

## Fotpin update #6 July 2011

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Dear fotpins,

I hope this winter update finds you well and warm. This update doubles as an attachment to the 2011 Convenor's Report which will be presented at the 2011 AGM on 24 July, and provides a summary of fotpin activities over the past year. I have signalled below who in fotpin is the contact person for the respective activity.

Topics covered by this update:

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### **1. Committee meetings (Heather)**

Committee has met six times since the Inaugural General Meeting on 25 July 2010. Our meeting agendas are very full, lasting up to three hours. Heather does a magnificent job of formulating draft agendas, calling for items and agenda papers, and preparing minutes. The more time consuming items have related to the proposed Community Service Order program, the revised fotpin rules, the Requested General Meeting in March and community engagement and communication activities. For more information on the Committee please go to [fotpin.org.au/governance.html](http://fotpin.org.au/governance.html).

### **2. Native grass restoration project (Don)**

Don Driscoll briefed our Inaugural Meeting on a project to trial treatments for restoring native groundlayer plant species. At that time the proposal had been submitted to the ACT and Federal Governments for funding, and we were awaiting a response.

Since then funding has been provided by both Governments, and we secured additional monies from the Canberra Labor Club. Total project funding is \$52,982, with almost \$28,000 of this to construct 10

herbivore exclusion plots in The Pinnacle Nature Reserve, Bottom Pinnacle and North Kama properties. Other large budget items include sugar, and the analysis of soil and plant samples.

The project is still in its early days, but is proceeding in line with budget and project milestones, and is well supported by fotpins and friends. Given the breadth and level of third party support this project is our group's key commitment. For more information on the project please go to [fotpin.org.au/ngrp/](http://fotpin.org.au/ngrp/). When the project concludes in 2013, the exclusion plots will continue to be valuable infrastructure for tracking the impact of kangaroo grazing across the three land parcels.

### **3. Fotpin website (Warren)**

The fotpin website goes from strength to strength and, in my opinion, is as functional and informative a website as anyone is likely to find in the volunteer parkcare or NRM space. It is a facility that we should contribute to and be enormously proud of, it reflects the motivated, capable and resourceful nature of our group. Warren is doing an extraordinary job of this, I'm sure everyone agrees.

The features of the website I find most appealing are that it addresses in detail each of our current program areas: weeds, kangaroos, rabbits, birds and erosion. It has a capacity to log every type of effort we make in the group, from administrivia to mapping rabbit warrens to weeding. There is capacity to join online, register to be on our email list online and make suggestions. If you want to see how the website has grown and evolved - check out the "website updates" link at the bottom of the main menu.

### **4. Weed control, effort tracking and monitoring (Warren)**

Over the year our group has given most attention to weed control, guided by our draft Weed Plan. Our website reflects this priority, providing comprehensive information, guidance and reporting on our weeding efforts. Warren maintains a daily update of monthly weeding effort, as well as updates on recent weeding parties ([fotpin.org.au/weeds/weed\\_effort.html](http://fotpin.org.au/weeds/weed_effort.html)).

Important features of our effort monitoring and reporting include:

- using GPS to map and where we have sprayed, grubbed and bagged weeds;
- the effort logging page to report on weeding parties. This goes to Warren who then adjusts our central, consolidated records;
- visualising gaps in weed control effort by visiting the weeding maps page.

### **5. Pilot revegetation project (John B)**

In response to a growing feeling that fotpin should be doing more than just weed eradication, and should be replacing some of the woody weeds that were acting as important bird habitat, a small group of fotpin members designed a pilot revegetation project alongside the Forest Block. This was prompted in part by funding on offer from Spicers Australia, through Landcare Australia, for revegetation projects to be carried out within this calendar year.

Following extensive research, we submitted a detailed application, which has now been approved. The project will involve planting 200 or so native trees, shrubs and groundcover plants on a day yet to be determined, probably in early October. The project, which will also include the installation of a small on-site water tank, will be an opportunity for fotpin to trial different types of plants, guards and other protective measures so that future revegetation efforts – such as under the Woodlands Strategy ([see 7 below](#)) - will be better informed.

## **6. Advocacy (Pax)**

A major initiative of Committee has been to advocate for the Bottom Pinnacle to be included in the nature reserve, and for the North Kama property (formerly leased) to be managed for conservation related purposes such as environmental education, research and establishment of a parkcare focal point. The previous Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope responded positively to our ideas, and I understand was seriously progressing those proposals. They are now with Simon Corbell, and I am hopeful of his support.

Details of other submissions made during the year by the Committee on fotpin's behalf can be found at [fotpin.org.au/advocacy.html](http://fotpin.org.au/advocacy.html).

## **7. ACT Woodlands Strategy (Pax)**

Towards the end of 2010 fotpin was invited to a roundtable discussion with key environment groups to discuss woodland conservation issues, and to a draft ACT Woodland Restoration Strategy ([fotpin.org.au/advocacy.html#woodlands](http://fotpin.org.au/advocacy.html#woodlands)). A working group was established out of that forum, and I agreed to represent parkcare groups on that working group.

In May this year the ACT Government allocated \$250,000 per year over 4 years to implement the Strategy. Following this announcement the working group met to discuss geographic priorities for investing in woodland restoration and agreed that the Belconnen Hills (Aranda Bushland, Mt Painter, The Pinnacle, and Kama Nature Reserve) should be one of two priority areas for investment in 2011-12.

In late June I organised a meeting of parkcare group representatives from across the Belconnen Hills, as well as ACT Parks officers, to begin to develop a Restoration Plan for this woodland corridor. The Plan will be presented to ACT Parks for funding.

## **8. Bird monitoring (John B)**

Since March 2010, regular monthly bird surveys have been undertaken by three experienced birdwatchers at eight sites around the Reserve. The methodology used is the accepted standard for woodland bird surveys in Australia, and consists of counting all the birds seen and heard in a 2-hectare area over a 20-minute period. By surveying the same locations consistently over many years, we can build a picture of the seasonal and annual changes in bird populations, in terms of both numbers and species.

A small number of birdwatchers have visited the reserve regularly for many years, some for several decades, and have already compiled an informal picture of what is and is not normal for the reserve, as well as some of the more critical issues for birdlife in the reserve. The inspiration for starting up the formal surveys came from the formation of fotpin and the accompanying upsurge in organized and concerted efforts to control weeds, rabbits and grazing at the Pinnacle. The bird surveys, by establishing a clear baseline now, will help to give us a clearer picture of the impact that the hard work of the fotpin members is having on birdlife in the reserve, and across the Kama-Pinnacle and Belconnen Hills corridor. We hope in the near future to be able to present this data on our website. In the meantime, you can see a complete list of the birds of the Pinnacle and find out more about them at [fotpin.org.au/birds.html](http://fotpin.org.au/birds.html).

## **9. Interaction with CIT (Heather)**

Heather and I arranged with the Environment Management course coordinator at Bruce Campus Canberra Institute of Technology for students to undertake projects in the Kama-Pinnacle area. We presently have five students undertaking, or planning to undertake, projects with us. These projects are designed to assist with updating the Weed Plan, with the native grass project, to develop a planting project for the Bottom Pinnacle, to map Aprasia habitat and to conduct soil surface erosion assessments.

The student projects will get into full swing during the second half of the year. All projects are being supervised by fotpin members.

## **10. Community Service Order workers (Pax)**

Earlier this year Committee explored with fotpins the possibility of establishing a fotpin-supervised Community Service Order program to enhance our weeding effort. The idea was that we would enter into a formal agreement with the ACT's Department of Justice (DoJ) to provide frequent, reliable opportunities for people to meet work orders placed on them by the Courts.

Sufficient fotpins volunteered to meet our proposed supervisory obligations. However DoJ was unable to provide at startup sufficient workers (3) to justify – in Committee's view – our effort expended in administering the program. DoJ believed it would take some months to build the program to this level. To proceed with the proposal would mean we take a short-term "cost" with a view to longer term benefits as the program grows to greater than three workers. This assessment is narrowly focused - it does not factor in the social and community benefits that might come from just one or two workers joining us!

Committee decided to shelve the program awaiting possible further uptake of it by the new committee after our AGM. I hope that in early Spring the new Committee will revisit our approach to the program, and consider accepting the short-term "cost" for a longer-term outcome that many of us consider worthwhile for a range of reasons. In the meantime we can organise the occasional busload of DoJ supervised workers to join us.

## **11. Kangaroos and rabbits (Pax)**

In early May we held the first kangaroo survey of The Pinnacle Nature Reserve, including North Kama, Bottom Pinnacle and the adjacent rural lease. The survey was well supported by fotpins and friends of fotpin. ACT Parks officers organised equipment and experience, and fotpin the people.

It was a successful day with many people joining us for the first time, compiling reliable counts and gaining a sense that, without much trouble, we could do a more efficient and reliable count next year! For details of the count go to [fotpin.org.au/sweep-count\\_110501.html](http://fotpin.org.au/sweep-count_110501.html), and for information on kangaroo management on The Pinnacle [fotpin.org.au/kangaroos.html](http://fotpin.org.au/kangaroos.html).

In April 2010 fotpins mapped rabbit warrens to assist ACT Parks rabbit control program. Since then John B, Warren and I have monitored rabbit warrens to track changes in numbers and activity. These counts are aligned with Parks' spotlight counts and showed that there is a good correlation between the two methods. For more information on rabbit monitoring go to [fotpin.org.au/rabbits.html](http://fotpin.org.au/rabbits.html).

Parks plan to undertake another rabbit control program in late 2011-early 2012, and will be seeking fotpin help to re-survey The Pinnacle area in November this year.

## **12. Training (Pax)**

Over the last 12 months three fotpins have received Chemcert accreditation to legally mix, transport and apply herbicides in the Canberra Nature Park, bringing to six the number of chemcerted fotpins. We are building a solid base of members that, principally, spray priority weeds. Most commonly used herbicides are Starane Advanced (St Johns Wort, Nightshade), Agritone (thistles, Horehound, Prickly Lettuce) and Brush-off (Briar Rose, Blackberry and Verbascum). Thanks to ACT Parks, Ginninderra Catchment Group and Molonglo Catchment Goup for contributing to the cost of training and equipment .

Prior to Saffron Thistle slashing last season, ACT Parks also provided 13 fotpins with training in safe brushcutter use (as well as lending us two units, and providing six helmets, hi-vis vests and gloves). Without this support we would not have achieved the huge impact on saffrons that we did! Thanks again to Parks. *(Parks have also assisted by revising their policies and OH&S requirements for chemical and equipment use.)*

## **13. Our Guided Walks and Spring Program (Heather)**

Guided walks, seasonal and monthly, are now significant events in the fotpin calendar. Rosemary's monthly 3rd Saturday walks attract a strong attendance of members and newcomers - Rosemary's knowledge of the reserve's plants is unparalleled and with her guidance these walks are a great opportunity to appreciate the seasonal and spatial nuances of the reserve.

Heather organises seasonal walks programs for Autumn and Spring. These have included theme-based walks by Rosemary, introductions to the grass project, an open air weeding forum attended by representatives from other parkcare groups and a walk to the Molonglo River corridor. This Spring we plan to hold another series of walks, including by popular demand another walk to the river corridor, the latest plant and bird happenings, and potentially a photography workshop. Look out for them!

The guided walks program is an important part of our Spring engagement strategy. With local residents coming out of hibernation and looking for a nearby nature-based activity, what better time than to capture their attention with an engaging pamphlet in the letterbox outlining our Spring walks and events. Our letterbox and poster campaign last Spring was very effective, and we'll do it again this year.

## **14. Erosion mapping and assessment (Pax)**

In August last year David Tongway trained a small group of us to assess erosion risk at the reserve. This risk comes in several forms: gully and drainage line; walking and maintenance tracks and soil surface. We got off to a quick start and completed some assessment work, however the wet Spring and Summer, our Saffron Thistle and St Johns Wort campaigns, as well as implementing the native grass project, meant progress was brief.

I'm pleased to report we have now returned to this project. Andrew Yates and I have almost completed drainage line assessments throughout the Top and Bottom Pinnacle, and North and South Kama. Warren plans to recommence the track erosion assessments shortly and I have discussed with David where we'll restart the soil surface assessments – although with Spring weeding and grass project demands this may again be delayed.

## **15. Promoting our projects (Pax)**

In March this year the ACT NRM Council convened a meeting of NRM Chairs from around Australia, and approached us to present our activities during a day of field visits. An opportunity to showcase our group's activities we eagerly accepted.

A luxury coachload of NRM leaders parked at the De Salis St carpark and, after a brief welcome at the noticeboard, they proceeded to the saddle below the Pinnacle to hear from Warren about the Weed Plan and our on-line monitoring and reporting system. Don then lead them to the Stipa1 plot to explain the ins and outs of the native grass project. Warren and Don both took a lot of questions, and of course, the cane growers from North Queensland welcomed the potential new market for their product.

The grand finale was Heather's talk about connection with place, that she gave at The Pinnacle. Earlier that afternoon a brief shower had passed through, leaving us with a beautiful fresh breeze, a sunny outlook and clear views across the valley and to the Ranges to top off our final talk. Heather's talk inspired special acknowledgement from the ACT NRM Chair, Dr Sarah Ryan, for its moving review of indigenous connection to place. See [fotpin.org.au/photos/NRM-chairs-visit\\_110316.html](http://fotpin.org.au/photos/NRM-chairs-visit_110316.html) for a pictorial record of the visit.

Along with the NRMs visit, we have had Mary Porter MLA and Andrew Leigh MHR visit the reserve promoting the native grass project (to the press!) and Don and I have escorted Alistair Coe MLA and Meredith Hunter MLA around the reserve to explain our goals and strategies. Heather and Warren also did a guest spot on ACT Radio Landcare in December to promote fotpin activities in general.

## **16. Newsletters and updates (Pax)**

Since our inaugural meeting we have produced four newsletters and four updates. Newsletters are our "flagship" communications product, that include articles from a range of authors, with pictures, figures etc to showcase our group and our activities. If anyone would like to contribute an article please let me know.

What was until recently an adhoc "fotpin update" is now a regular vehicle for briefing fotpins on the detail of what is happening. Just like this update, it's a no frills review of everything happening in the group. Please take the time to go through updates and if you are interested in the topic and/or want to get involved please contact the lead fotpin.

## **17. Equestrians (Warren)**

Equestrian activity at The Pinnacle Nature Reserve has had a chequered (recent) history, but I'm pleased to report that this is not so much of a problem these days.

Since Parks made the Dowling and Springvale Tracks available to equestrians, and constructed additional fencing to prevent access from the De Salis cavaletti across The Pinnacle, we have seen far less evidence of inappropriate behaviour by equestrians. I will be interested to see where equestrians go in Spring and Summer - when the riders mostly return.

**It's been a busy year, with 2011-12 likely to much the same!**