



fotpin update #23 May 2018

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This certainly feels like it has been a very eventful couple of months since the last Update. We've taken part in the Hawker Primary School fete, had our Aboriginal Heritage and Tree Week walks plus an additional "Breakfast with the Birds" walk with Greening Australia, had a hazard reduction burn at the Reserve and finally managed to run our annual Kangaroo Count with PCS.

Hawker Primary School Fete -- Sunday March 25th

The organisers at the school made a courageous decision to go ahead with holding the fete outdoors despite a not very promising weather forecast. In the event, it turned out to be the right decision. The wind and rain held off and the fete was a great success. Our stall was well attended, and our volunteers did a terrific job of responding to people's inquiries about the Reserve. Thanks to everyone who has helped out, particularly to Wayne for supplying the much-needed tent pegs when the wind threatened our display boards and they needed anchoring in place!

Autumn Walks

Aboriginal Heritage Walk

*This event is supported with funding made available by the ACT Government under the ACT Heritage Grants Program.

Ngunawal elder Wally Bell led a highly successful Aboriginal Heritage walk at the Pinnacle Nature Reserve on Sunday April 22nd. Almost thirty people turned up to hear Wally talk about the connection that his family and his people have to the land that we now call Canberra. He discussed Ngunawal cultural practices, passing around artefacts to illustrate his talk, and gave a welcome to country in language, something that I think made a deep impression on everyone present.

His walk took us through woodland and grassland areas, giving Wally the opportunity to show us how his people have used some of the local plants, and finished with a stroll to the top of the Pinnacle, where he talked about his people's pathways through the landscape and touched on the different types of scar trees found in the area.



Despite it being a chilly and at times damp morning, everyone found the event extremely informative and rewarding. I for one am very much looking forward to the second of Wally's walks at the Pinnacle, currently scheduled for some time in October. Keep an eye on the Fotpin website for details closer to the time.

COG* Tree Week Bird Walk

*Canberra Ornithologists Group

On an absolutely perfect Canberra Autumn morning, 22 people turned up to enjoy a relaxing stroll around the Pinnacle, in the company of each other and some very cooperative birds, to help COG commemorate Tree Week in the ACT. After a quiet start, we encountered a trio of Scarlet Robins in the southeast corner of the Forest block, and shortly after a large mixed feeding flock of thornbills, weebills, pardalotes and (briefly) a Speckled Warbler -- one of the locally threatened species that we regularly encounter at the Reserve. Such flocks (MFFs, for short) are a regular feature of birdwatching in the colder months of the year in Canberra, and it was especially nice in this case to have some very clear views of Striated Thornbills – normally a canopy species that is easily overlooked – clustering around a tree hollow which probably contained a pool of water they were drinking from.

En route to the summit of the Pinnacle, we encountered another group of four Scarlet Robins, including two brilliantly coloured males engaged in their usual contest for the attention of the females. After a pause at the summit, we headed back towards our starting point, encountering another large MFF that included another of the altitudinal migrants, the Golden Whistler. Alas, this was an immature bird, so did not have the brilliant colours that make the older males of this species such a spectacular bird. A little later, we were fortunate to see a flock of 50-60 honeyeaters passing over, part of the seasonal migration that takes place around this time every year. This flock consisted mostly of White-naped Honeyeaters, but with a large number of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters also. That brought the total for the morning's outing to 31 species in all, which is not a bad haul for this time of the year.

Kangaroo Count

Originally scheduled for March 18th, the forecast of extraordinarily bad weather (and ultimately a total fire ban) meant that the count had to be hastily rescheduled for April 22nd. On the 22nd, around 16 people turned up on a blustery morning with hopes of getting this event knocked over. However, it was not to be. Melissa Snape from PCS decided that, given the windy conditions, we did not have sufficient numbers to run the count safely, either for ourselves or, more importantly, for the kangaroos. By this stage, we were running out of available Sundays, so it was decided to try for Saturday May 5th as our third and final attempt.

Mercifully, conditions on the day were perfect and we had ample volunteers to come along and cover the ground. The first sweep appeared to go well, with the tally coming to 440 Eastern Greys and half a dozen Red-necked Wallabies. After a delicious lunch of Turkish pide and dips furnished by PCS, we started the second count and were about two-thirds completed when a very large mob of something over a hundred roos all crossed the sweep line at one point, completely overwhelming the poor volunteers trying to keep track of the numbers. At that point, Mel decided that the margin of error was too great and decided to pull the plug on the rest of the count. Later, it transpired that there had been a similar episode during the morning sweep and Mel had been hoping for a better outcome in the afternoon.

Ultimately, the result from the morning sweep will be combined with a count made using another method that involves rangers walking a fixed transect and then extrapolating their observations across the Reserve using mathematical modelling. Mel explained that the method was trialled at the Pinnacle (and several other reserves) a few years back and found to yield results that tallied well with sweep counts.

I took the opportunity to ask Mel why the Pinnacle was not included on the list of reserves to be closed for the Kangaroo Cull this year, and she explained that this year they need to prioritise some of the other reserves around Canberra that are in particularly bad shape due to overgrazing.

Hazard Reduction Burn

As many of you will know, the ACT Government conducted a hazard reduction burn in the Weetangera and Eastern paddocks of the Reserve on April 17-18. I have walked around the burned areas a few times since the burn, taking photos of the aftermath and observing the reactions of the bird life in the area. Only time will tell, but my impression is that the burn went very well. It appears to have been a successful "cool" burn that avoided inflicting too much damage on the larger trees, many of which were cordoned off from the burn, and which left some areas unburned, especially in Weetangera paddock. Eastern paddock was more extensively burned, but most of the canopy and larger trees again escaped unharmed.

Interestingly, birds are still plentiful in the burned areas. In fact, some bird species find recently burned areas especially attractive, as the insects they feed on no longer have as much grass and leaf litter in which to hide. I found the areas overrun with Magpies, White-winged Choughs and Australian Ravens, while the canopy was still full of the usual mix of resident and migrating species. Notably absent, however, were the Superb Fairy-wrens and Speckled Warblers, both of whom rely on long grasses and dense low-level foliage for habitat. Burned areas typically attract various robin species, notably Flame Robins, so keep an eye out next time you're in those areas!

A similar burn was conducted in the early 2000s in the Forest block, and the burned area has recovered wonderfully, so I am optimistic that the long-term outcomes for the areas burned this time will also be good.

Whitlam Pipeline

In the period since my last Update, the tender for the construction work on the Whitlam pipeline was awarded to Woden Contractors, the firm currently working on the construction of the new John Gorton Drive section (replacing the old Coppins Crossing Road) south of William Hovell Drive. On April 17th, we had our first meeting with three representatives from Woden Contractors: Ben Helmers (Construction Manager), Jessica Shute (Project Manager for the pipeline construction) and Peter Middleton (a former MD at Woden Contractors (who is acting as a consultant and mentor on this project). Warren Bond, John Fitz Gerald and I met with the contractors at the Reserve and walked part of the proposed construction corridor with them, discussing our concerns and priorities regarding the project.

We were generally pleased with the level of interest shown by Ben and Jess in our concerns, particularly with respect to weed control and Reserve access during the construction phase, and rehabilitation in the post-construction phase. There was some discussion of collecting grass seed at the Reserve for use in the rehabilitation, but we agreed that it was already too late to collect seed at this point and we would be better off waiting until next summer. We were also assured that a wash-down station will be set up at the Springvale Drive entrance to the Reserve where vehicles coming from other projects will be hosed down to avoid introducing invasive weeds from outside the Reserve.

The meeting was useful as a way of touching base with the construction contractors and establishing lines of communication. A second meeting is scheduled for Monday May 14.

2018 AGM

The Friends of the Pinnacle AGM for 2018 will be held at **2.00 PM on Sunday July 29th at Weetangera Primary School**, as usual. I'm sad to announce that our tireless Secretary Keith Thomas will be leaving us as of the AGM. We're very sorry to lose him and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank him for all the hard work he's put in during his time as Secretary and as a member of the fotpin Coordinating Committee. Which means that the position of Secretary for 2018-19 is officially up for grabs! We'd be delighted to hear from

anyone who'd be interested in stepping into Keith's shoes, or indeed in taking up any of the positions on the fotpin committee.

In terms of organising the AGM itself, I have confirmed with the school that the room is available for that date, and will approach Alison McLeod, the PCS ParkCare Coordinator, to ask whether she would be available to attend as guest speaker and Returning Officer. Failing that, it would be a good opportunity for us to meet and hear from the new ParkCare Ranger who will be taking Phil Selmes' place.

ParkCare Ranger

Which brings me to the other piece of recent news, which is that Phil Selmes, who has served excellently as ParkCare Ranger since our old friend Craig Wainwright moved on, recently stepped down from his position to take some leave and will not be returning to that position. Phil brought an immense amount of experience and knowledge to the role of ParkCare Ranger and all of us who worked with him experienced first-hand his dedication and enthusiasm for the job. He was totally committed to the ParkCare/Landcare cause in the ACT and was a tireless advocate on behalf of all the local volunteer groups in Canberra. Like Craig before him, he will be sorely missed, and whoever succeeds Phil in that position has some very large boots to fill.

John Brannan
Convenor
May 13th, 2018