

NARPULUNGUP NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF FITZGERALD RIVER NATIONAL PARK

NOVEMBER 2021, VOLUME 3



Photo: Libby Sandiford

LOVING THE BIG WET

BY GIL CRAIG

After three years of drought, Fitzgerald River National Park relished the rain that this winter and spring brought.

The road closures due to wet weather did mean that we had to first postpone and then cancel our planned National Science Week event, but the parched park loved the water - and the wildflowers looked magnificent!

Here's a sample of pictures from various photographers including Amanda Keesing, Kate Brown and Gil Craig.



FRIENDS' SCHOLARSHIP

BY GIL CRAIG

This year, the Friends offered a scholarship for up to \$5,000 to an Honours, MSc or PhD candidate to study any natural aspect of the park, with the aim to support a student to further knowledge and expertise relevant to the conservation and management of the park.

The scholarship was offered as a supplementary 'top-up' operating allowance for research expenses, including research related travel. Fieldwork was expected to be included in the project. A requirement of the scholarship was that the student give a presentation at a Friends' organised event in the FRNP at the completion of the project.

There were three applicants for the scholarship and with

only one scholarship on offer, it was a hard decision for the committee. The applicant who provided the strongest case for a project that would have outcomes that could direct management for the whole park was Tasmin Lancaster.

Tasmin is a student at the University of Notre Dame and her proposed Honours research project "*The implications of key constraining factors on the early life stages and population persistence*

continued on page 2

continued from page 1 – Friends' Scholarship

of *Royal Hakea* (*Hakea victoria*)” aims to focus on key stages in the life of *H. victoria*, including plant maturation, seed set, seed storage and seed release; and be guided by questions including:

1. What is the life span of *H. victoria* in the absence of fire?
2. At what age does *H. victoria* first flower and set seeds?
3. Does fruit and seed production increase with maturity?



Royal Hakea *Hakea victoria*.
Photo: Amanda Keesing

4. Does seed viability change with plant maturity and/or storage length?
5. Does the risk of granivory increase with storage length?

We look forward to meeting Tasmin and wish her success in answering

the questions she has posed. Thank you to all the students who applied for the scholarship, we wish them well in their academic endeavours.

FIVE DAYS IN THE FITZGERALD

BY CHRIS GILLAM AND ROBYN WEIR

Although we live in Perth, we are members of the Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park and over the past 20 years have visited the area often.

In October this year we spent a week in Hopetoun and travelled into the park each day.

Wednesday 13th – Woke to the stillness and quietness of a bush garden with just the small, effervescent birds chattering to wake us up. The weather was bright and windy so we headed off east along the beach watching terns gliding and diving and being buffeted like us in the strong wind.

No strong wind though to hamper the two little hooded plovers who were focused on fossicking in the seaweed for some delicious treat.

Thursday 14th – Out to Barrens Lookout today to spend our time looking at banksias, quaalup bells, Barrens regelia, royal hakeas and so much more – all brilliant in the morning sunshine. Not to be outdone, though, was a wonderful green

and orange jewel beetle [...]

Then to the top of East Mt Barren... or nearly to the top.

As we climbed higher and puffed louder, we welcomed the opportunity to sit down and take in the glorious views across to Cave Point, the Whoogarup Range, Culham Inlet and the coast. Again, we were intrigued by the hardy plants that clung to

rocks and hid in crevices smiling at our efforts to ‘cling on’ ourselves.

Friday 15th – Drove to Cave Point and walked from there to West Head through lovely low shrubland and along the sandy beach, then up through the bush admiring the displays of mauve myrtle covering the hillsides. The view back down the coast and over to the Barren and Eyre Ranges was spectacular.

Saturday 16th – To Barrens Beach today and its enormous granite rocks split with gorgeous orange-coloured quartz.

Walked east to Culham Inlet where we saw three hooded plovers eating and peeping at us from amongst the samphire. An osprey, oyster catchers and a Pacific gull were our companions on the walk back.

Sunday 17th – Hiked the Hakea Trail from Hamersley Inlet to Tamala Karst today through low heathland and

groves of shady peppermints, then across the enormous sandbar to the beach to wonder at the uniquely sculptured rock formations. No artist sculptor’s hand could create these.

Where better to sit and enjoy our picnic lunch?

During our five days in the Fitzgerald we so appreciated the time and opportunity to stop, look and listen to the sea, the birds, the diversity of the plants and ever-changing landscape. We’ll be back!



Jewel beetle
Anticoryne ovalifolia

WESTERN BRISTLEBIRDS IN FITZGERALD RIVER NP

BY BRENDA NEWBEY

A paper focusing on the Western Bristlebirds' response to fire in the Fitzgerald River National Park (FRNP) has recently been published in BirdLife Australia's online journal "Australian Field Ornithology". Fieldwork for the study began in 1994 with some work each year until 2006, then 2008 and 2017-19.

The endangered Western Bristlebird (WBB) is a small heathland bird far more often heard than seen. The FRNP population is the smaller of only two populations in existence. They are sedentary, living in pairs within a home range of about 7 ha within which is a core area of 1 – 3 ha. There are usually clusters of home ranges within the same vicinity, often overlapping to some extent. WBBs have short wings and weak flight and yet they have persisted in their fire-prone habitat.

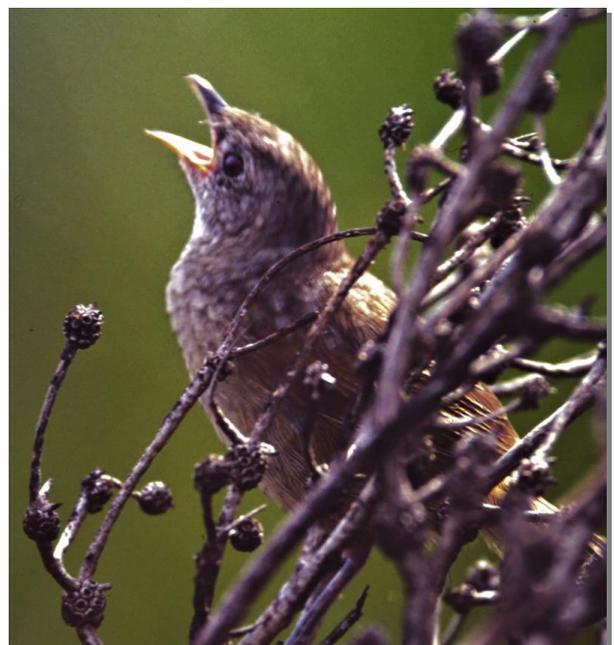
In October 1994 a sub-population of WBBs within the north of the FRNP was almost completely burnt out. There had been surveys in June and August 1994 so it was clear that 21 of the known 22 home ranges were gone. The opportunity to do a post-fire survey was taken in November 1994. There was considerable apprehension but the surveyors found 27 home ranges – one as before in the unburnt vegetation and 26 in four separate clusters within more or less suitable habitat around the fire edge.

The paper includes maps of WBB home range locations before and after four fires. Each time there was apparently a high survival rate and new home ranges were established near the fire edge. The WBBs gradually moved back into the original habitat when it became suitable. The process of moving back began within three years of the fire near the coast and nine years post-fire in the north of the park and was even

slower where there had been two fires within 13 years over the same ground. Of course the study could only relate to a home range with a calling male: it was not possible to follow individual birds.

Although there was no actual proof, it seemed most likely that when a WBB is threatened by fire, it shelters in the burrow of another inhabitant of its patch. After the fire has passed it emerges and makes its way to the edge. There seemed to be a definite inclination to re-settle in groups and no doubt the loud and distinctive call plays a key part here.

The paper "Western Bristlebird *Dasyornis longirostris*: Response to fire and persistence of home range in the Fitzgerald River National Park, Western Australia" by Shapelle McNee, Brenda Newbey, Sarah Comer and Allan Burbidge, may be found at www.birdlife.org.au/afo



Western Bristlebird in a burnt shrub at Dogger Swamp, FRNP, early Jan. 1990 after a fire late Dec. 1989. Photo: Simon Nevill

JUST IN TIME FOR CHRISTMAS!

Our beautiful banksia tea towels designed by artist Julie Outram are available by contacting admin@fitzgeraldfriends.org.au

\$20 each

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ADVANCE NOTICE

FRIENDS OF THE FITZGERALD RIVER NP

2022 AGM WEEKEND

AGM AT TWERTUP ON SATURDAY 12TH MARCH 1:30PM

GUEST SPEAKER KATY EVANS (GEOLOGIST) AT POINT ANN ON SUNDAY 13TH MARCH 9.30AM

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