



Toodyay Naturalists' Club Inc.

THE TNC NEWSLETTER

Number 22 April 2017



Above: Toodyay Naturalists' Club members at the entrance to the Helena and Aurora Conservation Park, returning from their Easter excursion to Bungalbin.

Photo: Vicki Warburton

*The Toodyay Naturalists' Club Inc.
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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

by Brian Foley

The Toodyay Naturalist Club started the 2017 year with its first meeting at the CWA Hall, with members Viv Read and Terry High. Viv gave a talk on his treks through Nepal with wonderful photos of the local people and scenery while Terry had two of his latest patients with him - a Brown Goshawk and a magnificent Peregrine Falcon.

In March we had a litter pick up along Julimar Road at our Adopt-a-Spot in the morning, collecting in excess of 25 bags of rubbish, again mainly drink containers, (alcohol, sports drinks and flavoured milk) then our March meeting in the evening.

Our member Georgina Steytler enthralled members with her photos she has taken over the years. Georgina has been very successful in photography competitions throughout Australasia and we could see why. Georgina explained various techniques she uses and advised how we novices could improve our photos.

Over the Easter weekend the club had an excursion to Southern Cross, staying at the caravan park, and travelled to the Helena and Aurora Range on the Sunday. This is an example of the wondrous banded iron ranges that are under the threat of mining. This was my first visit to the range even though I have worked a number of times at nearby ranges; it truly is a spectacular area and I will do every thing I can to prevent the loss of the Range to mining activities.

All those who made the trip enjoyed themselves, and also visited other features of the Yilgarn Region. I visited the Baladjie Nature Reserve and the Sandford Rocks Nature Reserve, both places deserving a further visit.

We now, in conjunction with the Friends of the River and the Historical Society have opened up a shop front to promote each others information that we all have collected over the years that promotes our interests in Toodyay. The shop is next to the Bendigo Bank and will be known as Drummond House -Toodyay Environment & History Centre. If you are walking past and see it open come in and peruse the rooms, grab a book, coffee or tea and sit a while (we are also looking for members to assist promotion during the opening times).

I look forward to the rest of the year, best wishes to all.

Brian



Left: A dragon lizard , and right a Wedge-tail Eagle at Baladjie Rock.

Photos: Brian Foley

NAMING OF DRUMMOND HOUSE - TOODYAY ENVIRONMENT & HISTORY CENTRE

by Dr Robyn Taylor

THE DECISION TO NAME our new shop-front premises *Drummond House* is based on our wish to acknowledge the importance of James Drummond (1787-1863) and his family to Toodyay's history, and to have a name that has relevance to the three community groups.

James Drummond was a botanist and plant collector who came to the Swan River colony in 1829 initially serving as the government naturalist. In 1836, he exchanged a grant of land he held for one in the recently discovered Toodyay Valley in the Avon River region. He named his new grant Hawthornden. The discovery of the Avon River with its permanent pools of water enabled the first inland settlements to be established in WA.

According to Drummond 'I learnt from Babbing [his Aboriginal guide] that this place was called Duidgee and that it was a favourite haunt of the natives, no doubt on account of its natural productions.' (Rica Erickson, *Old Toodyay & Newcastle*, p.20)

From his home Hawthornden, Drummond went on extensive travelling expeditions collecting wildflowers and seeds which he sold to overseas collectors. He and his sons also pioneered the Victoria Plains district where they collected plants. On these excursions, his youngest son Johnston collected birds and animals for the famous English ornithologist and artist John Gould. Another son John Nicol Drummond was renowned for his knowledge of Aboriginal language and customs. Drummond's second son James Drummond Jnr ran Hawthornden while his father devoted his life to botany. James Jnr was a major contributor to the agricultural development of Toodyay and became one of the state's leading pastoralists.

The ultimate naming of the centre becomes:

Drummond House - Toodyay Environment & History Centre



Above: Drummond House Stirling Terrace entry

Photo: Wayne Clarke

VALE - PAMELA WALSH

3 APRIL 1951 - 16 JANUARY 2017

IT WAS WITH GREAT SADNESS that the Toodyay community learned of the passing of Mrs Pamela Walsh.

Pamela was the loving wife of Karl for 46 years, mother of Ethan (deceased), Elder of the Balladong peoples and a most extraordinary member of the community. Who could forget the memories of her 'Welcome to Country' presentations accompanied by the beautiful happy chuckles coming from the very heart - they were always extremely special.

Pamela's 'Welcome to Country' at the Nat's 40th Anniversary in 2008 and at the time of the launching in 2013 of the John Masters' Bird Hide, situated along the Avon River, are well remembered. However, at the latter celebration Pamela was unwell and unable to be at the actual site so she gave the following special words to be read by the president of the Nat's Club.

Aboriginal history in Australia dates back more than 40, 000 years during which time a rich culture and relationship with the land developed. The rivers were areas the Aboriginal people collected their food, water and resources. Aboriginal people feel connected to many rivers and wetlands in a spiritual way.

Many rivers and wetlands are believed to be inhabited by spiritual beings with stories of land and river formations passed down through the generations by storytelling, art, dance and ceremony.

Many rivers in Western Australia are attributed to the movements of the Waugyl, or Rainbow Serpent.

The following is an Aboriginal gesture to our river:

"We come in peace.

We are here at this significant place to ask passage.

We are not here to do harm.

We will treat you well"



Above: Pamela giving the WELCOME TO COUNTRY at the Toodyay Naturalists' Club Inc. 40th Anniversary in 2008

Aboriginal history in Australia dates back more than 40 000 years, during which time a **rich culture and relationship with the land** has been developed. The strong ties that Aboriginal people have with the environment can still be seen today with a deep respect for the land and a broad knowledge of what the land can provide if it is looked after.

Before European settlement, which began in Australia just over 200 years ago, there were many different groups of Aboriginal people living in Western Australia, each with their own **language, culture and traditions**.

Following the arrival of new settlers in Western Australia, there have been periods of misunderstanding and terrible conflict. However there are now many groups of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working together to maintain and recognise the important links that Aboriginal people have with the land and the water in their local area.

Issues and Impacts

Use of the river

Rivers were areas where Aboriginal people lived, hunted, **collected their water and gathered food** such as fish, turtles, birds, frogs and native plant foods. It was along the rivers that Aboriginal people travelled and traded with other groups. Natural river resources such as paperbark were important for **making tools, shelter and artefacts**.

Spiritual significance

To Aboriginal people, rivers have a very special meaning that goes beyond just the supply of food, water and resources. Aboriginal people feel connected to many rivers and wetlands in a spiritual way.

Many rivers and wetlands are named and linked to creation stories, and many are believed to be inhabited by **spirit beings**. Stories of land and river formations are passed down the generations through storytelling, art, dance and ceremony.

Many rivers in Western Australia are attributed to the movements of the Waugyl (rainbow serpent - also spelt Waugul, Wagyl or Waagle) as it carved out the water course. More information about the Waugyl can be found in the Murray River section of this website. The Dreamtime serpent is called by a different name in different places and in Nanda country it is called "beemarra".

Impact of new arrivals

European settlement began along the Swan River in 1829, when Englishman Captain James Stirling set up the Swan River Colony. Initially there were friendly relations between these new arrivals and Aboriginal people, but as the differences in culture and ideas about land ownership arose, conflict began to develop between Aboriginal people and white people. Many Aboriginal people died during the disputes. Others died from diseases that came to Australia with the settlers - diseases that the Aboriginal people did not have any immunity against.

Settlers competed with Aboriginal people for food sources such as native animals, which they hunted. Unfortunately many settlers also hunted for sport, and depleted some native animal populations almost to the point of extinction. There were some early settlers that expressed concern about the rights of Aboriginal people; however the majority of their problems were not heard.

Protecting the rights

Throughout the years, the rights of Aboriginal people, including land rights have been severely disrupted. However there have been many moves to change this, including The Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 and The Native Title Act 1993, which both aim to help protect the rights and interests of Aboriginal groups and their connections to land, rivers and wetlands.

FLORA of the HELENA & AURORA RANGE

By Dr. Michalíe Ruoss

The Helena Aurora ranges are very diverse in flora species and are home to many rare and priority species. There are two Rare species [the *Tetratheca aphylla* subspecies *aphylla* and the *Leucapogon spectabilis*]. There are also six *Priority 1* species, thirteen *Priority 3* species and three *Priority 4* species. On our trip we were lucky enough to see three of these species on the top of the range.



Left: The rare *Tetratheca aphylla* growing from the rock-face at Bungalbin. This shows the state of the plant, clinging to 'life on the edge'.

Inset: A single flower seen nearby.

Photos: Wayne Clarke

The [Rare] *Tetratheca aphylla* was spotted in flower with delicate purple flowers on leafless stalks hanging onto the edge of the cliffs. We also saw the [Priority 1] *Acacia adinophylla*, a prostrate plant that fooled many members because it is very un-acacia like. The final species that we spotted was the [Priority 4] *Banksia arborea* [formerly *Dryandra arborea*], which is quite an abundant tree that covers the range.



Left: *Banksia arborea* [formerly *Dryandra arborea*], a Priority 4 species. Above shows the plant in bud.

Photos Jennifer Donegan

As well as these important species we also admired the diversity of the vegetation on the actual range and the different communities that surround it.

EASTER IN THE HELENA & AURORA RANGE - BUNGALBIN

by Eva and Don Smith

EASTER saw 24½ TNC members and friends at Southern Cross base camp gathering for our Sunday expedition to the wonderful Helena & Aurora Ranges (the ½ being our youngest TNC member, Finn Ruoss)! The caravan park has attractive vegetation including a purple Eremophila which was still flowering. As a result of the green surrounding, there were many birds including the beautiful pied butcher bird which sang to us each day. There were also Willie Wagtails and honey-eaters, to name just a few.

We had travelled up independently so the early contingent consisting of the Foleys, the Ruoss family and the Smiths headed out to Baladjie Rock via Bullfinch to check out the birdlife and flora. Imagine our excitement when we arrived to find a young Wedge-tail Eagle perched on top of the Rock - and it sat there while each of the photographers took snapshots!

We were delighted to find a purple Verticordia still in flower. To top it off, it was also being enjoyed by several gorgeous butterflies so the cameras were kept busy.

Don was very puzzled by a trail of footprints over the salt that filled the nearby Lake Baladjie. On close investigation, they proved to be the prints left by a flock of emus!

By Saturday evening, we had been joined by the remainder of the members so we got together over an enjoyable meal at the Club Hotel.

On Sunday, we all set out bright and early for our target, the beautiful Helena and Aurora Ranges. On the way, we had morning tea at Clarkson's Flat which is named after Barnard Clarkson, well known Toodyay pioneer. He was a member of an 1861 expedition which included the first white men to visit the Helena and Aurora Range. They named it Mt. Kennedy. It was later renamed by John Forrest, although he only saw the range from the distance and thought there was two hence the name Helena and Aurora. Other members of the 1861 expedition were Andrew and Edward Dempster, Charles Harper (Junior) and an aboriginal, Tommy, all from the Toodyay district at the time.

The range is the only remaining banded ironstone range left unmined. The magnificent flora and fauna, some endangered and others on the priority species list are truly a sight to which everyone with an appreciation for Nature's gifts should be allowed to share. Substantial recent rains had "washed" the dust from the bark and leaves of the trees and other plants so they had an especially extra clean and green appearance.

The trees on the way up and in the Ranges included gimlet, salmon gum, kurrajong, callitris sp and inland wandoo. The salmon gums with their greenish, silvery trunks and their shiny leaves made a striking contrast to the gimlet with their stunning bronze-red bark making the whole scene just like a spectacular painting.

We had lunch at the top after an interesting drive up. Everyone agreed that it was definitely wise taking only four wheel drive vehicles! Most of the group walked around the top of the peak. The flora there included a grevillea in flower and the lovely *Banksia arborea*, a priority four species, which was flowering profusely.

Seeing it in all its glory only served to reinforce the fact that everything must be done to help convince the government that it should become a National Park and absolutely not be mined.

Nature continued to play a part of the journey back to Southern Cross. Everyone was thrilled to see three Major Mitchell Parrots and Jenny Donegan photographed a Mulga Snake on the road.

It was getting quite late so we all enjoyed a beautiful sunset behind Lake Deborah. Of course, once we stopped, cameras were again in action to capture the scene which was enhanced by smoke from burn-off fires in the area. Also, we were treated to a brilliant sheet lightning display to the north of us.

That night, we shared our finds around the attractive barbecue area at the caravan park. It was an enjoyable final get-together as most of the group left early the next morning for the trip home.

See Page 9 for photographs

THE SERVENTY MEMORIAL LECTURE 2017

by Sarah Dudley

PROFESSOR KINGSLEY DIXON of Kings Park conservation biology fame, gave a well-attended, fascinating and engaging talk at UWA in mid-April. His topic for the 2017 Serventy Memorial Lecture was: 'Living in a Biodiversity Hotspot' (the Serventy Memorial Lecture is the main source of funding for the Serventy Memorial Prizes for botany students awarded annually at the four WA universities.)

To whet your appetite, Kingsley's great joy emanates from sharing such delights as:

"We have plants that were trodden on by the last dinosaur."

" We have an ancient flowering plant pre-dating the evolution of petals in Perth .."

" We have more species of animal eating plants and more orchids reproduced by sexual deception than the rest of the world combined..".

Kingsley's research team has focussed (amongst many other topics) on the Western Underground Orchid, *Rhizanthella gardneri*, first discovered in 1928 in the Wheatbelt and thought at one time to be almost extinct due to the widespread clearing of bushland for agricultural crops. The orchid has a mycorrhizal association with the broom honeymyrtle and relies on this species and the associated fungus for all its feeding requirements.

Remaining populations of the underground orchid are isolated in the fragments of habitat that persist today, largely around Corrigin. Clear the honeymyrtle and the Underground Orchid is gone!

Kingsley's accounts of the fragile relationship between the sexual predation shown by a wasp species and the Hammer Orchid was both entertaining and chilling when the interrelationships between species were grasped:

Most of the 250 species of Australian orchids that hoodwink hapless male wasps in this way are pollinated by a group of wasps known as thynnines. In the case of sexual predation in the Hammer Orchid the web has evolved as follows:

The males are fast-flying and large, with a wingspan of up to 5cm. The orchid emits a pherome which imitates that produced by the female. The male is attracted, attempts to mate with the orchid and in the process ensures the flower's pollination.

The female thynnine wasps are dumpy, flightless creatures that spend much of their adult living underground in organically deficient soils, laying eggs (after accurate matings!) on Scarab beetle larvae in the soil. These beetle larvae feed off *Kunzea* species. Clear the bush which removes the *Kunzea* - and the Hammer Orchid can no longer survive.

And then there's the example of convergent evolution whereby an *Amoeba* species has been found inside an Albany Pitcher plant.....and *Banksia brownie* appears to be heading for extinction thanks to *Phytophthora*.....and...and...and..... we could have listened for hours on end!

Kingsley concluded his sharing of WA's quilt-like biodiversity hotspots by presenting a drone video of the damaging effect of the beginning of the clearing of Roe Highway Extension vegetation...and as the drone flew along filming this line of devastation - quite suddenly the destruction stopped - and the biodiversity of the remaining wetlands area remained intact. The audience breathed an audible sigh of relief that one more piece of the quilt had been spared from mans' inane desire to destroy.

DID YOU KNOW...

... that in 1970 the TNC wrote to '... *JF Craig member for Toodyay* [the local Member of Parliament] *expressing the concern of the Naturalists Club about Bauxite Mining Claims in the Avon Valley ... and the ex-Army Training area which we understand has been gazetted as an A Class Reserve, and we hope he will do all he can to keep Bauxite Mining out of the area*'.

The Club records, including the minute books were almost all destroyed in a house fire. **The above [partial] extract is from the remnants of the burnt draft minute book.**

EASTER - LAKE BALADJIE AND BALADJIE ROCK EN-ROUTE TO SOUTHERN CROSS



Left: Emu tracks across Lake Baladjie (see Page 7).

Photo: Eva Smith

Centre: Dragon lizard, Baladjie Rock

Photo: Eva Smith

Bottom: A mulga snake taking in the last of the sunlight (see Page 7).

Photo: Jennifer Donegan



EASTER IN THE HELENA & AURORA RANGE - BUNGALBIN



Left: A cave in Bungalbin's cliff face.

Photo: Wayne Clarke

Centre left: Some of the incredible breakaway formations with an enlargement of the cemented structures.

Bottom: More breakaways

Photos: Jennifer Donegan



EASTER IN THE HELENA & AURORA RANGE - BUNGALBIN



Top left: The beautiful Grevillea georgiana on the Range.

Top right: An ever-watchful orb spider

Right: The wonderful vegetation of the Great Western Woodlands

*Photos:
Jennifer Donegan*





Top: A pair of 'Major Mitchell cockatoos' were a thrilling sighting on our way back to Southern Cross from Bungalbin. They had been drinking from water on the road.

Centre: A Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater in the foliage at the range.

Bottom: A mulga snake heads for the litter in search of a meal after deciding our vehicles were too big to tackle.



EASTER IN THE HELENA & AURORA RANGE - THE BIRD LIST *by Jennifer Donegan*

WINDING OUR WAY around golden coloured paddocks, white salt lakes and into a woodland which compares to a colour palate of a painter we were surrounded by nature. The Helena and Aurora Range contains such a variety of habitats providing a diverse range of environments for birdlife to live.

The woodlands contain tall trees with leafy canopies for Purple Crowned Lorikeets seeking food together with Tree Creepers, Martins, Magpies, Butcherbirds and Ravens.

There was a variety of wattle trees in size which were flowering together with eremophilas attracting different species of Honeyeaters - Singing and Spiny-cheeked were the most common.

The height of the range provided a spectacular viewing point of the Little Woodswallows soaring below with their beautiful grey colours on the top of their wings.

Ground dwelling Malleefowls are surviving in the sandy soils with their habitat acknowledged by signage on the road, and the various rocky outcrops and breakaways provide homes for other animals.

The rain that fell during the morning provided little watering holes on the road for birds seeking a drink at dusk and on our return we saw Bronzewings and a pair of Major Mitchell Cockatoos flying down onto the road for a drink.

My list of bird sightings totalled 25. I was unable to identify calls from a Treecreeper, Honeyeaters and a very fast paced, pointed winged, large falcon flying in the dark.

I enjoyed a wonderful birding weekend which started from home, to the gravel car park at the Junction in Toodyay waiting for our travelling companions and then to our first stop at Namelcatching Reserve. Grahame, Meg and I walked into the right side of the reserve as the Weebills and Striated Pardalotes were calling. There was a family of White Browed Babblers hopping along the bottom of the trees and making their various noises. The highlight was seeing a Spotted Harrier over the tree tops. A total of 20 different species were recorded.

A quick stop at Weipa Reserve and at an old railway line then to Baladjie Rock where the weather was warmer. A great birding spot with various types of trees provided a great view of a male Gilberts Whistler. It was a pleasure to share my excitement with Meg (they are not as inquisitive as a Rufous Whistler) we saw a total of 16 different species of birds. I was very tentative of using Georgina's camera until at the end of our trip but wished I had a photo of the Gilberts Whistler!

The Southern Cross Caravan Park provided 16 species over the weekend.

We left in the morning to go back to Baladjie Rock to seek the Gilberts Whistler again – just to get a photo as I was more confident with the camera until I accidentally hit a button and put it on video which Avon had to sort out while we were searching for the Gilberts Whistler again – to no avail but there was a Jacky Winter wagging its characteristic tail and a beautiful Yellow Robin. If only I had the camera then! 22 species.

We arrived at Sanford Rocks at 11am and walked to the bird hide. Weebills, Striated Pardalotes and Honey-eaters were all calling in the woodlands. 14 species.

We had a late lunch at Eaglestone Rock and there were rock climbers and people arriving to walk the rock while we enjoyed our break. Zebra Finches flew past and Yellow Rumped Thornbills and Grey Fantails fluttering around on the ground and in the trees. 9 species.

What a wonderful Easter weekend we had wondering in the unknown.

Bird List - 16 April 2017

Helena and Aurora Range - From and to Koolyanobbing

Yellow Throated Miner	Magpie Lark	Red Wattle Bird	Purple Crowned Lorikeet	
Weebill	Singing Honeyeater	Spiny Cheeked Honeyeater	Yellow Plumed Honeyeater	
Brown Honeyeater	Striated Pardalote	Willie Wag Tail	Tree Martin	
Black Faced Cuckoo-Shrike	Crested Bellbird	Magpie	Australian Ringneck	
Bronzewing	Grey Shrike Thrush	Raven	Little Woodswallow	Grey Fantail
Major Mitchells Cockatoo	Kookaburra	Chestnut Rumped Thornbill		
Yellow Rumped Thornbill				

EASTER IN THE HELENA & AURORA RANGE - BUNGALBIN



Left: The Great Western Woodlands on a dying sun

Photo: Desraé Clarke



Left: Bungalbin vegetation with the Great Western Woodlands continuing to the horizon.

Photo: Wayne Clarke

Right: Club members on top of Bungalbin East, taking in the splendid views across the Great Western Woodlands

Photo: Brian Foley



THE AVON RIVER HAS A MINOR FLOOD - BUT LEAVES OUR BIRD HIDE INTACT



Above: On 10 February 2017 heavy rains fell - not only in Toodyay but in the catchment. The Mortlock Rivers in Northam contributed to some local flooding, as with other areas in the outer catchment. The water flowed over the Katrine causeway and at one stage the Northam Road was closed with flooding in Harper Brook; water was lapping under the Julimar Road Bridge and the walkway from Drummond Street (West) to the school was damaged by the flood.

The photo above at Red Banks Pool shows the river running a banker; the 'John Masters Bird Hide' stood high and dry through it all (the structure near the top-left of the photograph).

Some areas

Photo: Rebecca-Meegan Lowe

THE RED HILL CLEAN-UP by Bridget Leggett

Tons of rubbish, hundreds of tyres, and a welcome sausage sizzle later, volunteers clocked off from the Red Hill Clean-up and the Cheeky Bus took the Toodyay mob back to base.

It was a warm April Saturday, and the second annual Red Hill Clean-up was again voted a resounding success. The numbers were down on last year - roughly 40 in total, with at least a quarter coming from Toodyay - every one of them committed to the environment in one way or another.

The dry weather meant that the bottles and cans were empty this year, the cardboard was dry and the red bags a lot lighter. The quantity of rubbish seemed down, too, which was pleasing.



Above: Part of the haul Photo by Jessica Tinsley

Congratulations to all the organisers from the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council (EMRC), supported by the City of Swan, Main Roads WA and Keep Australia Beautiful Western Australia (KABWA), who kept volunteers safe and well supplied with drinking water and rubbish bags, and pulled off a great event. No count on litter bags yet, but EMRC will let us know the actual quantity of rubbish in due course. In her 'thank you' remarks, the City of Swan representative noted that the City is having success with its 'RID' campaign - Reduce Illegal Dumping. Whilst it prosecutes offenders wherever possible/appropriate, it is also having some success with getting offenders to pick up what they dumped. Anyone observing illegal dumping is strongly encouraged to report it to the relevant local authority, or to KABWA.

ENVIRONMENT MATTERS



Above: Members of the TNC joined forces with other community members from Toodyay and the metropolitan area on Saturday 29th April 2017 to once again tackle the litter on Red Hill. Over 200 bags of litter and other rubbish was collected, along with a large number of vehicle tyres and parts.

Photo: Jessica Tinsley

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