



fotpin update #14 January 2015

Hi all,

Greetings for 2015. I hope your Christmas break has been a good opportunity to reflect and recharge and that you're ready to face the new year. For the Pinnacle, 2014 was an eventful and constructive year, and 2015 is off to a flying start thanks to the excellent rainfall during January.

The Spring of 2014 proved to be ideal for many of the grasses at the reserve, with the introduced Wild Oat Grass being perhaps the most evident beneficiary, unfortunately. However, the native grasses also did exceptionally well this year, with Kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*) in particular popping up in many parts of the reserve where I haven't seen it before. The recent moisture has triggered another flush of green as the oat grass dies off and the late-season native grasses flourish, and many of the small birds have taken the opportunity to raise a second or third brood in the encouraging conditions. The down side of this is that some of the more intransigent weeds – St. John's Wort and African lovegrass in particular -- have also enjoyed the conditions and are putting the challenge up to our weeding teams.

Fortunately, we have help from our friends in the Parks and Conservation Service, who have sent contractors in to deal with some of the heavier lovegrass infestations around the reserve. Given the prevalence of African lovegrass in the suburbs around the reserve, keeping the reserve itself free of this creeping menace will be a long-term struggle, but it's one we're committed to tackling.

I'd like to take this opportunity to look back at some of the more significant events at the reserve over Spring and Summer 2014-15.

1. Spring Walks Program

This year's program broke all previous records for attendances. We had an unparalleled 25 people for Craig Wainwright's post-settlement history walk, an unprecedented 30 people for my bird walk, and an unbelievable 50 people for the Aboriginal Heritage Walk, led by Wally and Tyronne Bell of the Ngunawal people, which was followed by a BBQ -- the perfect way to end an interesting walk.

2. Joint ParkCare Display at Jamison Centre, 26-28 September

This event was again very successful and gave many fotpins a chance to contribute in a way that did not involve weeding or planting. As with last year's event, fotpin did most of the heavy lifting in terms of staffing the stall, which is testament to the enthusiasm and energy of the fotpin community.

3. Other events

There were a couple of quite exciting events in our area of interest this spring, namely a 2-day forum celebrating the 25th anniversary of ParkCare in the ACT on October 17-18, and the 3-day Friends of Grasslands Forum that ran from October 30th to November 1st. Both events were very well organized and well-attended, with interesting speakers, events and displays at both.

The ParkCare Forum was held in an excellent venue at the University of Canberra (Anne Harding Conference Centre) and brought together politicians, academics and scientists as well as ParkCare/Landcare volunteers and PCS staff (who did most of the heavy lifting in organizing the event). I was a member of the organizing committee and learned a great deal from the experience, particularly the importance of bringing people from different disciplines together when addressing common problems.

The current plan is to have ongoing, smaller annual events among the same lines, to be held during July when the reserves are generally fairly quiet.

FOG's Grasslands Forum brought together experts in the field from all over Australia, and it was fascinating to explore the concept of natural ecosystem conservation and restoration in a context that did not involve planting lots of trees. Given the enormous number of trees that were planted at the

Pinnacle during the 80s and 90s and the woodland-dominated reserve that we now enjoy, it was thought-provoking to learn just how significant natural temperate grasslands are as part of the local ecosystems.

The topic of grassland restoration -- one that we have addressed ourselves through trials run by Don Driscoll -- was central to the Forum, and many of the speakers addressed this issue. If there can be said to be a consensus on this, it seemed to be that the best results can be achieved by slashing exotic grasses seasonally and then removing the slashed grass. While this approach takes time to work -- 10 years or more -- the gradual depletion of nutrients in the soil eventually tips the balance in favour of native grasses and forbs. While this is difficult on a landscape scale without heavy machinery, it is something we could perhaps trial in smaller areas.

[Note: to get advanced warning of events such as this, keep an eye on our [other ParkCare events](#) page that you can reach from the link at the top of our own [calendar of events](#) - www.fotpin.org.au/calendar.html]

4. Weeding

As I hinted earlier, this has been a challenging season for weeds, and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the weeding teams for the enormous amount of hard work they've put into the weeding effort this Spring. Following on from Pax's successful trial of Saffron Thistle spraying over the winter, we had to tackle a late flush of Paterson's Curse followed by the inevitable appearance of St. John's Wort. While nowhere near the levels we've seen in previous years, it is still fairly widespread in the reserve and the rains have triggered repeated flushes, with some areas requiring two or even three repeat visits. For a closer look at what we've been up to, visit our [Recent Weeding](#) page (www.fotpin.org.au/weeds/recent-weeding.html).

5. Vegwatch Program (Biodiversity Monitoring)

With the expert plant identification skills of John Fitz Gerald and the able assistance of Elizabeth Smith, this year's surveys of the biodiversity monitoring plot in Kama paddock were completed in good time. Despite the rampant growth of oat grass in the plot, John and I were able to identify virtually all the plant species we've found in previous years. The encouraging finding this year is a jump in the amount of natural regeneration that is happening in the plot. It will be interesting to see how this develops further in years to come.

6. Plantings

We are planning to hold another planting event this Autumn. This will be part of our program of ongoing complementary plantings designed to supplement the tree plantings of the 80s and 90s. Many of the woodlands planted back then lack an understorey, and our aim is to encourage the development of vertically integrated woodland ecosystems that include native groundcover and native shrub species below the existing woodland canopy. Again, we should be able to announce a date for the planting (probably in April) in the next few weeks.

Our membership continues to grow steadily and currently stands at 75, with another 100 people who have requested to be on our email list. We are always eager to hear input from the membership on how we can better achieve our goals in the reserve and operate as a ParkCare group. If you have any ideas, suggestions, questions or criticisms, feel free to email me at coordinator@fotpin.org.au.

John Brannan
Fotpin Coordinator
30 January 2015