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Spring is always a busy time, and this year it's been especially eventful. We've had extremes of weather, a very successful walks program, the Joint ParkCare display at Jamison, the Weetangera Primary fete and this year's Vegwatch survey, not to mention all the usual weed control and revegetation work that do.

Joint ParkCare Display at the Jamison Centre

Thanks to the sterling organisational skills of Jean Geue from Friends of Aranda Bushland (FOAB) and Linda Beveridge from the Friends of Black Mountain (FOBM), this year's event went off without a hitch. As well as ourselves, the participating groups were FOAB and FOBM, the Friends of Mt Painter, Friends of Grasslands, STEP (Southern Tablelands Ecosystem Park at the Arboretum) and the Canberra Indian Myna Action Group (CIMAG). We were also delighted to have ParkCare Ranger Marty Bajt along for a couple of hours to help field queries from interested shoppers.

Interest levels were generally high, with many visitors happy to learn about what we do and share their own experiences as regular users of the Canberra Nature Park reserves. The joint display provides a valuable opportunity for the Belconnen ParkCare groups to collectively talk to the public about what they do and talk to each other about how we deal with a range of issues. We look forward to having this opportunity again next year.

Spring Walks Program Report

Bird Walk

The dry winter and spring months meant that some of the species we normally expect to encounter on our regular Spring bird walk were missing, having already left for the mountains to breed. But we still recorded a good number of species, and the highlight was watching a family of Gang Cockatoos closely inspecting a tree hollow in the Kama paddock.

Aboriginal Heritage Walk

Ngunawal elder Wally Bell led another excellent and well-attended walk through the eastern end of the Reserve. Wally began by giving a traditional welcome to country in language before talking about his own background as a member of the Yarr clan group and the ways his people have interacted with other indigenous people of the region. He also talked about how his people used the land and illustrated this with artefacts from his own collection. During the walk, he pointed out trees and other vegetation that his people would have used, explaining the uses they were put to and their significance. We are grateful to Wally for his time and expertise and we are especially appreciative of the financial assistance provided by the ACT Government through the Heritage Grants Scheme, without which this walk would not have been possible.

Wildflower Walk

John Fitz Gerald and Nola McKeown led a very successful stroll through some of the prettier parts of the reserve. Despite desperately dry conditions, a number of native wildflowers were on display, and the walk also offered a good opportunity for visitors to look at the efforts we have made to rescue Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda australis*) tussocks from the proposed water pipe construction corridor and use them to promote native grass

recovery in our woodlands, most of which have almost exclusively exotic groundlayer vegetation.

The Themeda tussocks will replace existing patches of introduced grasses and will hopefully serve as stepping stones to a broader recovery of the native grasses in the area. To assist with this, we will be getting a second 1,000-litre water cube from PCS, which will be positioned in a convenient location for keeping water up to the transplanted tussocks

Weetangera Primary School Fete

Conditions on the day were pretty much ideal, so this year's fete attracted a large crowd of visitors, many of whom found their way to our stall via the neighbouring plant stall. The WPS fete is always very well organised and this year was no exception. Our thanks go to Chloe and Kate for all their hard work in making the fete such a success.

Vegwatch surveys

John Fitz Gerald and I conducted this year's Vegwatch surveys of the plot in the 2011 Spicers' planting on November 5th, restricting ourselves this time to just two surveys focusing on species diversity and structure (type of cover). The dry conditions meant that this year's results were very different from previous years, especially the wet spring of 2016 and generally good conditions of 2017. Diversity and cover were both greatly reduced, with exotic annual grasses (normally abundant) being almost completely absent, while many of the common introduced weed species (clover, sorrel, flatweed, etc.) were also missing. While this (and roo activity) resulted in more patches of bare soil than usual, it also meant that large areas of the plot were dominated by native grasses and forbs. The trees in the plot (mostly Red Box and *Acacia spp*) are also doing well, and we were pleased to find a Kurrajong (*Brachychiton populneus*) among the new regenerating saplings. My thanks as always to John FG for being so generous with his time and expertise.

Meeting with Minister Gentleman

On November 8th, a small delegation of ParkCare volunteers met with Minister Mick Gentleman, one of his advisors and Ian Walker the Conservator to discuss a number of issues relating to the management of Canberra Nature Park (CNP) and ParkCare activities more generally. The delegation was spearheaded by Kathy Eyles (Friends of Mt Taylor) and included Joachim Zeil (Friends of Mt Majura), Sarah Hnatiuk (Friends of Mt Painter), Libby Viccars (Friends of Black Mountain) and Martine Franco (for our catchment groups) as well as myself. It was useful to be able to put our views direct to the Minister and we were able to cover a fair bit of ground.

We focused on four main points:

- Importance of the CNP to Canberra's liveability, reinforcing the conservation purpose and the need for the CNP Management Plan to be released to guide our work. We pointed to proposals that will place additional pressures on values (tourism; mountain bikes strategies etc.), ongoing degradation from overgrazing and the ability of PCS (ACT Parks and Conservation Service) to undertake land management being reduced by other demands, such as the Urban Wildlife Program (UWP).
- Better coordination across the urban landscape so there is complimentary management of roadsides and urban open spaces that border the CNP reserves. The technology to coordinate land management across tenure is being used within PCS and should be used by all government land managers.
- The ParkCare 30-year Anniversary is a chance to acknowledge the partnership and the commitment of volunteers and recognise their important role in the ecological recovery of grassy woodlands in the CNP over this time; a tangible reward would be another Park Care Ranger to service north and south ParkCare groups.

- Importance of maintaining the Catchment Group network that advocates for the volunteer sector and provides essential infrastructure for citizen science programs and the primary means to lever additional funding into the CNP through ACT grants and Commonwealth programs like the Green Army, and the value to government of using community partnerships to deliver on-ground outcomes.

We provided examples to illustrate these points and tabled photos, as well as seeking a commitment for a further meeting with the Minister to follow up our concerns.

Outcomes:

- Advice that the draft CNP management plan is almost complete will be released early in 2019.
- Recognition by government that UWP diverts Ranger resources and an indication that this was being actively reviewed in government.
- Advice that a budget bid has been made for a second ParkCare Ranger (we also raised the value of having PC rangers based in the Districts).
- Willingness to work closely with us on the 30th anniversary celebration.
- Recognition of the value of the ParkCare and Catchment Group models to on-ground management and keeping the sector vital.

We finished by agreeing to meet with the Minister again and we will consider when would be a useful time to meet again once the CNP Plan has been released and the budgetary outcomes for CNP are known.

Proposed Planting for Autumn 2019

I have been considering for some time the need to restore some of the shrublayer vegetation lost in the Bottom Pinnacle due to the ongoing removal of briar roses. I was chatting about this in a chance meeting with Ian Rayner from Greening Australia, and he informed me that they have funding available to supply plants for this sort of work. I have asked Ian to set aside about 100 plants, and if we continue to get reasonable rainfall through the summer, I will organize a small planting event next Autumn. In the meantime, I will organise a work party to recover the tree guards that were used for our planting in the Bottom Pinnacle in Autumn 2014. With the stakes and guards that we already have, that should provide us with all the materials we need.

John Brannan
Coordinator
December 16th, 2018