



## fotpin update #31 May 2020

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Catastrophic summer, Covid-19 and drenching rain

Increased use of the Reserve

First ACT sighting of a butterfly species

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Weetangera Paddock Revegetation

I get to write these reports roughly every 3 months and I think I can confidently say that I have never looked back over a more extraordinary three-month period. The heat, the dry, the catastrophic bushfires, the smoke and a near-Biblical hailstorm gave way to three months of well above average rain and, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic and everything it has entailed.

In general, Canberrans have been fortunate to be relatively unscathed by the epidemic, but it has affected pretty much everyone to a greater or lesser extent, and I'd like to take this opportunity to express my deepest sympathies to anyone who has lost someone due to the virus.

For fotpin, the major impact has been in the reduction or complete cancellation of our usual autumn activities, though we have still been active to the extent allowed by the social distancing restrictions. Our committee meetings are being conducted using the now ubiquitous Zoom videoconferencing software, and our group weeding activities were necessarily suspended. However, as of May 8th, we have been given the green light to resume volunteer ParkCare activities in the Reserve, albeit with ongoing social distancing restrictions and a modicum of common sense (see [Guidelines for Volunteer Fieldwork during COVID-19](#)).

Warren, our Webmeister and data collector, tells me that the rainfall total for this year is already 85% of the total rainfall for the whole of 2019(!). My own rain gauge has recorded totals of well over 100 mm for each of the last 3 months, so I'm inclined to believe him. Up on the Reserve, this has resulted in luxuriant growth of native grass species and carpets of native wildflower blossoms, particularly the Variable Glycine (*Glycine tabacina*) as well as various native daisies and lilies, bluebells and many other species. I'm also told that Greenhood Orchids have been spotted by those who know where to look. Unfortunately, various weeds have also flourished, notably St. John's Wort, Paterson's Curse, Saffron and other thistles, Capeweed and Nightshade.

Anyone who has spent any time up at the Reserve recently will be aware of how much extra use the Reserve is getting in these unusual times. This is reflected in the number of visitors to our website, which has jumped in the last month or so. Predictably, the biggest jump was in visitors to our ["Walking Tracks"](#) page.

As well as spawning a local outbreak of "drop bears" ☺ (check out our [Facebook page](#)), this increase in Reserve visitors has regrettably also seen an increase in vandalism – rolling and shifting rocks, pulling fresh branches off trees to build "cubby houses" and defacing signs. Another thing highlighted by the extra use are the erosion issues along the Reserve's more frequently used tracks, particularly the "new" track that runs up the western face of the Pinnacle itself. We have raised this issue with the rangers in the ACT Government's Parks & Conservation Service (PCS) in the hope that it will attract the attention of the recruits being funded under the new "Jobs for Canberrans" program. This has produced 27 temporary casual jobs in PCS and recruitment is already under way. We are told that this new workforce will be targeting weed control and track maintenance in the local reserves, so fingers crossed.

One other notable event just recently was the sighting at the Reserve of a Pink Grass Yellow (*Eurema herla*) (it's a butterfly). This was a first for Canberra as this butterfly is normally only rarely seen as far south as even Sydney, so this marks a significant expansion of its known range. The intrepid discoverer was of course Alison Milton, who has already made so many contributions to our record of native flora and fauna species found at the Reserve, as

well as to the store of records held on Canberra Nature Map ([CNM](#)). Congratulations Alison! Thanks to Alison and many other devoted naturalists at the Reserve, we are now up to 620 native species and still counting – see our [flora and fauna](#) page for lists of confirmed species and selected photos.



Macleay's Grass Yellow, Pink Grass Yellow (*Eurema herla*)

On a personal note, I am recovering well from hip replacement surgery that I underwent on February 20th. In retrospect, I was very lucky that my number came up just weeks before the ban on elective surgery came into force.

Below is a summary of a couple of the other recent issues at the Reserve.

### **Molonglo Water Main**

A month or so ago, we were dismayed to discover that the pipeline corridor, which is supposed to be undergoing revegetation with native groundcover, shrub and tree species, was actually a mass of weeds, some of which we had never seen at the Reserve before, or never in such density. Our tentative conclusion was that the weeds had been introduced with the straw mulch the revegetation contractors used to cover the initial groundcover seeding. Once the heat and dry of summer killed off the first flush of groundcover grasses, along with many of the shrubs and trees, the way was clear for the weeds to flourish once the rain returned in February.

We immediately took our concerns to the project management group, with whom we have been liaising since the project first began, and kept PCS informed. A site inspection followed, attended by ourselves and representatives from the various contractors and project supervisors, which confirmed the presence of the weeds and the low survival rate of the trees and shrubs, as well as widespread damage to many of the tree guards used to protect the plantings.

The contractors agreed to spray out the weeds, re-sow the groundlayer grasses and replace the dead trees and shrubs, along with their damaged guards. This has already begun, and given the excellent conditions for planting, there is some optimism that the new plants will do well and that the corridor will be in much better shape by the time spring arrives.

Needless to say, we will continue to monitor the progress of the revegetation closely in the coming months.

## **Weetangera Paddock Revegetation Project**

As many of you will be aware, Len Taylor and his team have been working for many months now to revegetate some of the bare patches left by the May 2018 hazard reduction burn in the Weetangera paddock and the subsequent hot and dry spring and summer seasons. Len and his team have been propagating seedlings from seed collected on the Reserve and planting the seedlings out in the Reserve, protected by guards that Len knocked up using chook wire. The wire guards work better for grasses than plastic tree guards as they allow the plants to spread their seed heads beyond the guard and propagate new seedlings in the surrounding soil. The home-propagated seedlings have been supplemented with native wildflowers sourced from Greening Australia. Thus far an amazing 660 seedlings have been planted, of which only 34 have died, either due to poor (hydrophobic) soil or from being dug up by rabbits. Len concedes that there may be more plants that were dug up by rabbits, but even so, this is an outstanding result, especially given that new seedlings recruited from the existing plants are helping to make up for any losses. I should note at this point that this level of success was only possible thanks to the generous efforts of our ParkCare Ranger Marty Bajt, who was good enough to supply a couple of thousand-litre water cubes and then make frequent trips to refill the cubes over the busy summer when the seedlings were desperately in need of water.

However, Len is keen to shift from planting seedlings to direct seeding, which has been found in trials by Greening Australia and others to be a more successful way to revegetate large areas. Len has designed a project to trial this method at the Pinnacle by fencing off suitable sites, sowing grass and wildflower seeds at the correct depth and in the correct season, and then keeping the soil moist so that the seeds will germinate and grow.

To resource this project, fotpin submitted an application for funding to the Friends of Grasslands, who each year offer grants of up to \$1500 for projects that foster or protect native grasslands or open wooded grassland. We have not heard at this point whether our application was successful, but we think we have a pretty good chance. If we are able to get the necessary funding, we may be in a position to begin work on a trial fenced plot next spring.

John Brannan  
Convenor

May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020