

## Fotpin update #5 April 2011

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Dear fotpins:

Updates are a way of informing you of the progress of our program and policy activities and the person to contact if you would like more information [if you don't have contact details for the person mentioned, just contact [fotpin@internode.on.net](mailto:fotpin@internode.on.net), and we'll send them to you].

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### 1. Monthly and seasonal guided walks (Heather and Rosemary)

Every third Saturday of the month Rosemary leads a guided walk to explore and explain The Pinnacle, in its various seasonal guises. This is a great way to introduce new people to the reserve and to our group, and I would encourage everyone to try to attend from time to time. They are announced a week or so before the event on [This Week on the Pinnacle](#) on our website, or you can ask Rosemary to add you to the email list for these walks.

In addition to this, as a follow-up to our successful spring walks program, fotpin hosted three guided walks this autumn: woody weed invasion from adjacent properties; a weed control forum; and a longer guided walk from The Pinnacle to the Molonglo Valley.

Unfortunately the weather prevented the weed invasion walk, however with good weather the weed control and landscape walks were well attended. The former was attended by 25 people including ACT Parks, representatives of Catchment Groups and parkcare groups and a good turnout of fotpins. We discussed general weed control strategies, techniques for specific species and left open the possibility of similar walks in other reserves. What was to be a 2 hour walk became 3 hours, and I believe was enjoyed by everyone who attended. Good company and great subject matter!

Nine people joined Don and me for the Molonglo walk. We set off from The Pinnacle and headed down to the Bottom Pinnacle for great views and an overview of development and planning issues in the Valley, across to a grass experiment plot and through an underpass to William Hovell Drive, into and through Kama Nature Reserve to the river corridor. Feedback was positive, and we will do this one again!

### 2. The Pinnacle kangaroo survey (Pax)

It's all systems go for the kangaroo survey on Sunday 1 May being organised and supervised for us by Don Fletcher of ACT Conservation Planning and Research. We'll have a large number of fotpins, 10 CIT students and a few people from my work joining us for the two sweeps. There are still places for more people, and if you're interested in this rare opportunity please let me know; the more the better.

We will be sweeping through North Kama and “Top” and “Bottom” Pinnacle, so it is also an opportunity to walk through properties that you may not have visited before, or in detail! Also we will need boundary runners to keep the roos inside the reserve and off main roads, and we’ll be counting roos in the horse-paddocks from vantage points.

As well as providing us with some vital information for grazing management, it should be a fun event and a great day – weather permitting!

### **3. Pinnacle planting project (John Brannan)**

Following a visit to The Pinnacle by Greening Australia’s Ange Calliess, and our own visit to Mt Majura to study FOMM’s revegetation projects, the Fotpin Revegetation group is making steady progress towards developing a revised revegetation plan for The Pinnacle Nature Reserve.

Our energies are currently channelled into responding to an invitation to apply for funding for a revegetation project, and the group is discussing possible sites for what will be a small-scale pilot project that will give us some “hands-on” experience. We are also working up a seed-collection regime that will provide us with a calendar for future seed collection at the reserve, along with the requisite training and permits. The seed we collect will either be resown directly at the reserve or given to Greening Australia for use in raising seedlings that we can use in future plantings.

Revegetation will probably be a long-term initiative aimed in the first instance at fostering and, where appropriate, assisting the natural regeneration of native flora. It may also involve new small-scale planting in the current reserve, as well as the potential for larger scale plantings in the adjacent areas (Bottom Pinnacle and North Kama) in collaboration with PCS and Greening Australia.

### **4. Leadership on the scything front (Bob)**

Not only is Bob out in front on weeding effort, but also in innovation. Scythes are not new technology, but their application to weed control in the Canberra Nature Park is. Our Bob is leading the charge!

Bob demonstrated its use at the weed control forum referred to in Item 1, and at a Parkcare Coordinator’s meeting. I understand PCS is looking at Bob providing training to other parkcarers. Bob has already provided the input to Parks for their “standard operating” and “risk assessment” procedures for scything. There is also the prospect of the Australian agents for the scythes we use holding a scything workshop later in the year perhaps under the auspices of fotpin.

We don’t think the scythe will replace brushcutters, but its use for isolated plants or short, flowering patches of Saffron Thistles is clear. To have a few of these units in our armoury, with competent users, is a good thing. The scythes can also be used for slashing grass project plots and controlling exotic grass growth adjacent to high quality native grass patches – as proposed in the draft Weed Plan.

Well done Bob!

### **5. Progress with the Weed Plan (Warren)**

May I encourage all fotpins to visit our website and inspect the various weeding pages. Warren has made this a comprehensive and well connected set of pages containing the draft Weed Plan, effort logging, recording, maps and GPS (.gpx) files and cumulative effort reporting across the reserve. Familiarity with these pages is a must for the active fotpin weeder! Get started from the “weeding” item on the main menu.

Since early February our attentions have turned from Saffron Thistles and St Johns Wort to Nodding Thistles and Verbascum. These got away from us during the wet summer and so we’ve been bagging flowers and seed heads, and more recently spraying rosettes. In mid-February a group of Department of Justice supervised Community Service Order workers joined us to bag thistles.

John and Lesley have been targeting African Lovegrass, doing a splendid job in and adjacent to the reserve. As far as our Weed Plan is concerned lovegrass control is the priority.

A reminder of the value of logging effort by all people who carry out weeding:

- It provides hard evidence of the sizeable contribution of our members to the well-being of the Pinnacle (Our effort since 1 July 2010 is conservatively valued at \$10 - 20,000)
- It provides a good guide to the amount of effort required to manage each weed type, especially in those cases where we believe we have treated effectively all the weeds of a given species (as in the case of blackberry).
- The spatial information coupled with the effort provide us with a good indication of the severity of the weed problem in particular locations, and, depending on the weed type and the weather, an indication of how much effort may need to be applied in particular areas next year.
- The spatial information coupled with the date and type of treatment will enable us to assess the effectiveness of of given treatments at certain times of the year.
- And there's no doubt more uses will emerge with time.

So, thanks to all those who have been logging their effort and providing GPS information about where the effort was expended - it really makes a difference. Keep up the good work!

**Stop Press:** *We have just received funding from the Molonglo Catchment Group to upgrade our weeding capability with another Solo knapsack spray and two GPS units. The latter will be made available (with training as required) to anyone who does not have their own to ensure that as much of our effort as possible is geo-referenced, because that makes it so much more useful for monitoring of the results of that effort.*

## 6. fotpin's grass project (Don)

The grass experiment enters an exciting phase in April and May as we implement our experimental treatments for the first time. We will collect soil samples from 100 plots, slash 20 plots, slash an additional 20 plots then sow sterile ryecorn, and spread 250 kg of sugar over 20 plots. With luck, PCS will have time to burn 20 plots, and our experimental treatments will be complete. Then we wait to see what will happen. Will there, in fact, be elevated soil nutrient levels? Will the weeds run screaming from our sugar treatments? Will sterile ryecorn remove soil nutrients faster than simply slashing the existing weeds, or will the effects of ryecorn be largely through competition rather than nutrient manipulation? Answers to these questions will emerge over the next two years as we continue to sprinkle sugar, slash and burn our plots, in combination with our detailed spring plant surveys.

All of this activity is receiving welcome support from our local educational institutions. The Canberra Institute of Technology arrangement with fotpin has led Christopher Gauthier-Coles to take an ongoing role in the project. After giving a presentation to science teachers recently, I made contact with Laura Jones from Hawker College. Five of her students are now engaged in helping out over the next few weeks, and have already put in some very pleasant afternoons as we prepared the sites for treatment. This is on top of support provided by fotpin members, notably the dedicated fotpin slashers led by Bob and John Fitzgerald.

Getting involved in the grass project is an excellent opportunity to learn about some of the difficult management issues facing The Pinnacle, and to discover first hand, how we might go about fixing up the problems. It is a great opportunity for fotpin members to learn new skills in plant identification and the ecology of weed management. If you would like to help grow fotpin's capacity to manage our local reserve, the grass experiment provides the perfect opportunity. Contact Don Driscoll for details about when help is needed; you'll be able to send him an email by clicking on the link at the bottom of the following web page [http://www.fotpin.org.au/ngrp/ngrp\\_actions.html](http://www.fotpin.org.au/ngrp/ngrp_actions.html)

*(This project is our group's top priority. We have been funded by the Commonwealth and ACT Governments, as well as the Canberra Labor Club, to the tune of some \$50,000 to deliver this three year project. The ACT NRM Council, CSIRO and local catchment groups are also keenly interested in the outcomes and the quality of our project management.)*

## 7. Canberra Institute of Technology student program (Heather)

Fotpin has made connection with the Bruce campus of CIT to host student field work projects and to provide a practical context for field technique training. 5 student projects will get underway over the progress of the

year. Each student has a fotpin supervisor for their field work and a specific project to progress. The projects are:

- review of the Weed Plan;
- managing an aspect of the native grass project;
- developing a planting program for the Bottom Pinnacle;
- assessing and evaluating soil erosion on soil types/surfaces; and
- mapping *Aprasia parapulchella*\* habitat condition.

The projects will be supplemented with a series of field technique sessions for all students, such as the kangaroo survey, erosion survey, using GPS units and weed control – targeting the needs of the five student projects. As part of the Weed Plan project, saffron thistle infestations in North Kama and Bottom Pinnacle have already been mapped!

The field work projects are part of the requirements for the student's course and form one activity in their completion of the study they are undertaking. Fotpin is providing “*a real work experience program that engages with the community*” to quote from the supervising CIT lecturer.

(\* *Aprasia parapulchella*, commonly known as Pink Tailed Worm Lizard, is a listed protected species under ACT and Commonwealth legislation).

### **8. The proposed fotpin Community Service Order program (Heather and Pax)**

At its last meeting Committee decided to proceed with the proposed CSO program subject to the ACT Department of Justice providing at the outset three suitable workers to begin the program. Subsequent advice from the Department of Justice is that this is not achievable and that it may be some months before we would have that minimum number.

Some fotpins are still keen to build the program and tap into this opportunity to increase our weeding effort as well as broaden the reserve's value to society as a vehicle for people to work off a Community Service Order, and potentially gain a more positive outlook on community life.

### **9. Rabbit monitoring and control (Pax)**

In autumn 2010 fotpin mapped rabbit warrens across The Pinnacle Nature Reserve, North Kama and Bottom Pinnacle, to help inform ACT Park's rabbit control program. To get a better handle on the rabbit population this mapping activity was immediately followed by revisiting a sub-sample of 125 of the 277 warrens to count active entrances; it is possible to convert active burrow numbers to rabbit numbers, though the conversion rate needs to be verified at The Pinnacle. The sub-sample of 125 warrens was “risk-based”; it comprised all large warrens (those with more than 5 burrows), so that the largest problem areas were covered, and a sample of the small warrens (less than 5 burrows).

The active entrance survey was repeated in late August 2010 and again in March 2011. I estimate that between April and August there was almost an order of magnitude reduction in active entrances, and that those numbers remained stable or declined slightly to March 2011. This is curious as spring and summer should have led to large increases in burrows; perhaps the burrows have been inundated too often over what was a wet period. I'm still working up the estimates of entrances, and hope to have a more complete and visual description on our website as soon as possible.

An interesting development related to rabbit control is that the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre ([www.invasiveanimals.com/](http://www.invasiveanimals.com/)) is about to trial in NSW portable carbon monoxide fumigators for fumigating rabbit warrens. However, before the units will be available for sale (at ~\$3,000) the trials need to be completed and APVMA (Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority: <http://www.apvma.gov.au>) approval obtained for use of CO as a fumigant. John and I have registered our interest for any training that might be available, and I have made preliminary contact with PCS and the company trialling the units about possibly demonstrating fumigator use at The Pinnacle.

## **10. North Kama and Bottom Pinnacle (Pax)**

The Committee wrote to the ACT Chief Minister recently regarding the future use of the Bottom Pinnacle and North Kama (see our [advocacy](#) web page). We proposed the former be included in The Pinnacle Nature Reserve, and the latter be used for conservation purposes including a ranger station, a focal point for parkcare in the Lower Molonglo Valley, for restoration science and study, and for outdoor environment education.

The Chief Minister replied very positively to most of these ideas, but said that there are policy and planning issues that need to be sorted before this can proceed. For example changes will be required to the ACT's statutory *Territory Plan* to reflect the altered land tenure.

The Chief Minister's support for our proposals is very encouraging. It offers scope to achieve good environmental outcomes across the Pinnacle area and for our group, working with others, to engage the new residents moving into the Molonglo suburbs. We may one day be able to store equipment and chemicals at North Kama, and to work from there.

## **11. The land and water conservation project (Pax)**

The wet spring and summer frustrated our erosion assessment work, but fortunately it looks to be recommencing. Andrew Yates is leading the drainage line assessments, Warren the track assessments, and I will be working with David Tongway and Darlene Glyde (CIT) to complete the soil surface assessments.

The outputs of this assessment work will be inputs to drafting a Land and Water Conservation Plan which will set priorities for erosion mitigation and help measure erosion and erosion risks over time. We are using assessment frameworks developed by former CSIRO Research Scientist David Tongway and his colleagues over several decades and now used especially for minesite rehabilitation world wide.

If you would like to know more about these projects, and might have time to commit to helping complete one of these assessment areas then please contact me.

## **12. Management rules (Heather)**

You would have all received a note from Heather about the revised rules and the process for finalising them. There are two amendments that should be highlighted.

Firstly, the proposed revised rules provide for fotpin members attending our AGMs to nominate and elect persons to Committee. It was reasonable last year, in order to get started, to form a Committee by self-nomination and let Committee sort people's roles. It is now time for a more active decision by fotpins on who represents the group and coordinates its activities.

I encourage everyone to consider contributing through Committee. If there is a role that you would especially like to take on and feel you can do a good job, please signal your interest. The more fotpins over time who contribute as office bearers or ordinary committee members, the stronger and more effective fotpin will be. Within the rules you will notice that any one Committee position can only be held for 2 consecutive years – this points to a clear intent to have a healthy level of turnover and fresh activity.

Also, we are proposing a new position of Coordinator. Although several fotpins not on committee coordinate different field activities, this role has largely fallen to the Convenor. Committee believes these positions need to be separated to more effectively manage our group's activities. This will create four office bearing positions, Convenor, Secretary, Coordinator and Treasurer, joined by three Ordinary Committee members.

## **13. Fotpin's website (Warren)**

The website continues to grow organically as needs demand. If you haven't been to our website lately you might want to:

- Click on the main [News](#) link to see what news headlines have been archived since you last visited and you may have missed – the headlines often disappear off the front page quickly, but they can all be found at the news link above
- Have a look at the list of [recent additions](#) to the website (link located at the bottom of the left-hand menu)

If you're not already a member, our new [online membership form](#) makes it even easier for you to register as one.

Although there have been many small changes and additions, the main ones have been aimed at improving the ability of weeders to share information. The [recent weeding](#) page summarizes the qualitative side of the data collected in our weeding effort logging; it provides information on who has weeded where recently and what weeds they targeted. The [weed notes](#) page provides an opportunity for weeders to record and share useful observations about weed growth and occurrence, weeding techniques and recommendations, etc. So if you suddenly feel the urge to go weeding, a quick check of these two pages should help you to decide what to do and where to do it. Another relatively recent addition is our [weeding maps](#), which has now been updated and expanded. Where we have georeferenced weeding information, this is summarised on a map for each weed species. These are well worth a look, if only because they make quite attractive images.

Warren has recently implemented a free service to track visits to the website so that we can see how many people are visiting, how many new visitors are coming to the site, and what pages are being most looked at. The number of new visitors has been growing steadily since the counting started on 11 March, and now tops 150, well in excess of our combined mailing lists.

And finally, if something about the website doesn't work for you, or you have an idea for new content, please let Warren know; use the webmaster link at the bottom of the home page.

#### **14. NRM Chair's visit.**

In mid March the ACT NRM Council hosted a conference of the Chairs of Regional Natural Resource Management groups around Australia. As part of that conference, Council organised a half day tour of three sites in Canberra. Fotpin was fortunate to be invited by Council to provide a tour of the Pinnacle Nature Reserve and speak to the Chairs about what we were doing. For more information go to the news item from 18 March at [www.fotpin.org.au/news.html#n1103182](http://www.fotpin.org.au/news.html#n1103182)

The Pinnacle turned on perfect weather. Warren spoke about the Weed Plan, its implementation and our reporting, communication and monitoring strategies, Don about the grass project and Heather about a sense of place and connectivity. I'm delighted at the positive feedback we received from Sarah Ryan, Chair ACT NRM Council, particularly in regard to fotpin's Secretary ... *"Heather Burness spoke about connection with place and deep time, and received a moving response from John Wason, Deputy Chair of the Northern Gulf Natural Resource Management Group in Queensland ... It was a fitting bookend to the day."*

Promoting the importance of The Pinnacle, its place in the Lower Molonglo Valley, the programs we are running, and the very capable people that make up fotpin is an important role of Committee.

As you can see, there has been plenty happening and plans for more to come. If you are interested in being involved in any of the above, then do get in touch with the contact person named, or email [fotpin@internode.on.net](mailto:fotpin@internode.on.net)

Kind regards

Pax

Convenor