

# NARPULUNGUP NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF FITZGERALD RIVER NATIONAL PARK

NOVEMBER 2022, VOLUME 3



Photo: Libby Sandiford

## TWERTUP FIELD STUDIES CENTRE WORKING BEE

by Steve Janicke

A Friends maintenance working Bee at the Field Studies Centre took place on the weekend of the 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> of September.



The weather was only one point away from being perfect, and the nine participants shown here plus photographer diligently fixed,

swept, polished, sanded, washed, scoured, dusted, and put this, that and the other in order.

Two mice had taken a fancy to furniture stuffing and were caught in the act of scavenging the foam. They were eventually apprehended.



The agenda included action to fortify doors to deter more of their relatives from moving in.

It is almost a tradition to take fifteen minutes during a visit, to amble around the old quarry. It invokes a sense of the passage of time as we who visit intermittently notice the slots which were cut into the soft stone walls by Horace

Worth, are steadily being erased by rain and wind.

After everything was ship-shape for the next cohort of visitors, an expedition was organised to visit a ridge which is



situated a couple of kilometres away to the SW. There we sauntered about admiring the results of nature's perpetual working bee. Colourful cliffs capped with interesting shapes demanded that the walkers photograph them.

Plants, stones and rock hollows were examined on the off chance of spotting something unusual, perhaps something no one had ever seen before (it's still possible).

At the top of the ridge, the Mid Mount Barren range could be seen in the far distance.



There was nothing for it but to concur with poet Dorothea Mackellar that we too, 'love a sunburnt country'.

The working party consisted of: Gil Craig, Libby Sandiford, Alison Reddington, Jane and Bill Thompson and their friends Phil and Patti Stacey visiting from QLD, Mike Oakley and Steve and Geraldine Janicke.

## NOISY NEIGHBOURS MOVE IN AT TWERTUP

*by Gil Craig*

An overnight stay at the Field Studies Centre was interrupted by thumping, followed by loud urinating then pellets dropping above our heads. What was up there?

Visitors over the past couple of years have seen a single Brushtail Possum around the building. Kate, sleeping in her swag on the verandah, woke one night to find one licking her face. Our suspicions were confirmed on going outside to find, not one but two adults under the north-east verandah roof. Another tail was poking out of the hole at the corner, which then disappeared into the roof cavity. This was followed by chattering and scuffling, sounding just like parents scolding a youngster for not behaving. Sure enough, about 10 minutes later, a female with a joey on her back emerged from the north-west corner, followed at a discrete distance by her mate.

The verandah beams provided a perfect runway to the poly water tank and from there along the slippery conduit and down a post to the ground. At least when they came home later that night, these delightful possums were much quieter and hardly disturbed our sleep.

But what about the resident owlet-nightjar – had it been ousted from the cavity? Just as we were pondering this around mid-morning, the bird obligingly gave three short calls, letting us know that it was still up there. It's good to know that furry and feathered animals are breeding again at Twertup.




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## COMMITTEE CHANGE

**President:** Gil Craig

**Vice president:** vacant

**Secretary:** Delys Harland

**Treasurer:** Sheryn Prior

**Twertup Representative:** vacant

**Narpulungup News Editor:** Vicky Bilney

**Committee Members:** Kate Brown, Jack Guthrie  
Allison Lullfitz, Liz Utting

Jennifer Dunn has resigned from the Friends committee. Thank you for your enthusiasm and engagement, Jenny; we wish you all the best.

Jenny's position has been filled by Jack Guthrie. Welcome back on board, Jack!

## LIFE MEMBERSHIP FOR ANNE GADSBY

*story recorded by Delys Harland*

*Anne was awarded Life Membership to Friends at the 2015 AGM held at Quaalup Homestead. Over recent years, Life Members have been asked what attracted them to join our group, so that it can be included in the Narpulungup News and a copy held at the Twertup Field Studies Centre. Here is Anne's story:*

I have always had an interest in botany and was fascinated by Western Australian wildflowers. I was a member of the local Wildflower Society in Perth mid 60's. I became hooked on discovering the diversity of the bush.

My first trip through the bush which became the Fitzgerald River National Park (FRNP) was on the Telegraph track from Bremer Bay to Hopetoun. This was in the early 70's. It was all new and fascinating to me and it sparked a lifelong interest.

I began working for school health in the Wheatbelt in the late 70's and found a holiday job in Bremer Bay for the Health Department. I spent two summers in a caravan in the caravan park which was the "nursing post" before they built the Health Centre.

This is when I became aware of the Fitzgerald River National Park Association and my membership was paid to Kaye Vaux, the Treasurer.

I worked in Manjimup for four years and while there I bought my house in Bremer Bay and continued to holiday and work there over the summer. Then I worked in Albany from early 80's until retirement. I spent any free time in my house in Bremer and was able to learn more about the FRNP and meet interesting people, including Brenda and Ken Newby

(I helped them map the trail up Horrie and Dorrie), Andy Chapman (trapping adventures) and Kaye Vaux who always brought hot food to Twertup.

When I retired, I joined the Friends of the FRNP Committee at an AGM at the Fitzgerald Hall. Merle Bennett nominated me and I have been a Committee Member until I retired this year. I have held various positions, been Treasurer by default, then Secretary, Vice-President and President.

As Vice-President, I was able to focus on the Dieback Issue. I spent considerable time getting to know journalists, politicians, and Ministers making them aware of the situation. The Federal Member for O'Connor, Tony Crook was very interested, detouring on his trip home to Kalgoorlie to meet me at Bremer and discuss the issues we had.

I have been involved in other organisations as a Friends representative: CCWA; FRNP Advisory Group; Fitzgerald Biosphere Community Collective. Volunteer member of Fitzgerald Biosphere Group, South Coast Management Group.

My personal interests have involved joining Birds Australia which has been a big part of my life. Shorebirds have been of particular interest and I have written submissions to Southern Shores for South Coast NRM.

I also joined the Friends of the Western Ground Parrot and took part in several field trips. That was brilliant because we got to explore places near the Wilderness. I certainly heard, but never saw, a Ground Parrot. Brenda Newby was instrumental in alerting the Department of the serious loss of



# FROM A DAY WITH KATE AND THE WHALES

*by Jane Thompson, Gil Craig and Dr. Kate Sprogis*

Dr Kate Sprogis enthralled a keen group of 15 whale-watchers at Bremer Bay on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> August at our Science Week event. She explained that there are two main species of whale or “Mirnong” in the Menang/Merningar Noongar language, that are mainly seen in the shallow waters along the South Coast and the differences between them.

**Southern right whales** have shorter pectoral fins and no dorsal fin, therefore no ‘hump’. About 3000 migrate along the south coast of

Australia, which is a low number and they have not reached pre-whaling day population numbers. They were the “right” whale to hunt. In recent years, a New Zealand (NZ) population has been tracked heading westwards into the Southern Ocean, whereas previously they mainly went east of NZ to feed. Another population from South Africa is now known to migrate east towards the mid-Indian Ocean. ‘Our’ whales occur in at least 13 main aggregation areas across the south coast of Australia, and it is not known whether they meet up with either of the NZ and South African populations in the Southern Ocean feeding grounds. Whilst in the Southern Ocean, some southern right whales may migrate east, some west, and some south towards Antarctica; it is unknown. Over the warmer months, the whales in the Southern Ocean are feeding on small prey called copepods, which are small crustaceans in the zooplankton. The whales may also be feeding on krill, but these details are currently unknown. From biopsy

sampling, a small piece of skin can provide huge amounts of information, including genetic relatedness to other populations and details on what they are feeding

on in the Southern Ocean and how this differs from other populations and species. Information on satellite tagging and biopsy sampling of southern right whales can be found

on <https://tohoravoyages.ac.nz/>.

Male southern right whales have the largest testicles of any mammal. When

mating, a large group of males will surround the female; they do not fight, but roll trying to gain access to the female. A female may breed around every 3-4 years. During the winter breeding/nursing season, mother southern right whales reside in shallow bays. These aggregation areas are hugely important for the recovery of this species, and any disturbance from humans in these areas should be minimised (e.g. shipping, coastal development).

**Humpback whales** are recognised by their large pectoral fins, and dorsal fin, which forms a distinctive hump. The population that migrates along the Western Australian coast is estimated to be 30,000 – 40,000 individuals. Females can give birth every year or so, if they have built up enough food reserves (stored as



Dr Kate Sprogis speaking whale at the Friends' science week event at Bremer Bay.

Continued from last page

blubber) during summer in the Antarctic, where they feed on krill. This species is a conservation success story, as they too were near depleted off WA during the whaling days, with only a few hundred remaining. The humpback whales have increased successfully, and are a common whale to see from the coast during the whale season (cooler months). This was not the case during the whaling days when numbers were depleted.

Male humpback whales put on a great show during mating. Many testosterone-hyped males display with lots of action, splashing and fast swimming, as they try to access and mate with the female. Once pregnant, mothers give birth 12 months after in the cooler months along our shore. Mothers can rest on the surface like a log, or 5 m below the surface for 3 -5 minutes. Young suckle on the mammary slits on her lower body. A baby has to put its mouth at the mammary slits to receive the milk, which has a toothpaste-like consistency. It's not surprising that she is exhausted, having not fed for several months since being in the Antarctic feeding grounds where she stocks up her fat stores from Antarctic krill.

Humpback and other whales have to deal with a number of threats:

- **Orcas or killer whales** can feed on multiple baby humpback whales a day! and several a season. The smaller the calf the better, and just born is the best! Thus the calves must grow as fast as they can, and it's measured that in Exmouth Gulf the calves grow in length at 3 cm a day.
- **Seagulls** peck the skin on the back of the resting humpback whales and can make holes into the blubber. Kate said that this behaviour had been observed in Argentina for many years, on southern right whales, where the whales now rest at a skewed angle or with their back below the surface, to prevent seagull attack. She has observed that seagulls at Exmouth have recently

learnt this behaviour, which is of major concern. However, to date, there has been no funding to examine this further in Exmouth Gulf.

- **Human activities:** the main threat to whales are humans. *Ship noise* for example increases the noise pollution in the ocean, and this makes it difficult for whales to communicate and disturbs their daily activities (e.g., resting is disturbed by boat coming closer to whales, and so the whale gets woken up). Unlike for humans, sound is the primary sensory modality for whales, so limiting underwater noise from human sources is important.

*Collision with boats in shipping lanes* is another significant threat to whales. An example is one of the busiest shipping lanes south of Sri Lanka that is also the feeding ground of the blue whale. The overlap of whales and shipping routes increases the chance of ship strike. Occasionally, a ship arrives in Colombo with a dead whale on the bow. Ships are so large that the captain may not even know a whale has been struck.

*Fishing nets and rope* cause entanglement and trap the whales which roll as they are stressed, making the entanglement worse. If the whale has not already drowned, then the whale disentanglement teams have to risk their lives to try and disentangle distressed large whales, which is a dangerous event.

Dr. Kate provided us with much more information about whales, dolphins and other oceanic life. We also saw two southern right whales in Bremer Bay. They were resting, which is exactly the behaviour to expect whilst on our coast. The whales are in the shallow bays to rest and nurse their young. Occasionally, southern right whales will breach, but they are not as surface active as humpback whales.



Humpback Whales Photo: Nathan McQuoid

## NIGHT PROWL FOR OWLS

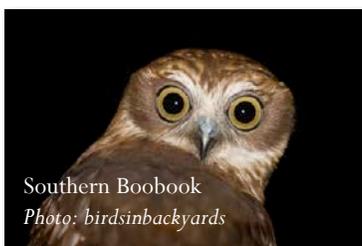
by Gil Craig

Vanessa Lipianin (FRNP's Senior Operations Manager) delighted our group, who were staying overnight at the Quaalup Homestead Wilderness Retreat, on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> August. Vanessa first became interested in night birds while working on Norfolk Island from 2010 to 2012, and since then her passion has taken her on many night stalks.

In between the rain showers at Quaalup, Vanessa played the signature calls of different birds that could be living in the area. Owls are very territorial, so when they hear another individual calling, they'll come to investigate the intruder. We were most impressed when firstly a boobook (*Ninox boobok*) flew in and roosted on a nearby branch, then a barn owl (*Tyto alba*) made some fly-overs when masked owl (*Tyto novaehollandiae*) calls were played. More calls were made to see whether any barking owl (*Ninox connivens*) or tawny frogmouths (*Podargus strigoides*) were in the area, but none arrived (or perhaps they did but we couldn't hear or see them). Owls have silent wings during flight, which make them difficult to spot and deadly for their targets.

Next morning, one of our campers commented that a boobook was heard calling for most of the night. It must have been determined to let any new bird on the block know that this place was already 'taken'.

Vanessa has accepted a new job with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and leaving the FRNP in mid-November. We are sorry to see her leave and wish her well in her new position.



Southern Boobook  
Photo: birdsinbackyards

## BOTANICAL WONDERS AT QUAALUP

by Gil Craig

Our National Science Weekend event continued on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> August. Dr Gil Craig guided eleven members along the botanical walk developed by Carsten and Karin at the Quaalup Homestead Wilderness Retreat. The diversity of plants was astounding, with the profundity of flowers providing gorgeous displays. With magnifying glasses in hand, Gil delved deep into the flowers and explained how plants like *Lambertia inermis* (chittick) had the male and female floral parts maturing at different times to avoid self-fertilisation.

The Friends thank Karin and Carsten for being such gracious hosts and for welcoming us to their Retreat for this event.



Gil Craig leading the botanical excursion. Exploring flowers. Chittick – *Lambertia inermis*. Photos: Kate Sprogis

## HOODED PLOVERS - SCIENCE WEEK TALK

by Anne Gadsby

The Wellstead Estuary at Bremer Bay is tidal at present, and with no chance of walking anywhere near a Hooded Plover, we started at the 'Lookout' above the estuary to visualise the situation before the river escaped, and what had been done locally to protect all beach-nesting birds.

Birdlife WA started the ball rolling by providing bollards to keep vehicles off the northern foreshore. There were difficulties persuading 'The Shire' but with Birdlife support, it happened. Next, the bollards stretched to the dunes at the start of Bremer Beach, again to deter vehicles from known bird-nesting territory. Protecting the dunes has allowed re-vegetation, and the Rock-Parrots come to feed on the *Arctotheca populifolia*

Each Spring, nests could be found with tyre tracks and hoof prints close-to or crushing them. One lucky Red-capped Plover was noticed by Sheryn (our treasurer), who raced off to the tip and assembled a small but very effective fence. Success!

Next step, get permission from Shire to erect a temporary fence (October to March) to protect the Hooded Plover nest sites. This fence stretched from north to south, across sand as the water level receded. It

was reasonably effective, but we were obliged to remove it at the end of March. Bad luck for the migrant waders which had begun to assemble in the area prior to migrating.

Eventually, with help from the Fitzgerald Biosphere group and local families it was possible to put the fence up (in sections for easy removal in case of flood) and leave it. When it came down, a quick call to anyone around, saved all the posts and wire for next time. Funding was from South Coast NRM, but we had to save as much gear as possible. Several Hooded Plover nests were built near the fence, one must have been sitting as we built, but the eggs were predated by Ravens.

Ravens are a serious problem. There have been three approved culls, and another is being planned.

Our resident Hooded Plover has moved to several different nesting sites. Twice (in several years) they have fledged three chicks, but that is rare. The last site was around the estuary nearer the jetty, but that's an area frequented by dogs.

As you saw, the bar may close (cross fingers it stays open). Plans are needed to re-erect our fence, and with luck our Hoodie has flown over to the north foreshore to nest unseen and unpredated.

## RANGER PROFILE: ELOISE MORATH



"My name is Eloise, I have a deep appreciation for the connection between our natural ecosystems, culture and landscapes. I have worked in Conservation for 6 years beginning my journey on the east coast in NSW where I was involved in various ecological restoration work in a mosaic of vegetation communities. I have recently transitioned from being a ranger in the Northern Territory to the beautiful Fitz, where I feel grateful to be working in a team to help preserve this highly diverse Biosphere Reserve."

*There are two other new rangers at Fitzgerald River National Park: Alex Mitchell and Damian Medley. We hope to include their profiles in future editions of Narp News.*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### MEMBERS WEEKEND 4-5 February 2023 at Twertup

Members and their friends are invited to a weekend at the Twertup Field Studies Centre. Enjoy meeting new people and catching up with Friends. Take a walk along the 'Horrie and Dorrie' and 'Nature' trails. Stay the night, either camping or book a bed in the building. RSVP essential to [admin@fitzgeraldfriends.org.au](mailto:admin@fitzgeraldfriends.org.au)

### AGM 4-5 March 2023 in Hopetoun

Saturday 4 March – the AGM will be held in Hopetoun (venue TBA) in the morning. The afternoon's guest speaker will be Tasmin Lancaster providing an update on her Honour's project researching the population ecology of Royal Hakea *Hakea victoria*. A walk to No Tree Hill will follow.

## MERCHANDISE

<b>Sugar and Sand: The World of the Honey Possum</b> book by Ron and Barbara Wooller	\$10.00	\$8.00 (each, 5+ copies)
<b>Fitzgerald biosphere map</b>	\$10.00	\$8.00 (each, 5+ copies)
<b>Twertup Field Studies Centre DVD</b> by Steve Janicke	free of charge	
<b>Checklist of plants</b> in FRNP	free of charge	

Please contact [admin@fitzgeraldfriends.org.au](mailto:admin@fitzgeraldfriends.org.au) to place your order. A cost may apply for postage and handling.

*We wish all our readers a joyful and safe festive season!*

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