



fotpin update #33 November 2020

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I don't think there could possibly be a more stark contrast between the condition of the Pinnacle Nature Reserve right now and the way it looked at this time last year. It has already been said many times that 2020 is the year of the unprecedented, and that word has been unavoidable as I have walked around the reserve in the last few months. Never before have we seen such a profusion of orchids and other wildflowers, nor the flourishing stands of native grasses. On the other hand, weeds such as Paterson's Curse, Capeweed and Saffron Thistle (to name just a few) are also enjoying a vigorous season. The efforts of our weed control teams have kept something of a lid on the weed infestations so far, but it is clear that we are going to have a challenging season in the months to come.

The Friends of the Pinnacle have been active in other ways both on the reserve and out in the community, as outlined below.

Joint ParkCare Display at the Jamison Centre, September 11-13

At one point, it looked like we weren't going to have this event this year due to COVID restrictions, but Canberra's excellent response to the pandemic meant that the event was able to proceed. Fotpin was one of six groups taking part in this year's display, and the local shoppers passing were notably more interested in the display than in previous years, largely due to the fact that so many of them have been spending more time at their local reserves since COVID struck. This being an election year, a number of MLAs also put in a (brief) appearance.

This event continues to be a valuable opportunity for ParkCare groups to reach out to the community and raise awareness of the local reserves and the role that ParkCare groups play in maintaining and improving the ecological values of the reserves. As usual, the Fotpin volunteers did an outstanding job of staffing the display, punching well above their weight and yet again and I would like to thank all those who gave up some of their time to help out. I also need to acknowledge the huge amount of work done by Jean Geue (Friends of Aranda Bushland) and Linda Beveridge (Friends of Black Mountain) in coordinating the display. Jean in particular has always been the driving force in making this event happen and continues to be a vital part of the organizing team.

Planning Meetings with PCS

- *Pinnacle Extension (Offset), August 14th*

We were delighted to hear that our old mate Craig Wainwright had been appointed to the role of Offsets Ranger and wasted no time in organising an on-site meeting with him to discuss his plans for the Pinnacle Extension. Craig has brought his usual enthusiasm and energy to the role, coupled with many years of experience and a healthy dollop of common sense, and outlined his plans to consolidate the fencing around the new plantings in the offset and bring in contractors to spray out the already rampant Capeweed, Paterson's Curse and thistles. He noted that the diminishing budget allowances for offsets once the "establishment" phase is over means that now he only has limited funds available for weed control in the extension. He also set about dismantling the fencing around the exclusion plot left over from Don Driscoll's grassland restoration experiment. This has served to spearhead the removal by PCS of all the remaining exclusion plot fences in the paddocks outside the reserve proper (see below).

- *Annual Planning Meeting, September 3rd*

Our annual meeting with the PCS rangers took place, as usual, at the Mitchell Depot and was attended by myself, Warren, ParkCare Ranger Marty Bajt, Volunteer Programs Manager Alison McLeod and District Rangers Riko Ahlers and Kelzang Tshering. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss our mutual plans for the year so that we can coordinate our efforts to get the best possible outcomes. The topics discussed included the upcoming handover of the maintenance contract for revegetation along the Molonglo pipeline, track maintenance work at the reserve, the future of the fenced exclusion plots both inside and outside the reserve, the prospect of getting some interpretive signage at the reserve (a long-held aspiration of ours) and the proper lines of communication between ourselves and the different bits of PCS that we interact with. We also got to meet our new ranger, Kelzang Tshering, who is a native of Bhutan and comes with extensive experience in ecology and land management. At the meeting, we arranged a date for an on-site meeting with Kelzang to give him a proper introduction to the reserve. Also discussed was the approval of some funds for new tubestock to replace plants lost over the summer from the May 2019 planting in the Bottom Pinnacle.

Spring Events Program

- *Bird Walk #1, September 20th*

In a reflection of just how many more people have been visiting the reserve since COVID struck, close to 50 people signed up for my first bird walk of the season. To put this in perspective, I generally get around a dozen or so people for my guided walks. Much to my relief, the day of the walk dawned cold and wet following heavy overnight rain, so the number of people who actually turned up was a much more manageable 20 hardy souls. Despite the damp beginning, the walk turned out to be very rewarding, with a total of 32 species observed, including 4 species sitting on nests. Probably the most notable of these was the Tawny Frogmouth sitting on a nest in a very exposed location. Thanks to everyone who turned out in the dubious weather and to Alison Milton (as always) for her wonderful photos.



A nesting Tawny Frogmouth trying very hard not to be obvious



Lovely shot of a Yellow-rumped Thornbill

- *Wildflower Walk, October 10th*

John Fitz Gerald and Nola McKeown again led a group of almost 30 walkers on a very pleasant walk down to the southeast corner of the Pinnacle Extension, which features one of the most highly diverse selection of native grasses and forbs in the entire reserve. While it was too early to catch any of the orchids in bloom, many of the other wildflowers were putting on an excellent show, including countless Early Nancies, more young Blue Devils than I have ever seen in one place, and a veritable field of Billy Buttons. My thanks to John and Nola for again giving up their Sunday morning to conduct the walk.

- *Revegetation Workshop/Forum, November 1st*

Len Taylor and his team have put in many hours of work in this effort to re-establish a native groundcover in some of the burned areas of Weetangera Paddock, including everything from seed collection, propagation and planting through to fencing, watering and selective weeding around the planting sites. The result constitutes a trial of various different techniques for establishing and maintaining native grasses and forbs in a nature reserve.

A total of 12 people attended this event, many of them representatives of other ParkCare groups around Canberra, and it proved to be an excellent opportunity for the visitors to relate their own experiences and share their knowledge on this topic. Re-establishing native groundcover species is undoubtedly the most challenging undertaking for land managers anywhere and I'd like to think that, through this work, we are making an important contribution to those efforts. My thanks to Len and all his team for all their hard work and to John Fitz Gerald for assisting Len with this presentation.

- *Bird Walk #2, November 8th*

Because so many people had signed up for my first walk, I felt justified in organising a second bird walk to provide another opportunity for those people who didn't make it to the earlier walk. This time however, I limited the walk to 20 people to make sure the number didn't become unmanageable. I was particularly happy to welcome our new ranger Kelzang along on the walk. This time, the weather cooperated beautifully and we had a very pleasant stroll that included a visit to the dam, which has been a

particularly busy spot for birds for the last few years. We recorded 42 species on the walk, with 9 species either building nests, sitting on nests or feeding youngsters. Highlights included watching a pair of Leaden Flycatchers busily building their nest while an Olive-backed Oriole was sitting on her newly completed nest a few yards away, and some lovely views of a White-throated Gerygone giving its beautifully melodic call.

Molonglo Water Main

The project contract called for the handover of the restored pipeline corridor by the main contractor (Wodens) 12 months after commencement of the restoration work. This handover was due in November 2020. It was further envisaged by the commissioning government agency (Infrastructure Delivery, TCCS) that fotpin be asked to carry out weed control and other maintenance of the restored corridor for a period of 2 years. At the latest on-site meeting, held on November 6th, it was decided that the revegetation was still not ready to be handed over to fotpin due to the relative absence of native grasses along the majority of the pipeline corridor. This situation has been aggravated by the latest attempts at re-seeding by the revegetation contractor, Ables. Based on what has emerged in the last 2-3 months, the seed used appears to have contained mostly species that were not specified for this project, including, most disappointingly, some perennial exotic grasses and the spectacular, but concerning, Crimson clover. These are now likely to become permanent fixtures unless a lot more time and effort is spent spraying them out.

The current proposal is that the revegetation contract be handed over to Fotpin on condition that there is a reasonable amount of native grass cover and that there will be further inspections in 6 and 12 months' time to assess whether further reseedling or replanting of tubestock is required. For the time being, it has been agreed that any handover will wait until there is clearer evidence of established native grasses. Ables have also agreed to slash or mow the tall stands of introduced grasses now growing along each side of the pipeline so that any emerging native grasses have a chance to flourish. This slashing will also help to mitigate the extensive swathes of Crimson clover introduced in the latest round of re-seeding.

ParkCare and Politics

In the lead-up to the recent ACT election, the combined ParkCare convenors have been lobbying politicians to get better resourcing for ParkCare groups and for the PCS rangers. One of our key demands was to get a second ParkCare ranger position established to take some of the burden off the horribly overworked Marty Bajt. Our hope was that the two ParkCare rangers would be based in the Northside and Southside PCS depots respectively and work alongside the area rangers. This would ensure that their work is better coordinated and simplify lines of communication. We were promised a second ParkCare ranger in 2018, only to find that the second ranger position was subsequently diverted into the Ranger Assist program, which is of minimal benefit to ParkCare groups and does nothing to ease the burden on Marty.

We had a videoconference with Minister Mick Gentleman on August 4th at which the Minister generally agreed with our position but made it clear that budget constraints did not allow for a second ParkCare ranger position. At the PCS Northside Convenor's meeting held on August 19th, we again raised our concerns about resourcing for ParkCare groups and floated the possibility of a pool of funding that groups could dip into for small on-reserve projects such as plantings. The meeting also covered the work being done by the Jobs for Canberra program (mostly track maintenance in our case), the management structure of PCS, opportunities for education and training, and the scheduling of annual planning meetings for each of the reserves.

On September 16th, we had a videoconference with Maxine Cooper, Chair of the Landcare ACT, Karissa Preuss, CEO of Landcare ACT and former Coordinator of the Ginninderra Catchment Group, and Martine Franco, Coordinator of the Southern ACT Catchment Group. Maxine promised to lobby the ACT Government on behalf of the ParkCare groups and gave us some useful tips on how better to channel our efforts. On September 21st, Friends of Mt Majura Convenor Jochen Zeil and I met with Elizabeth Lee, then Shadow Minister for the

Environment in the ACT Government and now leader of the ACT opposition. She was sympathetic to our position and pointed out that, even from opposition, she could apply pressure on the government on our behalf.

We are yet to meet with anyone from the new government, but the appointment of a Greens representative, Rebecca Vassarotti, as Environment Minister and commitments by the Greens* to substantial funding boosts for PCS funding to manage the Canberra Nature Park reserves (\$4M over 4 years), increased funding for weed and invasive species management (\$7.5M over 4 years), and increased funding for local environment-based volunteer groups (\$3.2M over 4 years) all bode well for the future.

*: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-11-03/three-new-faces-in-act-labor-greens-ministry/12843378>

John Brannan
Convenor

November 17th, 2020