



FOTPINNING IS A LIFESTYLE: The Australia Day Weed-off and BBQ

By Heather Burness

On one of the hottest days of this short and mild summer, fotpins were found resiliently weeding the reserve at 7.30 in the morning. Fotpins are a strange bunch of urban eccentrics willing to forego the holiday 'sleep in' to get together to bag, behead, grub, scythe and spray weeds.

Being the designated photographer posed its problems on the large reserve with teams spread east, west and centre. My apologies if you were there and I didn't capture you in situ.

Fashion awards on the day went to Gilbert for his sense of colour and style and Rosemary for her subtle use of diamante sparkle.

Special mention needs to be made of Bob and his instrument of weed torture (I will never look upon scythes in the same way again), and Warren for looking so....well... stylish. (How does he do that even though he has raised a sweat after 3 hours weeding?). Also to John F, Lesley and Rosemary who chose the most picturesque of locations, although as we all know that's not difficult at the Pinnacle Nature Reserve. Other weeders were, Pax, Graham, Ray, Mark B, John B, Jim, Dierk, Hannah, Grahame, Ray and Bob. Thanks to you all.



Gilbert wins the Australia Day Weede-off fashion award

One of the highlights was a visit from the ACT Natural Resource Council Chair, Sarah Ryan. Bob and Warren gave Sarah the low-down on the slashing efforts and the extent of the areas we have covered. She was very impressed with what we are doing and her feedback was very positive.

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Lesley and John weeding with view

After we had “freshened up”, 21 of us enjoyed a fantastic BBQ spread at Pax’s house with all the trimmings prepared by Sue and family. (Thanks Sue!). John Brannan displayed culinary skills that I never knew he had and we thank him for putting up with the heat of cooking on such a day. Special thanks to Mary Porter MLA, fellow fotpin, for coming to the gathering between her Aussie Day public commitments, and to Sarah Ryan for spending the day (including lunch) with us.

It was a great day for informal fotpin chatting, thanks to everyone who came along.



Australia Day fotpin BBQ

WEED MANAGEMENT

By Warren Bond



It's now 9 months since the launch of our Draft **Weed Management Plan**, and we're well into its first year of implementation. Grubbing, spraying and slashing has been progressing in line with the plan. Since July, we have been carefully logging the effort expended in implementing the plan, and have compared that with the targets estimated in the plan.

(See www.fotpin.org.au/weeds/weed_effort.html)

Although our effort kept pace with the estimated requirement during Winter, with the coming of Spring, when larger inputs were required, we started falling considerably behind. This resulted partly from the weather (a significant number of our fixed weeding days of Thursdays and Sundays were wet in August and September and preventing weeding) and partly because not enough weeders were available when the weather was suitable.

Since December, effort has increased dramatically with the coming of fine weather and a concerted effort by our weeding members; 105 hours was recorded in December and a massive 202 hours in January, so that the average for these months is in line with the target input for summer. This effort allowed most of the saffron thistles (50 ha) to be slashed before it became too late for this to be effective, using both teams of trained brushcutter operators and the humble scythe.

(See www.fotpin.org.au/weeds/saffrons.html).

About our targets

It is important to note that the **Weed Management Plan** does not say we will achieve the Plan's targets in the first year, rather they provide goals to work towards.

The targets were defined as the amount of effort required to provide "reasonable assurance" that all priority weeds were treated, and no weeds set seed. They were estimated on the basis of:

- a weed survey conducted between October and December 2009, and
- trialling the effort required to control a given area/number of each weed.

This was a practical way of estimating targets, but subject to a number of limitations:

- Spring rainfall in Canberra in 2009 (118 mm) was the 16th driest on record, and 30% below average. Consequently, weed germination and growth in 2009 would most likely also be below average levels.
- Not all weeds were visible during the survey, many hidden by other weeds, particularly the early maturing grasses.
- Not all weeds may have germinated at the time of the survey.

In contrast, the 2010 Spring was 15th wettest on record with 255 mm of rain, twice as much as 2009. This resulted in weed germination and growth that was far greater than in 2009, meaning that the 2009 targets were unlikely to be sufficient to control all weeds in 2010. This was exacerbated by the continuation of rainfall and mild conditions in December (the second wettest on record), prolonging the germination and growth of weeds.

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A large number of hours was also spent spraying, primarily St. John's Wort.

(See www.fotpin.org.au/weeds/SJW.html)

At the time of writing, February is tracking well (95 hours) but is likely to fall short of the summer target.

Experience with implementation this Spring has identified some practical issues:

- the availability of resources to achieve the effort targets;
- the best ways to prioritise effort when the task appears overwhelming, as it has this Spring;
- treating weeds not identified as priorities in the plan, but that become dominant in particularly favourable seasons; and
- the need to develop methods for monitoring the effectiveness of our effort in the short- as well as long-term.



St John's wort

In relation to the third point, we haven't adhered entirely to the **Weed Management Plan**. Significant effort was expended on removing hoary mustard and miscellaneous broad-leaved weeds in winter and early spring when they were the dominant weeds. Also, a small amount of effort was expended in the Bottom Pinnacle, which was not included in the plan. The Plan will be revised later this year and consideration will be given to including these, with appropriate priorities.

Gilbert, John and Pax scything, brush-cutting and spraying weeds



INITIAL WEED MENACE SURVEY REPORT

By Don Driscoll

After an outstanding effort by dedicated FOTPIN members, we completed our Weed Menace plant surveys. In all, we estimated the percentage cover of all plant species in four hundred 1 x 1m quadrats that were spread across our ten experimental sites. I've done some initial analyses and made some simple summaries of the data we collected. Figure 1 is a multidimensional ordination of each plot (the 5 x 5m treatment areas, with data from the 4 quadrats in each plot pooled), based on the percentage cover of each plant species. The distance between the names for each plot on the figure is proportional to the

difference in plant community between those plots. For example, in the mid-left of the figure, s2-10 is very close to s2-11, meaning they have quite similar plant species with similar percentage cover, whereas both of these are very different from s1-2 which is in the bottom-right of the figure. One important pattern is that generally all of the weed sites (W1 to W5) are in the top right-hand area of the ordination space, suggesting that the weed sites are different from our stipa sites (S1 to S5). This is reassuring because that is what we tried to achieve.

Pinnacle Plants

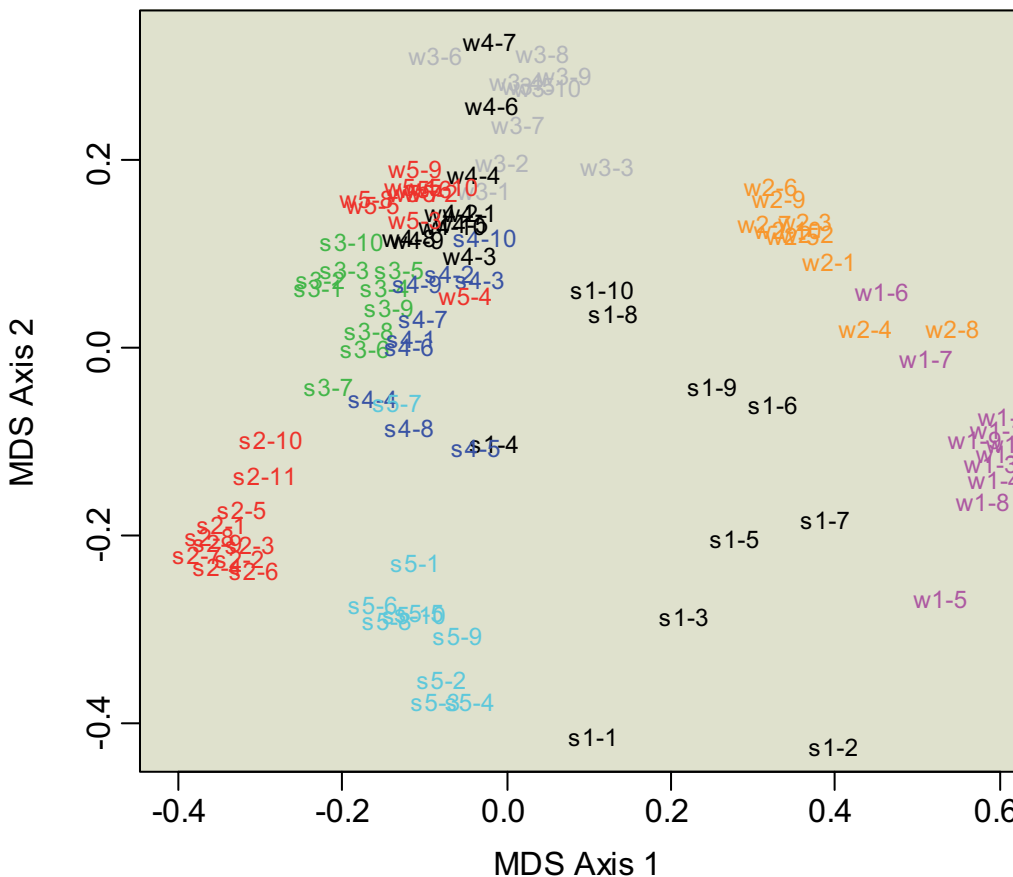


Figure 1. Differences among plant communities for each plot at each site. Site numbers include s1 to S5 and W1 to W5. The former were selected because they seemed to have higher native plant cover than the latter, which we regarded as being predominantly weedy. The numbers after each site number refer to the plot number (1 to 10 for most sites).

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Another pattern is that generally the plant communities are more similar within each site than they are between sites, which is what you would expect given that the ten plots within a site are next to each other. The interesting exception to this rule is S1, where the plots are widely spaced. S1 is an unusual site because it has the smallest number of species of any site (Figure 2), but has very high cover of native grasses (predominantly *Austrostipa*). The summaries in Figure 2 show that there is quite a lot of variation in number of species of natives and percentage

cover of natives and exotics. Interestingly, there is relatively little variation (with S1 as the exception) in the number of exotic species, with all other sites ranging from 20 to 27 species.

Although this is more variation than I expected among our sites, our experiment is designed to cope with such variation, since each of our treatments will be present in every site. We now have a solid baseline against which to compare changes over the coming years as we implement our experimental treatments.

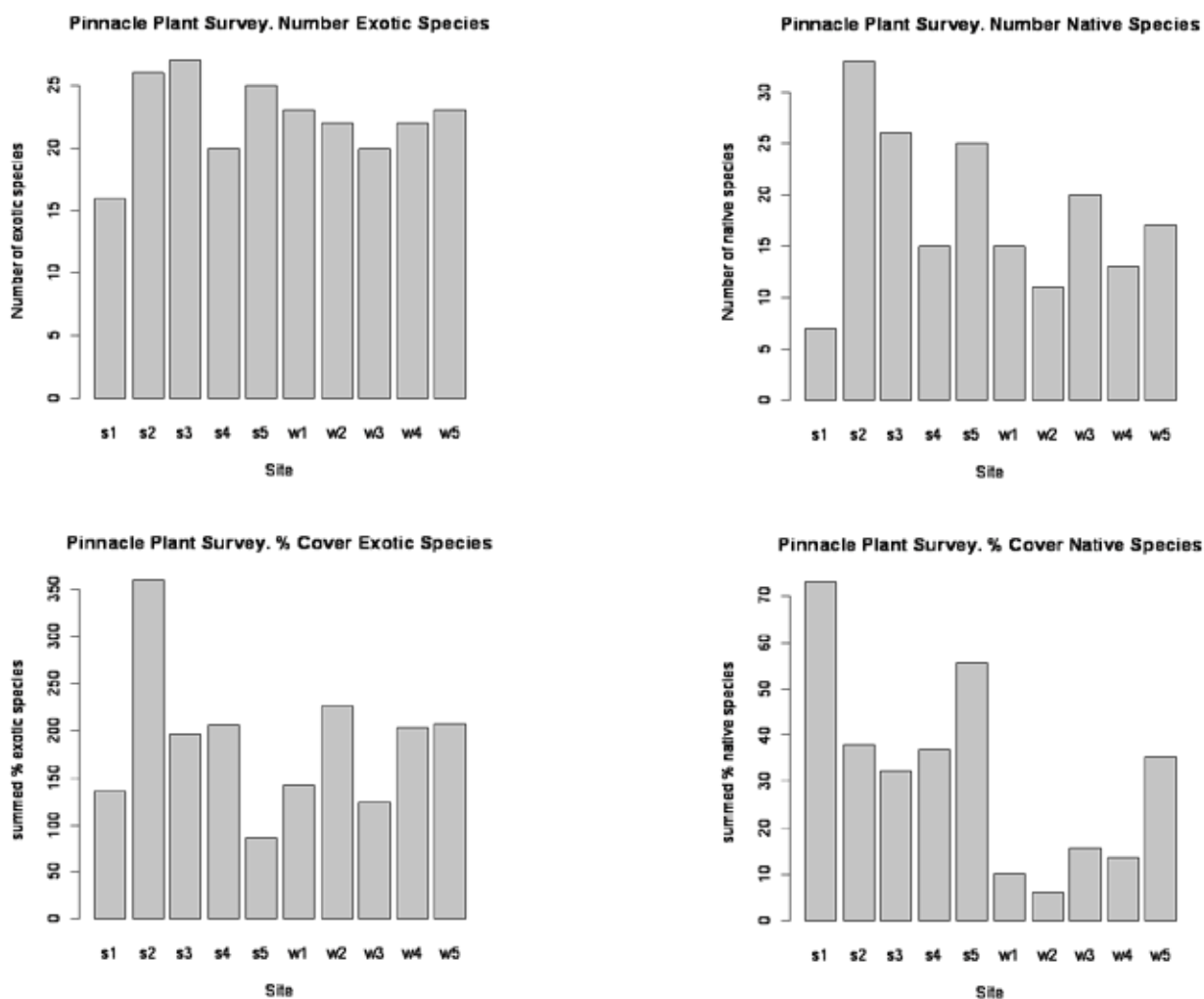


Figure 2. Summaries of the number of native and exotic species at each site, and summed percent cover (can exceed 100% because of the way we measured them).

THE FENCES

By Don Driscoll

With the ground only just dry enough to permit vehicles to enter The Pinnacle in January, John Kennedy and his fencing team got to work between downpours. They have completed our ten herbivore-exclusion fences, and we can now gear up to prepare for our Autumn WEEDMENACE activities. During Autumn we will need to collect soil samples from each of our plots, and of course the very exciting part of implementing our four treatments (burning, slashing, crop and sugar). **Please contact Don if you would like to be involved in this next stage of the project.**



FOTPIN KANGAROO RESCUE

While inspecting the new WEEDMENACE fences in February, FOTPIN members Don Driscoll and Penny Atkinson discovered a kangaroo with both feet trapped in the top wires of a dilapidated stock fence that runs through North Kama.

“We were wading through a sea of thistles when suddenly we came upon the thrashing macropod,” said Don.

After careful assessment and after plan A to snap the wire was quickly abandoned, Don used a sturdy stick to lever the wire apart.

“The kangaroo’s feet just slid out, and I jumped back out of the way in case he was grumpy. But he sort of rolled around, then stood up and watched us. He seemed kind of surprised. We crept off.” The kangaroo hopped off to join his many nearby kin. “It was lucky we came along at the right time,” said Penny, “he was hidden among the thistles and would have suffered a nasty death.”



A TALE OF FROGMOUTHS

By John Brannon

You don't need me to tell you that this Spring and Summer have been pretty unusual in terms of rainfall and temperatures. For most – but not all – of the birds up at the Pinnacle Nature Reserve, it's been a long and fruitful breeding season.

The Tawny Frogmouth is a nocturnal bird that is often mistaken for an owl, though it is actually unrelated, being a type of Nightjar. They are not particularly uncommon, and can occasionally be spotted perched motionless in a tree during the day, though their excellent camouflage can make them difficult to spot. In fact, one of their most famous and distinctive traits is their ability when threatened or alarmed to adopt a pose that makes them look exactly like a broken-off branch.



Photo by Helen Fallow

Up at the Pinnacle, we have several pairs of Tawny Frogmouths that nest in pretty much the same place every year. They generally raise one or two chicks, and, in very rare cases, three. During the day, the male sits on the eggs while the female roosts somewhere nearby, and during the night the roles are reversed. About two months after the eggs are laid, the chick is fledged and ready to leave the nest.

Back in August last year (on the 18th actually), I first spotted one of the Frogmouths sitting on a nest in the usual place. A very early start – almost exactly three weeks earlier than the previous year, when that pair successfully raised a chick. Alas, this year's outcome was not so good. I found the chick dead below the nest several weeks later – presumably killed by Pied Currawongs, which are notorious for killing nestlings.

In the meantime, another pair had built a nest not very far away. On Rosemary's monthly walk in September, one of the other walkers told me about the nest and the cute chick she'd seen peering down at her. A few days later I checked out the rather precariously positioned nest and got to see the chick. But just a few days after that, one of the season's more violent storms washed the nest completely away. I never found any trace of the chick, but it couldn't have survived.

Early in October, I noticed a pair of Frogmouths hanging around in the magnificent old eucalypt at the Dungowan Street entrance to the reserve in Hawker. They had nested in that tree the year before, so I was not surprised to see nesting material appear at the previous year's nesting site. This turned out to be a ruse, however, because they actually built a new nest in a totally different part of the tree. Having already seen two failed attempts, I silently wished them the best of luck.

At the end of October, I was taking part in "the Blitz" – an annual bird survey that covers the entire ACT, or as much of it as the local birdo community can manage. Naturally, the Pinnacle was one of the areas I surveyed. During that survey, my fellow birdo spotted yet another

A TALE OF FROGMOUTHS . . .

Frogmouth sitting on a nest, this time in a completely new location in the red stringybark woodland in the northwest corner of the reserve. So now we had two pairs to keep an eye on.

By mid-November, it was clear that the birds in the Dungowan Street nest were sitting on a chick, and fairly soon it could be seen peering down over the edge of the branch. Perhaps that curiosity was its undoing, because about a week later, I found the nest empty and the parents nowhere to be found. But poking around in the long grass below the nest, I came across the chick still healthy and curious and making enquiring noises, as if asking me whether I had anything nice (or anything at all) to eat. So I picked the little fellow up, popped him (or her) into my hat and took him down to the RSPCA.



So not an ideal outcome, but not so bad. But things did not go so well at the other nest in the woodland. Early in December, the parents simply flew off and abandoned what seemed to be a perfectly healthy chick, which died in the nest. It's hard to know why the parents would abandon a nest in this way, although (as a parent myself) I could speculate.

Although normally that would be it for the year, this year the summer had been so cool and damp, that there was still time for one more attempt. By the middle of December, the Frogmouths in the Dungowan Street tree settled in a new nest in yet another part of the tree. Would attempt number 5 be successful?

It was. On February 14th, almost exactly two months after the egg was laid, the chick took its first flight to a nearby tree, where I was able to get a rather poor photo with my camera.



Other photographers have since taken better snaps, and you can see a gallery showing the chick with its parents at this website: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/26596900@N05/sets/72157625992251411/>.

I also heard that the chick I took to the RSPCA turned out fine and was released into the bush together with several other Frogmouth chicks that were handed in at around the same time.

So, out of five nesting attempts, we had one partial success and one that finally proved to be completely successful! All I can say is, I really hope things go better next year. If you want to see more of these fascinating birds, check out the following website: <http://ibc.lynxeds.com/species/tawny-frogmouth-podargus-strigoides>.