

NARPULUNGUP NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF FITZGERALD RIVER NATIONAL PARK

MAY 2023, VOLUME 2



Photo: Libby Sandiford

FROM THE AGM: A DAY FOR IT IN THE FITZ

by Annie Leitch and Gil Craig

On Saturday 4th March, Friends of the Fitz came together at Mary Anne Haven in Hopetoun, donning Tallerack-leaf nametags and enjoying hot cuppas and homemade treats. Returning president Gil Craig thanked retiring members, especially Delys Harland, who has been secretary for the past five years, and welcomed new members to the committee: Troy Treeby, Annie Leitch, Kay Lehman and Kim Bennett. DBCA Ranger Damien Medley shared with us a brief summary of the recent fire events and gave advice on road closures following the Boeing 737 mop up and haul out. Rosemary Jasper, President of the Cocanarup Conservation Alliance, gave an update of Bulletin Resources's exploration into the Cocanarup Timber Reserve, demonstrating again both groups' shared commitment to protecting such a special part of the region.

It has been noted for some time that amongst several threats to the Fitzgerald River National Park is the increased intensity and frequency of fire, both through wildfire and prescribed burns. Short fire-return intervals have caused a noticeable decline in Royal Hakea (*Hakea victoria*) numbers, a species synonymous with the Fitz. Guest speaker, honours student Tasmin Lancaster, and her supervisor Dylan Korczynskij introduced Tasmin's research into gaining a better understanding of the population dynamics of this iconic species. Tasmin outlined her methods, sites she is using, research questions, and insights she has gained so far. Following the presentation, we were gifted some of the 'orphaned' seedlings Tasmin had reared as part of her seed viability experiments that help



Ranger Damien Medley sharing information about the recent fires. Photo Troy Treeby.



President Gil Craig, left, and AGM guest speaker Tasmin Lancaster. Photo Troy Treeby.



Comparing current vegetation on No Tree Hill with historical photos from the 1980s. Photo Troy Treeby.

to understand temperature ranges for germination of Royal Hakea seeds.

We carpoled to the beginning of No Tree Hill track and embarked on the mission to walk to the top. We were able to ground-truth our classroom learnings with our new friends Tasmin, Dylan and Meredith - such a privilege to be able to transfer classroom learning to the field. Gil had brought along some photos from the 1980s that we compared with today's vegetation.

Making it to the top we enjoyed congratulating all on the journey with some scroggin beneath a blue sky before heading back down a track that showed no mercy to unprotected legs and loaded ourselves into vehicles for the return 4WD journey along the sandy track back to Hopetoun before the sun dropped and the wind picked up.

Tasmin's research project is sponsored by the Friends of the Fitzgerald National River Park, we are grateful for the time she made to attend the AGM, and look forward to hearing more about her project in the future.

"It feels good when people who care about the bush come together in this special spot within the Fitzgerald Biosphere."

Annie Leitch



No Tree Hill Walk. Photo Troy Treeby.

FROM THE AGM: TAKING A HIKE WITH FRIENDS

by Sue Leighton

We couldn't have asked for a better day to walk the Hakea Trail on Sunday 5th March; the weather was delightful, participants friendly, knowledgeable and excited to be there - what more do you want!

We set off early for this 9.7 km walk, which took us on a variety of tracks from the Hamersley Beach/Dunes access road onto Edwards Track, onto Tommy Daw Track to pick up the Hakea Trail. The coastline there is spectacular and some of the larger shrubs seen at the beginning of the walk are seen in miniature as they are wind pruned and hug each other closely for support from the coastal elements.

The itinerary of the walk takes in a diverse range of soil types and the geological points of interest along the way. One of the highlights was to view the Hamersley Dune system from a distance and walking down the heath covered slopes of the coastline to the amazing rock formations along West Beach. It was a beautiful walk with like-minded people.

The walk was originally designed for the Ravensthorpe Wildflower Show a few years ago and is one of the most popular activities during the Wildflower Show.

We gratefully acknowledge and appreciate GoWest Bus Services who shuttled us from West Beach to the start point of the Hakea Trail at the Hamersley Beach/Dunes access track.



Rest with a view on the Hakea Trail. Photo Sue Leighton.



Rock formations at West Beach. Photo Sue Leighton.

MIRNONG MAAT – WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SOUTHERN RIGHT WHALE TAGGING UPDATE

by Kate Sprogis, Robert Harcourt and Emma Carroll

Last year Dr Kate Sprogis, from the University of Western Australia's Albany campus, was a guest speaker at our National Science Week event. Here is an update on the findings that she and her colleagues have discovered.

It is poorly understood where Southern right whales (SRW: *Eubalaena australis*) travel to forage, and pathways taken on their journeys offshore, once they leave the South Coast in spring. To examine the large-scale migrations of these whales, satellite tags were deployed on whales towards the end of the breeding season in September 2022. The satellite tracks of the whales, and the names that were gifted to the whales in local Menang/Merningar language by Indigenous Elders, are available on the project website: <https://tohoravoyages.ac.nz/welcome-to-mirnong-maat/>. 'Mirnong Maat' translates to 'whale journeys' in the local Noongar language.

The initial findings from the satellite tracks show that whales from WA migrate to several foraging grounds, ranging from Antarctica to French sub-Antarctic islands in the Indian Ocean (Fig 1). It has also been found, for the first time, that the foraging grounds visited by the WA SRWs are also used by SRWs from the Aotearoa New Zealand and South African populations. The satellite data are already being used by the Commonwealth government to help identify newly designated biologically important areas for SRWs. The satellite tags transmitted for more than a month on WA SRWs is providing a scientific basis for new whale marine protected areas.



Figure 1. Tracks of the Southern Right Whales tagged on breeding grounds in southwest Australia into the presumed feeding grounds. Each different coloured track line represents an individual satellite tagged whale. The map shows the arrival of the tagged whales to the Kerguelen Islands, Crozet Islands and Antarctica. To track the whales in real-time <https://tohoravoyages.ac.nz/track-the-australian-whales/>. The Mirnong Maat research is the Australian component, and Tohorā Voyages (Whale Voyages in Māori) is the New Zealand component.

You can now join the Friends of Fitzgerald River National Park online on our website <https://www.fitzgeraldfriends.org.au/become-member>
Membership is free, and we welcome donations.

2023 COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP GRANT APPLICATION

by Gil Craig

The Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park have applied for a 'large' (valued up to \$450,000) *State NRM Program 2023 Community Stewardship Grant* for a project titled 'Fitzgerald Biosphere vegetation research and monitoring for appropriate fire regimes'.

The Fitzgerald Biosphere is one of only five biospheres in Australia designated under the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme. The Fitzgerald River National Park (FRNP) forms the 'core area' and forms a substantial component of the 'Fitz-Stirlings Priority Place', one of only three Commonwealth-recognised Priority places in WA. Here, many dominant plant species only regenerate after fire from seed stored in capsules above ground, i.e. obligate seeders.

Inappropriate fire regimes are a key threatening process. In the Fitzgerald Biosphere, fire managers in the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) use 30-year-old vegetation as one of the decision mechanisms for planning burns. Research by Hassell and Dodson (2003) using estuarine sediment cores from the Gorden Inlet determined that the pre-European "catchment fire interval" for most fires was 29-58 years apart. Evidence-based research is required to determine 'adequate' seed banks for long-term survival of obligate seeder species in the Fitzgerald Biosphere.

Funding has been requested for two years to employ a full-time senior botanist and a part-time technical officer to assist with data collection. Skills development for Noongar youth has been included.

In-kind co-contributions have been proffered by

- Bush Heritage Australia,
- DBCA,
- Esperance Tjaltjraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation,
- South Coast NRM,
- Fitzgerald Biosphere Group and the
- Ravensthorpe Wildflower Show, for which the Friends are grateful.

Proposed outcomes include:

1. establishment of permanent, long-term research and monitoring sites (quadrats) in the major vegetation types that are characterised by obligate seeder species. The quadrats would be across a chronosequence of fire ages;
2. assessment of a developing threat to conservation and to fire management;
3. documentation of fire and recruitment dynamics in targeted obligate seeding species;
4. advice on risk of recruitment failure and potential biodiversity loss for current and future planned burns and after bushfires.

We will be notified in October if our application was successful, with successful applicants' projects starting in early 2024.

TWERTUP SPRING CLEAN

Yes, THAT time of the year will be upon us again soon: another beautiful spring in the Fitz. With the flowers comes the spring clean, though, so:

A busy bee will be held at the Twertup Field Studies Centre on Saturday 9th September to clean the building and do some gardening around the outside. Please bring gloves and other equipment to do the job. Members are welcome to stay at Twertup from 8th-10th September. For more information and to book a bed, please contact admin@fitzgeraldfriends.org.au.

TWERTUP FIRE MITIGATION

We are pleased that after discussion with DBCA, a satisfactory agreement on fire mitigation strategies for Twertup has been reached. Many of us are scarred by the loss of the original Twertup building; to me, it was like losing an old friend. We do not want to see ‘the second Twertup’ go up in flames. Hence, we are very glad that the fire mitigation strategy is considering the beauty of the vegetation around the field studies centre, while ensuring the highest possible degree of fire safety. *[Ed.]*

THE 2023 FRIENDS COMMITTEE

Executive Committee:

President: Gillian Craig
Vice President: Troy Treeby
Treasurer: Sheryn Prior
Secretary: vacant

Twertup Representative:

Kim Bennett

Newsletter Editor:

Vicky Bilney

General Committee:

Annie Leitch
Kate Brown
Liz Utting
Kay Lehman

VALE MERLE BENNETT

Merle Bennett was a long-term member of the Friends of Fitzgerald River National Park and extremely knowledgeable on the native plants and geology in the Ravensthorpe region. Amongst other things, Merle started the Ravensthorpe Regional Herbarium. Merle died peacefully, and will be greatly missed by many.

We would like to extend our sincere condolences to Merle’s family and friends.

SCIENCE WEEK EVENT IN THE FITZ-STIRLING

We are planning a **science week event on 19th/20th August at Nowanup Reserve and Bush Heritage Australia's Red Moort/Monjebup North Reserves in the Fitz-Stirling.**

The Fitz-Stirling region is an essential part of Gondwana Link's vision to reconnect southwest Australia's landscape from Augusta/Margaret River to the Nullarbor. The fauna and flora of remnant vegetation between the Fitzgerald River and Stirling Range National Parks is about as diverse as in both parks. Landscape reconnection is being made by Bush Heritage Australia and other organisations, a number of private landholders, local Noongar people and a large number of volunteers. They have been working on environmental restoration and cultural reconnection in the area since the early 2000s. *[Ed.]*

We are currently considering the following **activities:**

Cultural walk and yarn with Uncle Eugene Eades at Nowanup

Visit to revegetation sites at Monjebup North

Bush Heritage have undertaken eco restoration efforts over parts of this area, to help repair fragmentation in the landscape in conjunction with fauna recovery projects.

Bush Walk around Red Moort/pools

Accommodation/food: Some accommodation will be available at Michael Tichbon Field Station on Red Moort for \$30 per person per night. Camping is also possible at Red Moort. BYO food and drinks.

Dieback is an issue in the Fitz-Stirling, too. We will let you know if we have to change dates or cancel events due to wet weather. Please note that additional fees may be involved.

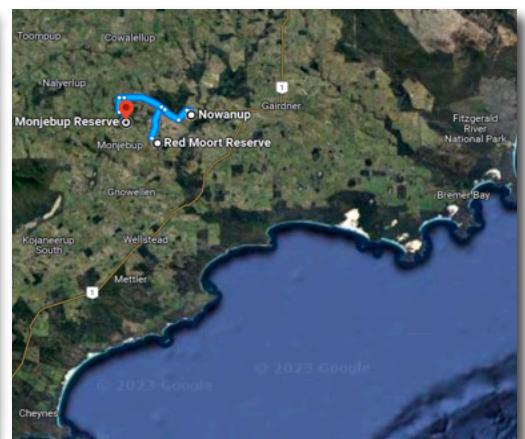
For expressions of interest, please contact admin@fitzgeraldfriends.org.au

**“If we heal the land,
the land becomes
healthy again, and the
land starts to show us
and teach us. If we can
heal the land and we
hang around long
enough, then we
become healthy as
well.”**

Uncle Eugene Eades



Michael Tichbon Field Station at Red Moort. Photo: Bush Heritage Australia



GRAND DESIGNS FOR GREAT SOUTHERN NATIVES

by Sally Malone



'Just Add Eggs' by Sally Malone

As a landscape designer, I have always had an interest in local plants and habitat types, something which has become more and more central to my practice, living as I do in the Great Southern and regularly visiting 'The Fitz' which is of course a place of extraordinary diversity and richness. Imagine my frustration at not being able to source or specify for gardens, the amazing plants we see growing wild. But such is life, and there has been much improvement in the variety of natives and Australian cultivars now available in nurseries.

What I did begin to see, however, was that we can recreate some very special elements of natural habitat in our gardens – nesting places! So many of our native animals require hollows, and these are in very short supply in urban and suburban environments where the big old trees needed for hollow formation are often the first felled to build homes. I started building nest boxes and possum pods for my own garden in Albany, as a way to see if they would contribute habitat and bring wild animals into my garden.

And did they ever! It has taken 3 or four years, but gradually they have become sought after real estate, with a new benchmark set in my Red Cap

parrot box with the successful hatching and fledging of 6 noisy chicks last spring. A ringtail possum has stolen my second parrot box, but I'm not complaining!

Watching all the activity around competing for nest boxes, feeding young and coming and going from the garden, I wondered if other gardeners would enjoy installing their own habitat structures, and my boxes became the prototypes for a new venture – habitART.



'Poppy Pod' by Sally Malone

HabitART is a collection of bee hotels, possum pods, bird nest boxes, bat boxes and water baths – with a twist. Each is made of 99% upcycled, recycled or repurposed materials. Buying new materials to replace lost habitat felt wrong, a bit like clearing rare cockatoo nest sites to mine minerals for 'green' batteries... This means each habitat is unique and many hours are spent trying to fix warped timber, loosen rusty screws and source unusual treasures. I confess – I have become a dumpster diver and have frequent flyer points at the op shops and tip shops. All this treasure hunting has led to a process of assembling quirky, (and I hope sometimes beautiful) habitats – something a bit more than a box with a hole.

I'm also now on a wonderful journey of researching what each creature needs in a home. What size hole? How deep? How to cat and feral bee proof the boxes and how to trade off longevity of the box against that fabulous bit of vintage decoration that I think will bring a smile. And that is the second twist to habitART – my addiction to the pun. Each creation has a title, the native bee boxes are Air Bee n Bees, the golf club birdbath is the 19th Hole, the parrot box with the old muffin tin lid is 'Just Add Eggs' – and so on.

I wanted to do this with a light hand; we get so many depressing messages about the state of the environment that many of us feel a sense of hopelessness. I wanted to try and use humour, be playful and create habitat that would provide little artworks in the garden. The ringtail won't care that the crochet red rosettes perfectly set off the grey army blanket, but gee – wouldn't that be a pretty way to get the possum out of your roof space and into a quiet corner under the eaves?

I'm loving the challenge of assembling these 'grand designs' for native critters - but what I am enjoying most is seeing how quickly wildlife responds to garden design that plants and installs habitat – it really is a case of build it and they will come. I'm pretty sure I won't be telling Narpulungup News readers anything they don't already know, but I would really encourage gardeners to plant little wild corners in their gardens with food and nest materials, and make themselves some Grand Designs of their own - you never know who will move in!

WHY DID THE TURTLE CROSS THE ROAD?

Albany based citizen scientist and freshwater turtle expert Atlanta Veld has teamed up with the 1Million Turtles program to find out just that. Atlanta is looking to engage people to report turtle sightings using the TurtleSAT app, protect turtle nests from predators and monitor fox activity around known turtle nesting sites.

If you have freshwater turtles on your property or have seen turtles out and about in and around the Fitz, Atlanta would love to hear from you.

Check out the 1 Million Turtle website <https://1millionturtles.com/> download the app <https://1millionturtles.com/turtlesat> and get in touch atlantasgarden@aussieb.com.au or 0478 642210.



Editor's note: The seasonal turtle protection speed limits on some of Albany's roads are the result of Atlanta's work with the Albany City Council – see <https://1millionturtles.com/our-team>. For helpful background information about the south-western snake-necked turtle: <https://www.albany.wa.gov.au/documents/846/south-western-long-necked-turtle-facts-and-identification>



We respectfully acknowledge the Noongar people as Traditional Owners of Country. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters, culture, and community and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

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