



fotpin update #45 December 2023

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What an unpredictable year it has been. After a very unusual 3 year stretch of rainfall that was well above average, 2023 started with 6 months of average rainfall and then hit us with 4 months of winter drought. The shallow soils on the rocky slopes of the reserve were quickly dried out by the dense vegetation cover that had established in the good years. The result was that some of the more water sensitive wildflowers didn't appear this season or had an early, short flowering period. Then we received nearly twice the average November rainfall and December is also already above average.

The upshot of all this is that the reserve's wildflowers were less abundant than in recent years in the early part of spring, particularly in the drier woodland areas, but have since been returning to their splendour that the recent wet years produced. Unfortunately, the same is also true for weed growth; what looked like being a light year quickly reversed after November and the reserve is now full of newly sprouted weeds, particularly our old friend, St. John's Wort. That said, the reserve has been looking especially lovely for the last couple of months, with lots of fresh green grass and the later season wildflowers much more visible thanks to the absence of a thick cover of exotic grasses such as wild oats, one of the often dominant species that were suppressed by the earlier dry conditions.

Even by our standards, we had an exceptionally eventful Spring, with five guided walks in all, as well as a succession of events where we set up display stalls, including the annual Joint ParkCare Display at the Jamison Centre, Hawker Primary's Spring Fete and the Hawker Community Markets, while we also helped out at the annual Hawker College Tree Planting Ceremony. More details are provided below.

Spring Walks

Inaugural Pinnacle Tree Walk – September 10th

This fascinating walk was led by plant ecologist Michael Doherty, who took us on a gentle loop walk from Dungowan St through the Forest and Hawker paddock, stopping along the way to explain how to identify the many varieties of tree in the reserve's woodlands. We all found the walk highly informative and enjoyable, and we will be inviting Michael to come back again in future to perhaps take a look at the trees at the Weetangera end of the reserve.



Michael pointing to the mistletoe growing in the "big tree" near Dungowan St.

Photos: Anne Aisbett



Michael with friend (an Apple Box-
Eucalyptus bridgesiana)



Michael with wattle in flower

Guided Bird Walk 1 – September 17th

A relatively small group had a very pleasant morning observing the local resident birds, and a few early migrants, in the western section of the reserve. On the walk, we were able to spot a number of species sitting on nests, including Red Wattlebird, Magpie and Yellow-rumped Thornbill.

Linking The Pinnacle Nature Reserve to its European Settlement History – September 24th

Led by fotpin founding member, webmeister, weed control manager and budding historian Warren Bond (and those are just some of his hats!), this was an intriguing and carefully researched look at the traces of European settlement that still remain on the reserve, and their significance in the reserve's history. We started at the Dungowan St. gate where Warren gave an overview of the three periods of European settlement that impacted the reserve: "Squatting" (1826 to 1861), Free Selection (1861 to 1911) and Resumption (1911 to c.1965). We then traced some of the old property boundaries that pass through the reserve.

We walked along part of the northern boundary of one of the parcels of land that were chosen along both the Molonglo River and Ginninderra Creek in the name of George Thomas Palmer when he sent men in 1826 to identify good grazing lands in the recently discovered Limestone Plains area. These parcels were later combined by Palmer to form the Ginninderra Estate. The land parcel on which the reserve sits extended from the southern edge of the reserve's Macrorhyncha forest down to the Molonglo River. The boundary runs from a few



One of the decaying fenceposts (near Warren's right foot) on the Squatter era boundary



One of the early 20th century fenceposts (centre background) marking the eastern boundary of the Kama property just west of The Pinnacle

Photos: John Brannan

hundred meters west of the reserve to the mobile phone tower and also influences the location of a later boundary beyond that. Although the location of the boundary is inferred from early maps, Warren showed us visible markers of its location, namely the remains of two old posts from when it was still a property boundary in the early 20th century. Later, in the Hawker paddock, we visited two posts that were part of the fence marking the eastern boundary of Oswald Dixon's Kama property, which he leased for 40 years from 1923 to 1963.

Along the way Warren regaled us with information he had gathered about each of the several families that had owned or leased various parts of the reserve after free selection in 1861 resulted in closer settlement. He is preparing a series of pages about the reserve's history to be added to our website early next year.

Guided Wildflower Walk – October 22nd

Due to a clash with the Hawker Primary School fete, I was not able to join this walk, which was led by the highly knowledgeable John Fitz Gerald, ably assisted by Warren Bond, who provided this summary.

Starting from the mobile phone tower the walk followed the ACTEW Pump Track briefly, then cut across in the direction of the dam to pass through an area of woodland that has regenerated well since the creation of the reserve. It is particularly rich in small shrubs, such as Grey guinea-flower (*Hibbertia obtusifolia*), Bitter cryptandra (*Cryptandra amara*) and Urn heath (*Melichrus urceolatus*), all putting on a good display) as well as many wildflower species, including, on the day, Curved riceflowers (*Pimelea curviflora*).

After this brief taste of what was to come the group made a beeline for the wildflower-rich area in the bottom corner of the Kama Link paddock. Despite, the below-average rainfall of the preceding months there was sufficient soil moisture in this wetter part of the reserve to encourage a good display of native wildflowers and shrubs. As well as seeing the same plants as in Dam paddock and many other common species such as Scaly buttons (*Leptorhynchos squamatus*) some less common ones were also seen. These included Small matrush (*Lomandra bracteata*), Ground-berry (*Acrotriche serrulata*), Chamomile sunray (*Rhodanthe anthemoides*), Hoary sunray (*Leucochrysum albicans subsp. tricolor*) and Bush pea (*Pultenaea procumbens*). The group was even lucky enough to see two of the reserve's orchid species – the spectacular Tiger orchid (*Diuris sulphurea*) and the less spectacular (but widespread when conditions are favourable, as in 2021 and 2022) Onion orchid (*Microtis sp.*).

Guided Bird Walk 2 – November 12th

Eleven interested birdos spent a very pleasant morning studying the many migratory species that visit and nest in the reserve every Spring and Summer, as well as some of the later nesting residents. Of a total of 32 species observed, highlights included a Tawny Frogmouth family with two recently fledged youngsters, Speckled Warblers and Leaden Flycatchers both building nests, and Noisy Friarbirds, Black-faced Cuckoo Shrikes, Pied Currawongs and Willie Wagtails all sitting on nests. We even came across an echidna quietly going about its day.



Adult Tawny Frogmouth with 2 chicks

Photos: Alison Milton



Male Leaden Flycatcher watching us from its almost completed nest

Interpretive Signage

We finalised our designs for the six new signs to be erected at the reserve, and in early October submitted them to the Parks and Conservation Service for approval by the various government agencies concerned. In the meantime, the company who'll be making the signs (Screenmakers) sent us their proposed designs based on our drafts and text. We (the subcommittee looking after this project) are generally very happy with the proposed designs, and have met with Screenmakers a couple of times to discuss the changes we would like to make and how best to proceed. On November 22nd, the Screenmakers representative visited the reserve to finalise the locations where the signs will be installed. There was some question over the exact position of the sign to be installed at the entrance at de Salis St. and that is still to be determined. On December 8, we met with representatives from the ACT Government to discuss their feedback on our proposed designs and text. They suggested a number of changes, including replacing our maps with their own versions to ensure consistency across all the signage at the reserve. Unfortunately, they are unable to provide the new maps until February next year at the soonest, so the timeline for completing this project has now blown out until March or April next year. To make this possible, Kat McGilp (of Ginninderra Catchment Group, through whom the grant for the signs is managed) has requested an extension to our funding until June 2024. (It was originally scheduled to expire at the end of 2023).

In the meantime, we have been asked to review the text to make it easier to understand (where feasible) and, in the case of the Panorama sign intended to go on The Pinnacle summit, make it shorter. While a little disappointing, the extended time frame does allow us to relax a little over the festive season and spend more time making sure that the final outcomes are as good as we can make them. The image below shows one of the signs in its close-to-final form. This sign will be installed beside the *Macrorhyncha* track in the Forest.



Click on the image above to open a higher resolution version (3 MB) in your browser.

Molonglo Watermain Corridor Revegetation

Our efforts in September last year to establish plots of native grasses and forbs proved to be almost entirely in vain. Even given the abundant rainfall and cool summer, there was virtually no sign that any of our seed had successfully germinated and established a native groundcover layer, as we hoped.

Acting on advice from landscape restoration ecologist, Jarrod Rűch, we decided to set up rabbit-proof fenced plots along the section of pipeline corridor that runs from the Icon water tanks compound down to the creek. Fortunately, our District Ranger Julian Lolicato was able to supply some 8 sections of temporary fencing, each 2.5 m long, that we could use to construct two plots. I used some of the funding given to us by the ACT Government for revegetation to purchase a roll of rabbit-proof mesh, and on November 3rd, a work party of 7 stalwarts successfully built two plots, we very much hope, will prove to be entirely rabbit- and roo-proof. Over the summer, we plan to use herbicide to clear the plots of any exotic plant species and then, once the weather is a little cooler and we've had a bit of rain,

again try to get some native groundcover species established inside the plots, using a mixture of donated seedlings and purchased seed mix. Over time, once the groundcover has become established in the plots, we will gradually step them further down the slope, repeating the same treatment until we reach the creek.



So, how do we do this now? (The planning meeting)

Photo: Alison Milton



Second plot almost completed – experts already!

Photo: Denise Hall

PCS Annual Planning Meeting (Part 2)

We had our annual planning meeting with the PCS rangers on September 4th at the PCS depot in Mitchell. This meeting concentrates on issues related directly to our reserve following on from the annual briefing to all ParkCare groups in June which was reported on in Update #44.

Topics discussed included the interpretive signage, the Molonglo Watermain corridor revegetation work, weed control in and around the reserve, the strategy for implementing the Landscape Improvement Implementation Plan drawn up for the reserve, track maintenance, and the rabbit and kangaroo management plans. The key outcomes from the meeting were Ranger Julian's offer of fencing for the pipeline revegetation work (described earlier in this Update) and news that PCS had arranged for contractors to spray St. John's Wort in the Offset (Kama Link paddock) in November and African Lovegrass (ALG) along the northern boundary in the new year (more information below under "Weed Management"). We also heard in the meeting that Icon Water currently has no plans to construct a third water tank in the reserve, so our efforts to revegetate that area have not been a complete waste of time. There is also funding for further track maintenance at the reserve, as well as for further rabbit control work. The full outcomes of the Kangaroo Management Program at the reserve over the winter can be viewed [here](#), but resulted in a small reduction of numbers in the Pinnacle Nature Reserve.

Weed Management (*Warren Bond*)

After catching up on spraying key targets that we didn't have time for in autumn, the weeding season got off to a slow start because of the very dry conditions. With the very high rainfall in November, however, it then became a matter of finding rain-free days to start in earnest on spraying St. John's Wort (SJW), which was starting to grow fairly quickly. As mentioned in previous reports, in recent years we have had to cut back our SJW control because of the magnitude of the task and our reduced resources. Nevertheless by concentrating on the most sensitive areas of the reserve (those with the largest native plant diversity and numbers), we have been able to successfully control it and are seeing signs that in many of those areas the amount of SJW is decreasing year on year.

This year we successfully applied, through Ginninderra Catchment Group, for funds to employ contractors (under the direction of Ranger Julian) to spray St. John's Wort and African lovegrass (ALG) in areas where there was too much for us to deal with. In addition, as mentioned in the previous section PCS allocated money to treat ALG in the worst areas and accessed Offsets money to spray dense areas of SJW in, and around the boundary of, Kama

Link paddock (the Pinnacle Offset). This combined funding for SJW spraying has meant that the densest patches have been treated across large areas of the reserve for the first time in many years.

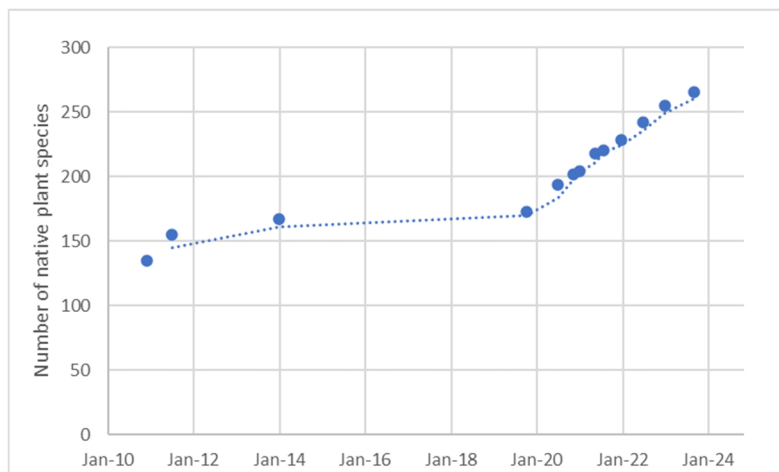
The [summary of effort](#) for the 2023-24 season to date (July to December) will be available on the website a few days into January.

Pinnacle Biodiversity (*Warren Bond*)

NatureMapr (formerly Canberra Nature Map) has initiated a "[Species Richness Score](#)" (SRS) for each of the areas it consolidates observations for. This is calculated from reported sightings of all species, with weightings applied according to their conservation value and is intended to be indicative of the biodiversity's health in a given location. Pleasingly, The Pinnacle Nature Reserve's SRS score ranks 5th of the Canberra Nature Reserves, behind Aranda Bushland, Mt. Ainslie, Black Mountain and Mt. Painter.

Check out [our biodiversity dashboard](#) which is updated regularly on the *NatureMapr* website.

Based on [our own record keeping](#) (which includes all *NatureMapr* sightings) our current total native species count is 979, of which 267 are plant species. The graph below shows how our recorded number of native plant species has changed since Rosemary Blemings and others compiled a list in the years up to 2010. The graph clearly shows the effect of favourable conditions and increased interest through *NatureMapr* during the last 3 years.



Other News

- On October 31st, Greens MLA Jo Clay submitted a Private Members Motion to the ACT Legislative Assembly that calls on the government to set clear criteria for the addition and ongoing maintenance of new areas in the Canberra Nature Park, and to increase the PCS resources to implement that policy. We supported Jo's motion, and it was subsequently accepted by the Assembly. Check out [Jo's Facebook page](#) for more information.
- On October 24th, I attended a consultation session on the ACT Government's Nature Conservation Strategy. The session was run by Umwelt, a firm of social and environmental consultants who have been tasked with evaluating the ACT Government's performance in implementing the first 10 years of the strategy (2013-2023). The aim of the review is to come up with ways to improve the outcomes of the next 10 years. The consultation was attended by representatives from a range of local environmental groups, including Canberra Birds and the Rural Landholders Association, and gave me an opportunity as a ParkCare volunteer to provide feedback on what the Government is getting wrong (and right, in some cases). Only time will tell whether our input will lead to any constructive outcomes.

John Brannan
Convenor

30 December 2023