



fotpin update #13 June 2014

Convenor's Report, Autumn 2014

Dear Friends of The Pinnacle

Every time I sit down to write one of these reports, it seems to me that the last 3 months have been particularly remarkable ones for the Friends of the Pinnacle. But this time, I really do feel that I'm looking back at a rather special period.

It began with our stall at the Hawker Primary School fete on the first weekend of April. This year's stall included a dedicated display aimed at highlighting the menace posed by African Lovegrass, along with a couple of quizzes targeted at the youngsters (and their parents). Much of the credit for the success of the stall must go to our tireless Secretary Elizabeth, who devised and created the quizzes, and of course to our ever-willing volunteers who came along to staff the stall for the day.

Our Autumn program of guided walks this year included a couple of ground-breaking and extremely popular walks. My own bird walk was, as ever, a delightful stroll with many familiar faces and quite a few new ones. The birds (eventually) cooperated after an unusually quiet start, and we ultimately returned with a total bird count in the low 40s. Not bad for a few hours' birding.

On April 27th, we welcomed Wally and Tyronne Bell of the Ngunawal people, who led a walk highlighting the aboriginal perspective on the reserve. This was by far the best attended fotpin walk ever held at the Pinnacle, and I have no doubt that everyone who came went away with a far greater awareness of the significance of the local area to aboriginal people and of the role they have played in shaping the landscape. We're especially grateful to the Ginninderra Catchment Group, who extended their program of aboriginal heritage walks, conducted under a grant from the ACT Government, to include the Pinnacle Nature Reserve. I'm hoping that this will be only the first of many such walks at the reserve, and that fotpin will be able to continue to play a role in increasing community awareness of aboriginal heritage in the region.

The final guided walk was led by former PCS Ranger and now ParkCare Support Officer Craig Wainwright. Craig spent many hours gathering and collating information on the post-Settlement history of the reserve, which he then put together into a hugely informative handout for the dozen or so people who came along on a cold and blustery (but fine!) morning. Incorporating accounts from local landowners and maps pulled out of the PCS archives, Craig's walk was a fascinating overview of the history of European settlement in the Belconnen Hills area and a perfect complement to Wally and Tyronne's walk the week before. Several people missed out on the walk, so again, I'm hoping I can persuade Craig to revisit the topic in the future.

Another first this Autumn was the initial Briar Rose Replacement Program planting in the Bottom Pinnacle. Designed to improve connectivity and re-establish small bird habitat in areas where we've removed briar roses and other woody weeds, the planting put around 250 shrubs and groundcover plants into the ground along both sides of one of the key gullies in the Bottom Pinnacle. It turned out to be rather more work than we'd anticipated, and an event that was supposed to be finished by lunchtime ran well into the afternoon before the last few shrubs were planted and watered. Ultimately, it was a very successful event, and I am hugely grateful to the wonderful fotpin stalwarts who gave up their mornings, and in some cases their afternoons too, to kick off this very worthwhile project. We now have ongoing funding from the ACT Government to continue this program, so further (perhaps less ambitious) plantings will follow.

The last major fotpin event for this period was the annual kangaroo count, conducted on a rainy June 1st. Yet again, Pax pulled together a fantastic turnout of volunteers, despite the awful weather, and the count was a great success. Feedback from PCS indicates that the Pinnacle roo counts constitute "a great demonstration of community and ACT government staff working together in land management".

The result (an average of 772 for the two counts) shows that numbers are back to where they were in May 2011, and still far too high to be sustainable in the area surveyed. As I write this, the reserve is closed between 5 pm and 7 am daily for the annual cull which, we hope, will bring the numbers somewhat closer to sustainable levels.

Quite amazingly to me, while all of this has been going on, the indefatigable fotpin weeding teams have also put in an amazing 369 hours of weed control, including the busiest May ever. Figures collated by Warren show that we are making clear headway against many of the worst weed infestations, including briars, verbascum and Spear Thistle. However, we still face many challenges on this front, particularly with African Lovegrass, St. John's Wort and Saffron Thistle, and much of the effort this Autumn was devoted to early intervention with Saffron Thistle to try to keep growth in Spring to manageable levels. Anyone who remembers the way the reserve looked at the end of the drought in 2009 can immediately see how much progress we've made since then. Like housework, there's no end to weed control, but the numbers and the current state of the reserve show that we're definitely making an enormous difference.

Don't forget that we've got our AGM coming up at 2.30 pm on Sunday July 20th at Weetangera Primary School. Don Driscoll will be our guest speaker, talking about the outcomes of his Grassland Restoration Experiment, something we're all eager to hear about since it might give us some pointers on how we can best restore the Pinnacle's grassland areas to health. Try and make it along if you can. If nothing else, there'll be a lovely arvo tea!

Cheers,

John

John Brannan