

Friends of Woorabinda Bushland Reserves

NEWS LETTER

Number 60, September 2017

Green Army Graduation

Extra seating had to be squeezed into the room at the Woorabinda Environment Centre on July 6, when more than 40 people turned up for the Green Army Graduation Ceremony.

Guests included the Federal MP for Mayo, Rebekha Sharkie, endorsed candidate for the seat of Heysen, Josh Teague, Councillor John Kemp and AHC Mayor Bill Spragg, who presented the certificates.

Sincere thanks to the team and their supervisor, CVA's Uta Grehn, were expressed by representatives of each of the groups which have benefited from the Southern Brown Bandicoot Habitat Recovery and Linkage project.

The main talk, by FOWBR's David Ragless, was very well received and is reprinted in this newsletter. Each of the graduates gave a short illustrated talk describing the work that each of them had most enjoyed - a crash course in public speaking had been part of their training.

The project, with the support of DEWNR and the Adelaide Hills Council, did valuable work for five environmental groups: Woorabinda Bushland Reserves, Mark Oliphant Conservation Park, the National Trust, Sturt Upper Reaches Landcare Group and the Deanery.

Considerable assistance with both advance planning and on-ground work was provided by volunteers from the areas involved, including Philip Hicks (FOWBR and Mark Oliphant), David Ragless (FOWBR) and Janet Pedler (FOWBR and The Deanery). Janet also acted as organiser and MC for the graduation.

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The Green Army graduates: L-R back: Nathaniel Sutherland, Katherine Klocke, Tom Hannam
Front: Amelia Noel, Miriam Frances Wood, Megan Davis, James Cummins

KNEE DEEP in BUSHCARE

David Ragless's address to the graduation ceremony

Good morning Green Army participants, esteemed guests, group members and all you good folk who have come along to support this Green Army graduation ceremony.

The Macquarie dictionary defines Bushcare as: *The maintenance of remnant bush or the revegetation of land with native trees by landowners and community groups.*

I have been involved in bushcare for nearly 30 years and have been asked to share with you some of my experiences on this journey.

My journey officially started when the District Council of Stirling planned to sell what is now Stirling Park, an old market garden, for subdivision into 29 housing blocks.

Community opposition stopped this sale and the community formed a Landcare group to assist council with the management of the area.

I reluctantly became chair of this group for the first 10 years. The group has evolved into the Friends of Woorabinda Bushland Reserves Inc., of which more later.

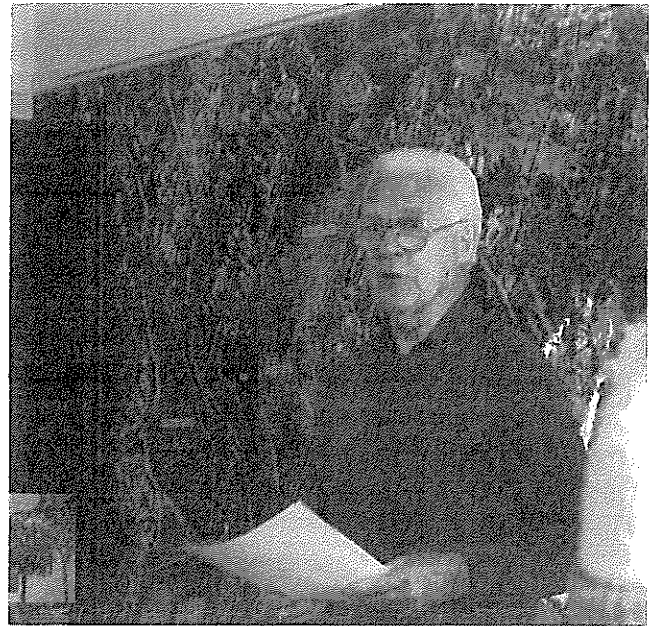
Commitment to saving the area from development was driven by community realisation that it was a valuable piece of water catchment and a major sub-catchment of the Aldgate Creek. The Council engineer at the time also considered that revegetation of Stirling Park would materially reduce the possibility of flooding of the Aldgate main street by slowing down run-off from Stirling Park into the Aldgate Creek.

At the same time the realisation of the importance of the biodiversity of the area was driven home when our small central hills high rainfall area was listed as one of the 50 biodiversity hotspots in Australia and that only 9% of our bush remained - much of it seriously degraded and seriously fragmented.

The Landcare group started revegetation of the area in 1990, supported by a grant from Greening Australia.

Following this the Friends group lobbied for Council to purchase the adjoining Woorabinda property from the State Government who were considering selling to a developer. This acquisition would link Hender Reserve and Stirling Park.

In 1994 Council bought Woorabinda and saved it from housing subdivision. This was a wonderful act of faith given that Council was cash-strapped at the time due to bushfire debts.



David Ragless delivers his address

To link Madurta Reserve then entailed Council opening up the two surveyed walking trails, one to Woorabinda Reserve and one to Stirling Park.

And that is how the 34 hectare Stirling Linear Park came into being - now known as Woorabinda Bushland Reserves

Weeds are the great threat to bushland by competing with delicate natives and reducing biodiversity and ecological sustainability.

Consequently the cornerstone of bushcare is weed control - as I am sure the Green Army trainees will attest.

The most effective weed control method in native bushland is known as the minimum disturbance Bradley method, (named after the Bradley sisters who pioneered the method) To many newcomers to bushcare this can seem counter-intuitive because instead of first concentrating on the worst weedy areas priority is given to the least weedy areas and working outwards. This time-proven method makes best use of labour and allows bush to naturally regenerate quickest.

Weed control is a long term job and must be guided by surveys and plans - which should be revised regularly.

However, it can be far from simple. For instance many weeds are on Government proclaimed schedules and so land managers have a legal responsibility to control these.

Research has indicated the dense blackberry patches in, or alongside, very good bush can provide habitat of value to help Southern Brown Bandicoots to survive predators like cats and foxes. I must add

that Blackberries are of little or no habitat value on degraded land.

Also it is an offence under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act to destroy Southern Brown Bandicoot habitat.

This means that it can be an offence not to control blackberries but can also be an offence to control them if they could provide habitat for Southern Brown Bandicoot.

Consequently we are leaving some blackberry patches and only aim to prevent them getting bigger or spreading.

It is a surprise to some people that some of our most invasive and damaging weeds are Australian natives - from other parts of Australia. *Acacia longifolia var longifolia*, or Sydney Golden Wattle is a good example.

It flourishes in our reserves and can shade out all local natives, then die at an early age allowing introduced weeds to take over the bare ground.

Recently when working controlling *longifolia* a passing woman stopped and exclaimed that we had better not let the "greenies" catch us - or we would be in real trouble. She was puzzled when we said that actually we were the greenies.

The question is sometimes asked why do we volunteer for bushcare?

There are several reasons.

Firstly, being in good bushland quietly working with like minded people is very relaxing and the discovery of rare or endangered plants and sightings of native wildlife, particularly endangered species, is most inspiring.

Secondly, it is a rare opportunity to mingle with a range of people of like mind.

The Friends of Woorabinda bushcare working bees attract, among others, a policeman, accountants, a GP, nurses, engineers, an agronomist, teachers, an author and scientists.

Thirdly, contributing to the effective management of community public open space makes people feel useful members of society.

And finally, learning and understanding more about our Adelaide Hills biodiversity is a real bonus.

All these things contribute to the good mental health of participants.

Recent research has documented the beneficial effect on health of relaxing in natural open space.

The collective efforts of the Woorabinda Friends over 27 years are significant.

The group has attracted close to a quarter of a million dollars in grant funding and contributed over 30,000 hours of volunteer labour - at a modest hourly rate this is a million dollar contribution of labour.

This work has been mainly weed control, but has included substantial re-vegetation work in Stirling Park and Madurta reserves, some trail building, provision of public seating, interpretive signage and notice boards.

Over 30,000 tubestock have been established.

All of this work has, in recent years, been keenly supported by the Adelaide Hills Council and a number of other organisations including Conservation Volunteers Australia.

And recently the wonderful support from the Green Army. Twelve months of two back-to-back projects. They have done an awesome amount of weed control in Woorabinda and Stirling Park, and some re-vegetation using tubestock grown by a member of the Friends group.

It is with pride and pleasure that we can report that much of the four reserves that make up Woorabinda are as pristine bushland as any in the district.

A council-employed consultant recently scored all Adelaide Hills Council owned conservation reserves for biodiversity.

Much of Woorabinda and Hender reserve were scored the highest (98% plus) of all Council reserves. This is certainly a tribute to the work of our bushcarers - because the reserves were not very good 25 years ago.

Inevitably bushcare work has its share of frustrations.

Foremost among these is that when you develop an attractive place lots of people would like to use it, which is fine - for appropriate activities - for reserves are public open space.

However some wish to use bush areas for trail biking, mountain biking, horse riding, 4WD driving, or dogs off leash - all of which can impact on biodiversity, water catchment function and also inhibit other people's passive recreation enjoyment.

This inevitably means that bushcare groups need to get involved in education, publicity and advocacy - none of which are our core business - but become frustratingly necessary.

Also there are meetings, meetings and more meetings. While they can be frustrating they are essential to develop and maintain policies and communication.

We have the Friends monthly committee meetings, meetings with like minded organisations such as other landcare and Friends groups, Council meetings, many meetings with council staff and have had meetings of the Woorabinda Advisory committee, the Woorabinda Advisory Board, the Woorabinda Steering Committee, Woorabinda Management Committee and others such as the Green Army and Greenweb.

All in all I have attended well over 1500 meetings to do with Woorabinda and the bushlands.

Green Army Project

The Green Army Southern Brown Bandicoot Habitat Restoration and Linkage Project, in which FOWBR was one of the five main partners, was completed when team members from the second six month stage were presented with their graduation awards at a ceremony at Woorabinda Environment Centre on Thursday, 6 July 2017.

Project benefits across the partner groups centred on improvement, protection, extension and linkage of habitat areas to allow increased movements and interchange between Bandicoot sub-populations thus breaking localised genetic isolation, buffering them from further isolation and facilitating local extension over time.

Conservation Volunteers Australia were the Service Provider for the project. The team was led by Uta Grehn and included Amelia, Katherine, James, Miriam, Nathaniel and Tom, who graduated, as well as Jane and Megan who also made valuable contributions but had to resign before the end of the project.

Together with David Ragless, I was fortunate to work with the team in Woorabinda Bushland Reserves (WBR) where they spent a total of around three weeks continuing the work of the first team by cutting and swabbing large stands of Gorse from the extensive areas of the western slopes of Stirling Park. They also worked on cutting and swabbing scattered Erica, Broom and *Acacia longifolia* as well as small Gorse regrowth in areas previously cleared of large Gorse.

In closing I pay tribute to the very many volunteers who over many years have given expertise, energy and time, working to support the Woorabinda Bushland Reserves.

Without them, support from funding bodies and the support of the Adelaide Hills Council, the reserves would not exist.

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to the Woorabinda Bushlands, and the consequent enhancement of the district.

If they did not exist the mental and physical health of residents and visitors would be diminished.

So when you leave, everybody breath deeply and take in the magic.

The team planted and watered around 200 plants provided by Anne Hicks, backfilling areas already planted on either side of the Ethel Trail. Species planted included Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxlyn*), Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*), *Melalucea decussata* and *Hardenburgia violacea*. So far, the plants are doing well, having survived the dry Autumn and early Winter.

All of this work represents a major contribution to the long term improvement of the habitat within WBR by facilitating regeneration of local plant species. It also reduces fuel loads and enables the Friends bush care volunteers to concentrate on other areas, although it does mean that we have the challenge of a larger area cleared of Gorse which will need ongoing follow-up work.

I also had the pleasure of working with the team as a Friend of Mark Oliphant Conservation Park where they cleared extensive stands of Erica and other invasive weeds. Much of their work there was in the old Loftia Park area adjoining the main Scott Creek Road entrance to the park. This area had deteriorated before it was abandoned by the YMCA who had used it as a campsite and recreation area and the Green Army's work was an important contribution to a long term rehabilitation project.

The amount and quality of the work completed by the team in both parks exceeded my expectation and I learnt new weeding techniques that the team had picked up when working with the other project partners. On behalf of FOWBR, I would like to thank Uta and the team for their contribution.

Philip Hicks

Working Bees

Report on Sunday working bees to June 2017.

The six working bees held so far this year have been well attended with numbers ranging between 10 and 18. This has no doubt been helped by the unseasonably fine weather experienced through much of Autumn and early Winter. Only the July working bee in Stirling Park was affected by questionable weather, so we decided to pull or dig out *Watsonia* rather than swab it because of the threat of rain. This work was undertaken as a follow up to reduce *Watsonia* which had emerged in areas where large gorse had recently been removed.

Our three working bees in Woorabinda and one in Madurta Reserves so far this year have concentrated mainly on removing Blackberry, Gorse, Broom, Erica, *Pittosporum* and other invasive weeds from the margins of the good quality bush. We have

generally following the Bradley method referred to elsewhere in this Newsletter.

In the fire regeneration area on either side of the Linwood Trail in Woorabinda, Sollya (*Billardiera heterophylla*) infestations have been far thicker than before the fire. Volunteers have made good progress on removing Sollya as well as a high concentration of *Acacia longifolia* from the dense regrowth. At the time of writing, some areas of Sollya remained but a Natural Resources Management, Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges contractor was well into work on the worst areas using very much appreciated funding of \$5,000.

For many years we have not needed to have working bees in Hender Reserve as Bob James has systematically and effectively worked his way through the weeds in and on the margins of the good quality bush in the reserve.

<i>Sunday Working Bees - 9 am to 11 am</i>		
Date	Location	Meeting Place
October 15	Madurta	Madurta Avenue
November 19	Woorabinda	Woorabinda Drive
December 17	Stirling Park	Branch Road

You are invited to join our working bees at any time. Wear sensible protective clothing, boots and gloves. The Park has a variety of terrain, and can be wet underfoot. Gloves are provided for people using herbicide (swabbing the stumps of woody weeds).

To receive reminder notices for the working bees, or to find out more about them, send an email to Philip Hicks, lhicks@chariot.net.au

CVA Teams

Conservation Volunteers Australia teams of volunteers funded by Adelaide Hills Council made good progress on removing large and small gorse and large *Acacia longifolia* from an area of the western slope of Stirling Park, to the south of areas covered by the Green Army, on three days in May 2017.

FOWBR volunteers Jane Schoettgen and Anne Hicks worked with the team at various times.

Annual General Meeting

FOWBR's AGM will be held on 17 November at the Woorabinda Environment Centre. Watch out for a notice with more details of time and speaker.

Contributors to this issue include Brian Donaghy, David Ragless, and Philip Hicks.

Affiliations: The Friends of Woorabinda Bushland Reserves Inc. is a member of Friends of Parks Inc. It is a registered Landcare Group and a member of Greening Australia, Trees for Life and the Central Hills Green Web.

Disclaimer: Contributors' views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily the views of the editor, the committee or the general membership of the Friends of Woorabinda Bushland Reserves Inc.

HEATHFIELD HIGH STUDENTS HELP IN HENDER RESERVE

Recently eighteen Year Ten students from Heathfield High School spent a cold outdoor education session in Hender Reserve pulling up weeds. The students, accompanied by an outdoor education teacher, braved hail and sleet while working at controlling periwinkle. Some broom was also weeded.

Five members of the Friends of Woorabinda Bushland Reserves also attended to support the session.

The class plans to return for two more sessions this spring to do more. It is hoped that the weather will be more hospitable!

The work will clear an area of dense periwinkle, and will facilitate easier control of the weed next autumn when regrowth will appear.



Attacking the periwinkle



Some of the results



The team