



fotpin update #19 January 2017

In this update:

Spring Walks Program

Annual PCS Planning Meeting

Other Recent Events

Weed Control

Vegwatch

Grassland Slashing Trials

ParkCare Coordinators' Meeting

Collaboration with Belconnen High School

As we head into the new year with a spell of hot, dry weather, the extremely wet winter which gave way to the relatively mild and damp Spring is but a fond memory. The result was an outstanding season for almost every plant species. On the positive side, this meant wonderful arrays of blossoming native wildflowers, including a pretty much unprecedented profusion of orchids, lilies, daisies and other flowering natives. The native grasses are still going gangbusters, with species such as Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda australis*) now taking over more and more areas of the Reserve. On the less positive side, it has also resulted in enormous stands of exotic annual grasses, including virtually impenetrable thickets of head-high (and higher!) wild oat grass, and widespread germination and vigorous growth of many weeds (see the "Weed Control" section below for more details).

So the last three months have been busy for the fotpin weeding teams, while other Reserve-related business has successfully filled in any other pockets of free time we might otherwise have had.

Spring Walks Program

In addition to two very successful birdwatching walks, this season's program included a very well attended tour of the new extension to the Pinnacle Nature Reserve, with myself, John Fitz Gerald and Warren each providing a guide to the birds, the vegetation and the background and management respectively. Fortunately, this visit coincided with the flowering of some stunning areas of native wildflowers, such as the Billy Buttons shown here. Feedback on the walk indicated that the participants had a very enjoyable and worthwhile visit.



Annual Planning Meeting

We had our annual planning meeting with the ACT Government's Parks & Conservation Service on September 6th. The PCS officers present were Anthony Hart (Senior Ranger Northside), our local ranger Nic Mikhailovic, Nina Bruns (Senior Ranger for Offsets) and our old friend Craig Wainwright (ParkCare Support Officer).

Nina informed us that the [offset area in North Kama](#) is now officially part of the Pinnacle Nature Reserve, and for the time being we are now referring to it as the "Pinnacle Extension" until we can come up with a more suitable paddock name. The area will have its own weed-control regime, which will initially target thistles, Paterson's Curse, St. John's Wort and African Lovegrass. Nina also plans to enlist people to assist with Frogwatch observations at the dams in the extension, probably by simply recording audio of the frog calls for later identification. There will also be rabbit control and some minor plantings of native species, to be advised at a later date.

Nic foreshadowed his plans to plant tussock grasses and shrubs (probably *Bursaria spinosa*) along the track that has been closed off running down from the Pinnacle summit. [In the event, those plantings were also supplemented by about 20 eucalypt seedlings on the same slope.]

Topics raised by fotpin included concerns about easy motorbike access to the reserve now that the fences along the Springvale track have been removed, the implications for the

reserve of the proposed construction of a water supply pipe for the new Molonglo suburb of Whitlam, the future of the Tully land (aka Wintergarden) now that it has been purchased by the ACT Government, and the progress of the ParkCare 25th anniversary bench.

Anthony noted our concerns about motorbikes and assured us that PCS would do what they could (not much, admittedly). He also said he'd seek a meeting with the Land Development Agency to get some more information regarding the water pipeline for the new suburb of Whitlam that will pass through the Reserve (see [Minutes September Coordinating Committee Meeting](#), item 14b; more information for members soon). The situation with the Tully land is that it has been leased back to the Tully family for 10 years, with a possible extension for another 10 years, meaning that not much has changed regarding the management of that land. With regard to the ParkCare anniversary bench, we later learned that they are now being manufactured (some are already completed) and will be available soon. So it is now up to us to select a suitable site for the bench. Stay tuned for more information on that.

Other Recent Events

The two main events in which fotpin participated this spring were the annual Jamison Joint ParkCare Display running over three days in September and the Weetangera Primary School Spring Fete in November.

I'm pleased to say that both events were very successful, with the Jamison event in particular attracting a lot of interest among the weekend shoppers. As always, my profuse thanks go out to everyone who gave up their free time on a weekend to come along and help out with the setting up, staffing and tearing down of the displays.

Weed Control

While we have necessarily had to limit the reach of our weeding program since Pax's withdrawal, between July and December we still managed a very creditable 367 hours of [weed control effort](#), particularly bearing in mind that this figure does not reflect all the associated effort put in by our weeding teams. While this is much less than previous years, our restriction of most effort solely to the Reserve means that it has received almost as much effort as previously.

This is a very abundant year for many of our main target weeds. Cape weed was abundant in some areas in early spring but St. John's Wort has been the big one, being widespread and prolific, and has consumed 136 hours of spraying time to date. Saffron Thistles, Verbascum and Paterson's Curse have enjoyed the conditions to a lesser extent as well as some of the lower priority weeds such as Prickly Lettuce. The relative scarcity of weeds such as Spear Thistles and Horehound and the steady declines in Verbascum and Briars suggest that our past efforts to eradicate those weeds have been successful in preventing seed germination.

We're also very happy to welcome Denise to our team of certified weed sprayers, which will help to spread the workload in what remains a very busy year.

Vegwatch Program (Biodiversity Monitoring)

Yet again, John Fitz Gerald was on hand to help with this year's survey. The profusion of annual exotic grasses meant that there was a little less diversity than in some previous surveys, but we are also starting to see the first clear evidence that our 2011 plantings are producing offspring of their own. This is very encouraging as it suggests that other plantings we have undertaken may have a long term effect by multiplying and spreading so that our woodlands start to include a viable shrub layer, instead of just groundcover and trees.

Grassland Slashing Trials

Len and Grahame have taken some time out from weeding to undertake a trial slashing program in selected plots in Weetangera paddock. The aim is to prevent seed set by some of the exotic annual grasses so that those areas can be re-colonised by the later-flowering native grasses that are still relatively abundant in the area.

With Len and Grahame's help, I am trialling a similar experiment in the triangular plot between the Dowling and Springvale tracks in the northwest corner of the reserve. This will

be a long-term undertaking, and only time will tell whether we are successful in promoting a recovery by native grasses, but if we can demonstrate that this is beneficial, then it may be something we can apply to larger areas of the reserve in the future.

PCS ParkCare Coordinators' Meeting

These quarterly meetings are an opportunity for the Parks & Conservation Service (PCS) to communicate with all the ParkCare and Landcare groups they supervise, and for those groups to exchange information among themselves. The meeting on November 22nd raised a number of issues that could impact on fotpin:

The positions of ParkCare & Volunteer Coordinator and Assistant Coordinator (currently held by Phil Selmes and Craig Wainwright respectively) are to be spilled, and an Aboriginal Programs Manager position will be established. Phil intends to re-apply for his current position, but Craig has an opportunity to take up a new position out at Tidbinbilla and will likely leave us early in the new year. This is sad news, as Craig has been a highly effective and energetic supporter of and advocate for ParkCare and Landcare groups in the last 4 or 5 years. He will be sorely missed. He assured us that his replacement will be carefully chosen and coached into the job (by Craig himself), but Craig's will be a very big pair of boots to fill.

- There is funding available for "Reserve Orientation Signage". This will include permanent versions of the temporary Activities Declaration signs we've had around the reserve for several months, but will also include maps and the opportunity to highlight walking loop trails in each reserve, with information on length, degree of difficulty and possibly some highlights of the walk. This will be developed in consultation with the relevant ParkCare/Landcare group during the first half of 2017, and will be supervised by Lara Woolcombe and Lois Padgham at PCS.
- PCS are also in the process of developing a policy position with respect to electric bikes. They foresee that, because these machines straddle the divide between pushbikes and motorbikes, permitting them access to reserves may push the current boundaries of what constitutes "low-impact" activity in a reserve. Our input on this issue is invited.
- A position of "Community Groups Support Officer" has been established within Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) (what used to be TAMS). The position is currently held by Nick Bakker, and he will now be the contact point for us when we want to talk to City Services. I spoke to him briefly about weed control, but he's still feeling his way into the job and couldn't give me any useful answers regarding ALG spraying around the Pinnacle NR. He did say that one of his tasks will be to improve the coordination between PCS and TCCS weed management.

Collaboration with Belconnen High School

Following a chance encounter with a school-led group of Year 7 Belconnen High School students at the reserve, we were recently contacted by teachers at the school with a view to enlisting fotpin members to provide advice and guidance on future visits to the Pinnacle. The first of these took place on November 30th, with a second scheduled for December 5th. These visits are part of the school's ecology studies program and offer the students a chance to learn about local ecosystems and the flora and fauna species in those habitats. I accompanied about 25 students and 3 teachers on the visit last Friday and found the students very friendly and occasionally inquisitive and interested. A few already showed considerable familiarity with the reserve and its plant and animal species. The visit went extremely well, I think, and hopefully will lay the foundations for an ongoing relationship with the school. My hope is that this relationship will serve to broaden community awareness of our work at the reserve and make more young people (and their families) aware of the values that the reserve has to offer.

John Brannan
Fotpin Convenor
16 January 2016