
 FRIENDS OF THE FITZGERALD RIVER NATIONAL PARK

NARPULUNGUP NEWS

www.fitzgeraldfriends.org.au



A NATIONAL SCIENCE WEEKEND IN THE FITZGERALD BIOSPHERE

BY ANNIE LEITCH AND SARAH COMER

NOWANUP

We join Uncle Eugene Eades (Uncle Euy) in the meeting place Mia Mia at Nowanup Reserve after a quick morning tea and begin heartfelt discussions to welcome, introduce, heal and reconcile. We learn about 'court to country' programs that have seen young fellas making their way to Nowanup for bush school.

We are introduced to eco-restoration efforts that have placed Nowanup on the map for the whole world to see: using family members' totems planted in art form as a show of respect, using the 'Wadjula way of restoration to tell two stories on one land.'



Uncle Euy making us 'yarn carriers' in the meeting place Mia Mia. He notes 'Noongar are the biggest story tellers out, they reckon.'



We walk to the second meeting place, stopping for views and flowering calendar plants. They indicate that goannas are preparing to lay their eggs in termite mounds.

We look over the escarpment discussing the future of walking trails, planting projects and other collaborative projects with like-minded stakeholders such as Bush Heritage Australia and Greening Australia.

Dr Alison Lullfitz, a local community member and member of the Friends shares her experience with not only the Eades family, but helping us to understand the importance of Noongar inclusion in university projects. Uncle Euy himself is an Adjunct Associate Professor with Curtin University.

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Sarah Comer, Bush Heritage Australia (BHA) Ecologist and Friends member, shows us around BHA's Monjebup North reserve.

MONJEBUP NORTH

This reserve is an ecological restoration project, implementing high-grade restoration practices using direct seeding and infill planting to restore native vegetation on previously cleared paddocks. Matching appropriate local plant species with soil types, plantings have become productive enough for animals to move in again. We hear Crested Bellbirds and Emus as we navigate vegetation to find an active Malleefowl mound.



Ecologist Sarah Comer introducing us to Monjebup North

Sarah spoke to us on many topics – Felixer grooming traps which have been designed to specifically target feral cats and how they work, BHA's integrated predator management work, vegetation and fauna monitoring, technology and song meters, Yate swamps with cultural and ecosystem significance and getting a closer look at empty pygmy possum nest boxes!

We were fortunate to book the whole Red Moort Field station accommodation and kitchen facilities for this weekend, referencing plants found that day with the BHA herbarium and Friends members' expertise.

It was a great way to spend a few days in the Fitzgerald Biosphere.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This outing was presented by the Fitzgerald Biosphere Community Collective and Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park for National Science week on the 19th and 20th of August 2023. We thank Lotterywest for funding this weekend, Uncle Eugene and Rocky Eades from Nowanup Enterprises LTD and Sarah Comer from Bush Heritage Australia for guidance through their projects.



2023 COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP GRANT UPDATE

Unfortunately, our application for a StateNRM grant to research appropriate fire-return intervals for plant communities in the Fitzgerald River National Park was unsuccessful on this occasion. We'll keep trying...

TWERTUP SPRING CLEAN

BY LIBBY SANDIFORD

As always, it was a great stay at Twertup during the spring cleanup. After a day scrubbing, sweeping and washing, the building was looking clean and welcoming and you could see out the windows! That left time to admire the morning fog, stroll up Horrie & Dorrie and explore the spring flush of plants and insects around Twertup and elsewhere in the park. One interesting find was a new plant record for the park: *Aotus sp. Esperance*, which represents an easterly range extension for this small pea plant.

SNAPSHOTS

BY GIL, KATE AND LIBBY



REWARD FOR HARD WORK:
FITZ IN ITS GLORY



Aotus sp. Esperance - a new
plant species for Fitz

MORE PHOTOS FROM TWERTUP AND THE PARK

Photos courtesy Libby Sandiford



Verticordia crebra T



Melaleuca glena



Olearia imbricata



Calectasia keigheryi P2



a native bee on
Taxandria spathulata



Toad bug



Velvet ant (= a female
flightless wasp)



a flower wasp on
Verticordia habrantha

ROYAL HAKEA PROJECT UPDATE

BY DYLAN KORCZYNSKYJ, SCIENCE PROGRAM COORDINATOR, NOTRE DAME UNIVERSITY

Following our September visit to the Fitz, it seems timely to offer a snap-shot of Tasmin Lancaster's project investigating the seed bank of the majestic Royal hakea (*Hakea victoria*). Tasmin, Meredith (my wife and field assistant extraordinaire) and I plunged into the east and west of the park to plug a few survey 'holes', including some of the longest unburnt plants yet.

In the east No Tree Hill was on the list, to add an extra survey quadrat from where Gil's 1987 photo was taken. We also revisited tagged plants to help verify our method of aging fruit cohorts using the growth increments that give this hakea its characteristic structure. These plants tell us that the method works mostly, but we have to accept that there are years where the plants do not put on a usual flush of growth, which can impact the interpretation of plant age.

**IF ANYONE HAS INFORMATION
ABOUT THE AGE OF EITHER
THE MURRAY ROAD SITE OR
ANOTHER ON THE WESTERN
END OF DEVIL'S CREEK RD
PLEASE CALL DYLAN ON
9433 0107!**

We drove west to survey long unburnt sites to extend our understanding of annual fruit and seed production in *H. victoria* beyond 33 years post fire. Unfortunately, we haven't been able to confirm the exact age of the long unburnt sites, because they are so long unburnt! Ken Reddington has helped narrow the age of our Murray Road site to earlier than 1967 (56 years since fire) which is a great start!

ROYAL HAKEA PROJECT UPDATE – CONTINUED

BY DYLAN KORCZYNSKYJ, SCIENCE PROGRAM COORDINATOR, NOTRE DAME UNIVERSITY

Ranger Alex Mitchell (DBCA) was a great help, taking us into the park to a long-unburnt site adjacent to the February 2022 wildfire and pitching in wholeheartedly. The older plants were quite phenomenal – large, very branched, often laden with fruit. After surveying hundreds of plants, the mature structure of these oldies taught us that they provide important habitat not realised in the younger plants. Three out of the 10 plants we intensely surveyed had birds' nests and the density of spiders was much greater – it is here that we learnt that Tasmin wasn't a fan of spiders!



Surveying a long unburnt *Hakea victoria* bush. 'Oldies' are more likely to provide important habitat to spiders and harbour birds nests than younger plants.

While deep within the park I arm-twisted the group (Alex included) to complete a few surveys of the recently burnt site for *H. victoria* seedlings. It was nice to see a healthy crop and, although not part of Tasmin's study, it provided a nice snap-shot of a population returning after fire and possibly the start of a natural follow-on study. It would be interesting to see how the seedlings fare over summer and to follow them in time to complete our understanding of the lifecycle of *H. victoria*.

As before, we collected fruit from the plants which will feed into Tasmin's germination trial to confirm how seed viability changes with time stored on the plant. Tasmin has been working solidly over winter on these trials and a quick look shows that seed viability is initially strong, but decreases rapidly over the next 2-3 years of crown storage.

This tends to suggest that irrespective of plant age, *H. victoria* must continually produce seed to maintain a viable canopy seedbank. Furthermore, the plants that produce most fruit (seed) in the last two years will make the largest contribution to re-population following fire: burning following two good fruiting-years may encourage the strongest population re-establishment. Other preliminary trends are emerging, but we will have to wait for the full story!

After four long days of field work, elbow deep in the lacerating branches of *H. victoria*, Tasmin's passion for the project continued to shine bright! While this trip completed her fieldwork, germination trials, analysis and much writing still lies ahead. Tasmin continues to balance full-time work with the project and her eyes are set on June 2024 to bring the threads together



Young Royal Hakeas on No Tree Hill



Huntsman spider lying in wait on an old *H. victoria* to scare unsuspecting researchers - or maybe just out hunting...

SIGNIFICANCE OF COCANARUP FOR CARNABY'S RE-AFFIRMED

BY ROSEMARY JASPER

In mid-October, a group of volunteers came together for the annual nest-monitoring of Carnaby's black-cockatoo in the Ravensthorpe area, focussed on Cocanarup Timber Reserve.

This survey has been undertaken for the past 17 years and is now organised by Birdlife Australia and the locally based group, Cocanarup Conservation Alliance Inc. The first search for nesting birds in Cocanarup was

actually organised by Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park, in October 2006, when a group of 12 people found five active nests.

In 2023, the event was somewhat different. Dedicated volunteers from various backgrounds and hailing from local and regional areas came together to, in essence, locate previously recorded nest-hollows and check whether the hollows are again occupied or not. They did this by raising a camera (which is wi-fi connected to an iPad) on an extendable pole and thereby gaining a view of the hollow and recording the contents. This year, 247 hollows were surveyed in the district and 61 breeding attempts were recorded. This is a similar result to recent years and maintains the claim of Cocanarup and surrounds being

one of the most important natural breeding areas for this endangered and charismatic species.

Over the four day survey period this year, 26 volunteers, including four Esperance Tjaltjraak Rangers, contributed their time and energy for a total of 300 hours. This is a magnificent effort but it is also a remarkably rewarding experience for the volunteers.

For several years there has been a concerted effort by Cocanarup Conservation Alliance and

Birdlife Australia to advocate for the conservation of the Cocanarup Timber Reserve and surrounds to protect the breeding habitat of this rare cockatoo species.

"THE DATA COLLECTED BY THE NEST-MONITORING OVER THE YEARS HAS BEEN FUNDAMENTAL TO ESTABLISHING THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THIS AREA FOR THE FUTURE OF CARNABY'S BLACK-COCKATOO."
ROSEMARY JASPER



A combined effort of Birdlife Australia, Cocanarup Conservation Alliance and Esperance Tjaltjraak Rangers to monitor nests in a very old salmon gum woodland. Photo courtesy Jacqueline Richards

COCANARUP FOR CARNABY'S COCKATOOS - MORE IMPRESSIONS



Monitoring group in salmon gum woodland, having raised the camera on extendable pole, are now checking contents of hollow, courtesy of a camera at pole top and wi-fi linked device at ground-level. Photo courtesy Annie Leitch.



Only weeks old, this Carnaby's chick was photographed in its beautifully worked hollow, with perhaps eight weeks before it will be ready to leave the nest - all going well. Photo courtesy Birdlife Australia & Cocanarup Conservation Alliance.

CARNABY'S BLACK-COCKATOOS
ARE SUCCESSFULLY BREEDING
AT COCANARUP.
EACH PRECIOUS CHICK IS AN
INVALUABLE INSURANCE FOR
THE SURVIVAL OF THIS
DECLINING SPECIES.



One of the monitoring groups walking to the next hollow in Cocanarup. Photo courtesy Annie Leitch.

COCANARUP IS NOT ONLY A
SITE OF IMMENSE
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPORTANCE.
IT IS ALSO A LIVING
MEMORIAL TO THE
COCANARUP MASSACRE AND
WA'S COLONIAL HISTORY.



Inquisitive female Carnaby's emerging from her very neat hollow. Photo courtesy Jacqueline Richards



2024 AGM SAVE THE DATE

Our next AGM will be held at Twertup on Saturday 9 March 2024. Malcolm French, renowned for his knowledge of eucalypts, will be our guest speaker. A field trip to Calyerup Rocks is planned for Sunday 10th March.



JULIE OUTRAM DESIGNED

\$ 21

TEATOWELS AVAILABLE

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Proceeds go to the Friends of the Fitzgerald River
 National Park, an independent community group
 bringing people together to appreciate and further the
 scientific knowledge of the the remarkable Fitzgerald
 River National Park

FOR FURTHER ENQUIRIES PLEASE EMAIL:
ADMIN@FITZGERALDFRIENDS.ORG.AU



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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