as the upper dam had become a bowl of dry, cracked mud .

Kangaroos:

The kangaroo count conducted in 2017 showed their number had increased dramatically since the last count five years earlier. It was more than 400, whereas it had been well below 200 before.

Consequently Aranda Bushland was included for the first time in the annual government culling program. The intention was to remove about 300 animals, but in the end only 27 were taken out, for reasons connected with the terrain. Next year they will try again with different techniques.

Our kangaroo exclusion zones showed how abundant the grass cover would be without this excessive number of kangaroos. The only trouble with our present enclosures is that they are impossible for us to move, but we now have permission to construct our own kangaroo-proof enclosures. This is a project for the winter.

Orchid walk:

Our annual orchid walk which takes place in October, was cancelled this year because there were hardly any orchids to look at after the harsh, dry winter.

Seats:

Since the installation of the Parks and Cons seat at Keir trig, we have gained another seat, near the noticeboard at the top of the spine. Also we have arranged to get a spare Parks and Cons 25th anniversary bench, which was lying about at the Mitchell depot, and put it at our morning tea place next Sunday.

In addition to all that, Ian and Mary have offered to pay for a seat with arms and a back, to be installed in the old pines site near the powerlines on Bindubi Street. We have just received final approval for this from Parks and Cons.

Thanks:

This is my last AGM as convenor, as our rule of iron is that convenors must retire after three years. I hand over to the knowledgeable and hard-working Jim, who has kindly agreed to take on the role.

Over my tenure I have been greatly helped by the committee, which last year consisted of Diana Brown our minutes Secretary, Peter Mellor our treasurer, Jim Arnold, Mary Falconer, Ian Falconer, Pam MacDonald, John Brickhill, and Kevin McCue, who all bring their own expertise to the group. I also thank our dedicated work party members, who put so much time and effort into enhancing the quality of our bushland. Colin Macdonald helped greatly by printing out photos for the series “Trees of the Aranda Bushland”, which we posted in the noticeboard.

We really appreciate the support we receive from the Parks and Conservation rangers. Phil Selmes, who was our Parkcare Ranger, was replaced during the year by Marty Bajt, and we found both of them to be unfailingly available and helpful. Our present Northside ranger is Michelle Nairn and we are pleased that she has recently been made permanent.

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, outgoing convenor, January 2019