



*The Toodyay
Naturalists' Club
Inc.*

Number 3

December 2010



Above photograph of a Brown Goshawk was taken by Jack Donegan, one of our up-and-coming young naturalists.. See story on page 3

**GRATITUDE IS EXTENDED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF WATER,
NORTHAM, FOR THE PRINTING OF THIS NEWSLETTER..**

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE CHRISTMAS 2010

I wrote a lengthy report for the July 2010 AGM, so I won't repeat it here. Anyone who would like a copy is welcome and need only email me, leefran@bigpond.com or ask Wayne to post one to you.

It has been an unusual and, for many of us, a difficult year. Many people's plans for the year were disrupted by the December 2009 fire, either because they were directly impacted, or because they spent many, many hours/days/weeks assisting in various ways to ameliorate the effects of the fire and to help their fellow community members. Consequently there were some last minute and unavoidable changes to our programme for the year, so I apologise to anyone who missed events or was disappointed that certain things did not occur as planned. I wish to thank everyone who, in whatever way, gave some relief to those affected, and to offer our continuing support to anyone we can assist. We had some plans for helping with revegetation, but the extremely dry winter made that something that is best postponed until we get decent rains.

As I write this, a large fire is out of control in the Rockingham Regional Park, putting lives and homes at risk in the Karnup area. I also recall that Birds Australia had a sighting of the Australian Bustard a couple of years ago in that area, so hopefully no homes are lost, no people are hurt, and the bird and other animals are able to find shelter.

Our long time members, Vicki and Steve Westerink are leaving us in December, joining the (some would say) sensible people who are heading to the cooler southwest. We all wish them well in their new home, and I guess they will form part of the Toodyay Travellers Southwest Trail

In the new year we will have a planning day on the third Saturday of January (venue to be advised). This is not just for Committee members...we'd like to see as many members/friends/guests as possible, as the more people there are, the more ideas are likely to spring forth. It is always a very enjoyable day, with lots of food and drink and plenty of fun and laughter, so please put it in your diaries. Speaking of food, we had a great feast after our final meeting of the year...I think we could go into the catering business!

At the Ordinary Meeting of Shire Councilors on December 9th a copy of 'The Toodyay Naturalists' Club 40 years of observation and education (1968—2008)' was presented to Shire President, Mr Kevin Hogg. Kevin responded to the presentation with enthusiasm for the work that volunteer groups, such as the Naturalists' Club, make to our Shire community

As we came to the end of 2010, I would especially like to thank the TNC Committee for their hard work, inspiration and commitment to the Club. I'd also like to wish all members, friends and their families a very happy, safe and fulfilling festive season. Have a good rest if you can, and come along fresh and revived for the start of 2011.

Lee Francis
President

OUR YOUNG TOODYAY NATURALISTS

Jack (15), Amber (14) and Chloe (11) Donegan, students at the Mundaring Christian College, are budding young naturalists with a growing talent in photography and a great knowledge in natural history. These three young people entered the Midland Camera House photographic competition. Jack was a finalist with the Goshawk, Chloe a finalist with the Beetle, and both received a \$200 voucher; Amber did very well with entering her unusual farm sunset.

The front cover of the newsletter depicts the Brown Goshawk found by Jack's father, Avon, an injured bird lying at the base of a big old tree in a paddock; the wing injury and abrasions appeared like a 'traffic impact'. The bird was taken to a Wildlife Refuge and when the family visited, sometime later, the bird was well on the way to release with only several wound areas to



EXCITING SIGHTING for Jennifer Donegan (the Children's Mother)

Early December, while waiting to play tennis in Toodyay, Jennifer noticed a Peregrine Falcon in a nearby tree. After watching it for a while, she discovered it was, along with a second bird, feeding a chick. Days later, together with Geoff Barrett, Wayne and Des-raé Clarke, the birds were to be seen feeding, not one, but **three chicks!**

TNC MEMBERS ATTEND SERVENTY MEMORIAL LECTURE

by Greg Warburton

On September 22nd David, Robyn and myself attended the annual Serventy Memorial Lecture. The W.A. Naturalists' Club commenced these lectures in 1989 to acknowledge the great contribution made to wild life conservation by various members of the Serventy Family. Dom Serventy (1904-1988) was born in Kalgoorlie, founded the Western Australian Naturalists' Club in 1924 and went on to be an internationally recognized ornithologist and conservationist. His famous brother Vincent (1916-2007) popularized nature study by producing documentary films and writing scores of books about wildlife and environmental issues. Several other members of the family were notable Naturalists' and Conservationists in their own right. Vincent's films and books were a huge influence on me during my childhood and helped foster my lifelong interest in nature.

This year the lecture, held at the University of W.A., was presented by Professor Kevin Kenneally, an eminent Botanist and Order of Australia Medal recipient. For 35 years Kevin has been leading research expeditions to the Kimberley region and is regarded as an expert on the flora of that remote region. Kevin spoke about the pastoral pioneering history of the Kimberley; Joseph Bradshaw's failed settlement at Prince Regent River and the botanical collecting expeditions of Baron von Mueller. It was an enthralling story of nature and history richly illustrated by stunning images of the rugged Kimberley beauty.

Afterwards, supper was served on the veranda while a Night Heron dined on goldfish in the pond of the Japanese garden. There was also a chance to catch up with some familiar faces. Our Patrons John Dell and Neville Marchant were there. It was quite nostalgic for me being an ex-W.A. "Nat" who has fond memories of weekend excursions with Kevin Kenneally when he was a long-haired, purple Monaro driving university student. I look forward to attending next year's Lecture.



Above: Dr Robyn Taylor and David Fox-Spencer at the University of WA at the Serventy Memorial Lecture by Professor Kevin Kenneally.
Below: A patient Nankeen Heron fishing in the University's Japanese garden pond.
Photographs: Greg Warburton



MEMBER PROFILE-THE BMW MOTORCYCLIST FROM THE CITY

by David Fox-Spencer

I started life in the county of Hampshire in England. At the age of five my family moved to the premium red soils of Somerset where my Father had gained a position as farm manager on a mixed enterprise farm. The eventual aim was to buy a farm in Somerset.

When I was fourteen my parents were negotiating to buy a grain/dairy farm, Glebe Farm, in Tolland. Unfortunately, Father had a nasty farm accident during this period so there ended my hopes of becoming a farmer.

Both families of my Parents have been involved in agriculture for several generations. Until his retirement, my Paternal Grandfather owned a veterinary practice and farm on the clay soils of Kent whilst my mother's home was a large family farm on the chalky soils of Hampshire.

My one goal in life, even as a very small child, was to be a farmer. I just loved being outside, witnessing plants grow from seed and then flower and I seemed to have an empathy with animals. I loved machinery, all machinery, and making and improvising things - something that still stays with me with 'big boys toys'! I still haven't out grown that one yet! I still love the countryside, animals, birds and my heart remains very much in farming.

After a year's pre-college practical I attended agricultural college. Having completed my time at college I was faced with the decision "where from here". The pull of working with the soil and outside life was far too strong to ignore. I took a short term contract to run the grain harvest on a Wiltshire farm.

From there I returned to Somerset and began setting up and establishing a very successful dark room/plate making division within my Father's printing business. The call of the great outdoors was still proving too strong so, once this enterprise was up and running, I took a contract to manage a large pig unit for a year. I loved the challenge and the direct animal contact. There is nothing more satisfying than seeing happy, healthy and contented pigs! The problem was, I hated seeing my grown up piglets heading off to the factory- hardly the right mind set for a pig unit manager!

The next venture was to become a field advisor/representative for a lime and fertilizer company. This proved to be very fulfilling as I was "out and about" as well as being involved with crop planning and maintenance of soil condition which also sparked an interest in the relationship between farming practices and the environment. My biggest problem seemed to be my desire to get "stuck in" and help the farmer. I soon realized this company was in desperate need of a dedicated contractor to spread its products on farm.

Had I finally found my 'direction'?

... cont Page 7

Following a period of negotiations I kitted myself up with some “big boys toys” and was off down the road as a spreading contractor to ultimately become the first truly independent ‘spreading contractor’ in south west of England. This proved to be a pivotal point in my business.

I have always been adventurous and would push myself on difficult ground just to see how far I and the machine could go. I began modifying and building spreading units to work on exceptionally steep and boggy ground. My reputation spread far and wide with “if *he* won’t go there no one can!”

My ‘boggy ground’ unit came to the attention of the Ministry Of Agriculture. This resulted in involvement with trials on the Somerset Levels to establish working practices on stocking areas that would help to reverse the seriously declining bird numbers and, at the same time, keep the current diversity of plant species and a sustainable farming environment. I just loved my work, and was really privileged to be able to be in some truly beautiful places.

So, where does the motorcycle passion fit in?

I guess it is from my love of nature. Perhaps not an obvious link, however, on a motorcycle you are truly in contact with your surroundings. You sense temperature changes, you are aware of the different smells, you hear the sounds and you see so much more; you have nothing between you and nature.

When my contracting business “took off” I used my motorcycle to travel around the farms to inspect potential jobs, make ‘follow up’ visits, travel around the fields and collect soil samples - it became a bit of a ‘trade mark!’ The bike also proved to be a means of escape taking me to many parts of Europe when my first marriage failed.

Then came Helen, my second lady, who decided to give “being a pillion” a try. To her amazement (and my delight) she loved it for the same reasons as me. We visited many countries, on one of my BMW’s, in both east and western Europe. By this time I was hopelessly hooked on exploring extensively on my bikes.

Well, do I hear you asking why are you here?

Helen had a son and daughter who were in Australia for two years and her daughter, Katherine, encouraged us to come and visit her. We were impressed with the Aussie’s and Australia.

During the ensuing years we visited every second year and with each visit we found it harder to return to England. Helen became increasingly concerned about the constant danger of me pushing the boundaries, ever further, on steeper and steeper ground as well as single handed manhandling large wheels and machine parts. Employing labour had become far too expensive and unreliable so, apart from peak seasons and a truck driver for a milk collection contract we held, I was working mainly on my own.

... cont Page 8

Helen admitted to dreading answering the phone when I was working on steep ground for fear of the news she was sure would come “he is in a heap of twisted metal at the bottom of a steep valley”. Fully understanding this, I had to come to terms with selling what had taken me years to build.

In 2004 we arrived as permanent residents in Australia, only to have to return to England to re-market our small farm (adjoining Glebe Farm in Tolland!) and beautiful home we bought in 1995. We prepared to return to Australia and it was at this time Helen was diagnosed with cancer. By now we were homeless and stuck in England whilst the wheels of the medical system slowly ground away and she received treatment. A small window of opportunity to fly back to Australia opened in November 2005 which we took. Unfortunately, it was too late for Helen - she lost the fight in Feb 2006.

Australia has allowed me to continue the pursuit of my love of motorcycle travel and the great outdoors. My trusty steeds have taken me to much of outback Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South Australia along with some of Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales.

With a need to work, I decided to use my truck license in an effort to get out of the city. My first truck was a 68 tonne double truck and dog combination progressing to a 95 tonne road train. This all came to an abrupt halt following a work accident (*not* a driving accident).

Where do I go from here?..... I am still looking!

Toodyay

My motorcycle and truck trips into the bush allowed me to see a great variety of bird and plant life but the main thing missing was somebody who knew and had an interest in what they were looking at. Bird books are fine but a little brown dot flying through the sky at 90mph is very difficult to define. I was also missing the contact with farming and country people.

One day, on one of the many motorcycle rides, I saw a notice advertising the Toodyay Show so made a note of the date. The show date arrived and I was on the motorbike heading for Toodyay. While enjoying walking around looking at the various show stands I spied the display of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club. After quite a talk to Greg and Lee I thought this is what I am looking for so, armed with a membership application, I went home and filled it out - and the rest is history, as they say.

I have vivid memories of the first meeting I attended. I walked in feeling rather apprehensive, questioning whether I should be there, after all; I didn't live anywhere near Toodyay. Well, that feeling lasted about five minutes by which time I was feeling very much at ease. I left there on a 'high' thinking, these are my type of people and, yes, it was well worth the journey.

... cont Page 9

Yes, I am a country boy living in the city, when the time is right maybe I can rectify that.
Thanks to the Toodyay Naturalists' Club I am able to keep my feet on the ground and remain in touch with what I call real people and real life! The bonus is that my knowledge of Western Australian fauna and flora is building.
Thank you.



Above: Lichen at Bewmalling Nature Reserve, Toodyay.
Photographs: David Fox-Spencer
Below: Pimelea off Bindoon Dewars Pool Road, Toodyay.



ENVIRONMENT REPORT by *Desrae Clarke.*

Since the fire of December 29th 2009, that destroyed approximately 3,000 ha of beautiful Toodyay bushland, farmland, homes and infrastructure, the change in birdlife and plants, the loss of fauna and the change in landscape is quite significant..

Loss of habitat and food sources have severely affected our birdlife, mammals, such as bats, echidnas, kangaroos, possums, and our reptile population. Some plants, including orchids the and Grass Tree (*Xanthorrhoea preissii*) have thrived since the fire as has our Christmas Tree (*Nuytsia floribunda*). Unfortunately, the change in the landscape has seen a some increase in the growth of weeds. As the rainfall has been extremely low over the past winter there has not been noticeable erosion. However, with the landscape taking many, many years to heal, erosion could well be a great problem in the forthcoming decades.

An unsuccessful application was submitted to Community Conservation Grants to develop a 'demonstration site' of the Mavis Jeffery 'A' Class Nature Reserve that had over 50% destruction from the December 2009 fire. It was envisaged to monitor a variety of quadrates that were in burnt and unburnt areas, some fenced (for control of fauna both native and feral) and some left unfenced; the project was to record both flora and fauna .recovery. Well-known naturalists and university graduates were to be involved together with the Toodyay Naturalist Club members. The unsuccessful application has been followed by a further application to seek alternative funding.

On July 19th 2010 a significant and sacred site of the Ballardong People, Ballardong Park, was officially opened. The Pool, situated 5kms west of Northam, is a semi-permanent body of water and the Aboriginal spiritual beliefs are that Burlong is the "Summer home for the Wargal". The site was developed through a partnership between the local Aboriginal Ballardong community, the Avon Valley Environment Society, the Shire of Northam, Department of Water and the Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management. Funding was provided through the Australian Federal and State Governments Natural Heritage Trust Program..The program has accomplished care of a significant natural resource..

Greg Warburton, representing the Toodyay Naturalists', attended the Community Reference Group meeting at Windarling Peak on September 17th 2010. It is of utmost concern that the mining companies have so little regard for species richness and rarity and continue to push for the rights to mine precious, landscapes such as these.

The indiscriminate destruction of roadside vegetation continues! It is of great concern that the wildlife corridors of both small birds and mammals are destroyed and not given the significance and priority they deserve. If the road verge is a fire hazard a permit is required from the Shire for a 'cool' burn between May and August. However, as weeds thrive in an 'ash bed' there are alternatives. Negotiate with the Shire to possibly use herbicides to reduce the fire hazard but allow small trees to proliferate and continue to provide cover for the smaller wildlife species.

Litter on road verges and in reserves is another major problem. The Toodyay Nat's members are proud of their contribution of litter collection several times each year.

MAVIS JEFFREYS NATURE RESERVE *by Desraé Clarke*

On December 12 2010 members met Dr Geoff Barrett, District Nature Conservation Coordinator, Bob Huston, and Catherine Page, Nature Conservation Officer (both from the Mundaring Office of the Department of Environment and Conservation) at the Mavis Jefferys 'A' Class Nature Reserve at the Corner of Sandplain Road and Drummond Drive. The meeting was to discuss the use of the Rapid Bushland Assessment tool over the burnt and unburnt areas resulting from the December 29th 2009 'hot' fire when approximately 50% of the Reserve was decimated.

Ideally the surveys, using this tool, are seasonal resulting in four annual assessments. These are categorised as:

Type 1 – Ant plates – 20 minutes

Type 2 – Birds – 20 minutes within a 2 ha area

Type 3 – Birds and insects in flowering trees – 5 minutes each tree

Type 4 – Weed cover

Type 5 – Tree health

Type 6 – Rabbits, tree regeneration and native mammals – evidence of rabbit infestation and mammals eg scats, warrens, scratching of the various mammals, etc.

The survey sheets are extremely well described and illustrated to make an interesting and fulfilling survey. The data will not just be filed away! There are important uses for the survey which, to begin with, will be that of a 'Post-fire Demonstration Site'. The Rapid Bushland Assessment tool uses the activity and diversity of flora and fauna species to give a 'measurable' result of the condition of a reserve. It is anticipated that the Rapid Bushland Assessment of the Mavis Jeffery Reserve will commence in March 2011.

Photographs by Desraé Clarke



Left: The burnt, blackened trunk of the Christmas Tree belies the busy activity of butterflies and bees.

Below: Education of the team by Dr Geoff Barrett



**REGENERATION OF NATIVE SPECIES IN THE TOODYAY DECEMBER
2009 FIRE AREA** *by Bethan Lloyd*

Travelling around the areas affected by the fire last December it has been fantastic to see how nature is repairing itself despite the worst conditions for recovery that we could have imagined. Within a few weeks of the fire the cycads were the first to show some green but were followed closely by a suite of resprouters sending out their foliage. An inspiration of hope to many.

Plants in the resprouter category include such species as hibbertias and stilingias. These plants regenerate from underground storage organs, using their below ground reserves to sustain themselves to produce leaves and flowers after they have been destroyed by fire or grazing. Many plants in this category may be much older than their above ground foliage belies. Typically, they do not reproduce from seed except when a certain set of circumstances come together in the right order. In evolutionary terms, they have decided to put most of their eggs in this basket. With this underground structure they are very resilient and tough compared to the fragility of seed.

The other main group of plants in the bush are known as the seeders with species included like gastrolobium and acacias which produce large quantities of a hard-coated seed, a percentage of which are protected in the soil bank and are stimulated to grow by the heat of a hot fire penetrating the soil. Some species, like acacias, recruit partners such as ants to assist them by providing interesting food parcels attached to the seed which cause the ants to carry the seed underground where it is protected. .

Most of the seeders do need follow up rains in order to germinate and we simply have not had enough rain this season. At present, the resprouters are dominant in the fire affected areas. The good news is that the seed will remain dormant in the soil until next season when we can expect a wonderful display - provided we get the rain.

Eucalypts, and a few other species, regenerate quickly from epicormic buds situated just below the bark. In areas where the fire was very hot often it not only burnt the trunk of the tree but continued into the base and burnt to the roots. These trees will reproduce from seeds next

season, wandoo particularly, will germinate prolifically on the ash beds where logs have been burnt, and this is because of the extra nutrients in the soil; in other places germination maybe more sporadic.

Some plants have a bet each way. Banksias produce shoots from epicormic buds and release seed from their woody cones after the fire has passed. Hakeas resprout and also produce seed by opening their woody capsules following the passing of the fire.

The Christmas Tree (*Nuytsia florabunda*) has recovered where the main stems have been completely burnt. It produces a mass of suckers which will grow into a small forest of stems in coming years to produce a spectacular sight.



Christmas Trees and Balgas flowering on the fire ground; there is no apparent germination on the ground from seeders.

Photo: Bethan Lloyd.

Many plants that were brushed by the fire but not completely burnt have responded to the stress caused by the fire by flowering in order to produce seed. The Christmas Trees and the Balga's (Grass Tree) are excellent examples with lovely shows of these beauties around the fire ground.

The fire will have been very hot in places and cool in others and there are some islands of vegetation that remain unburnt. All the species will respond and regenerate in different ways. For many plants to persist they must be able to reach maturity and set seed before they are burnt again. Plants vary in the time that they take to do this. These factors and variables, from a fire affected area, have a major effect on the composition of plant communities that we see in our bushland and contribute to the amazing bio-diversity that we find. Fortunately, hot summer fires do tend to discourage many of the weed grass species such as wild oats.

As we have had little winter rain this year we will have to wait to see what weeds have been introduced into areas as a result of the fire control operations. Landholders should be very observant as the autumn rains begin in 2011.



Powder Bark Wandoo's regenerating from epicormic buds at the base of the trunk. Many smaller trees had their upper trunks completely destroyed. Photo: Bethan Lloyd.

CHITTERING WILDFLOWER SHOW 2010 *by Lee Francis*

The Club's September gathering was a trip to Bindoon to view the annual Chittering Wildflower Show, which our member Jacqui was involved in organising. Despite it being a poor season for flowers, the organizers had managed to find a wide variety of plants to display. Some of us had a chat with the Chittering Shire's Environment Officer and with WWF Project Officer, Carla Swift. We had to admit to being a bit jealous that these two people are able to devote their time to conservation work within the region, and wish Toodyay Shire could also employ an Environment Officer, but perhaps that is to come in the not too distant future.

Only a few members were able to attend, including David who met us at Bindoon after being delayed by an enormous piece of (unidentifiable) machinery being transported up Great Northern Highway causing serious traffic chaos. Locals told us that they have thousands of large truck movements per day, so Toodyay is lucky in that regard.

Also on display outside the Bindoon Hall was a collection of native animals and their carers, including pythons, a red-tailed black cockatoo, and various cute and cuddly joeys. After filling up at the bakery, we travelled further north towards Udumung Reserve, where we stopped for lunch.

We observed that the variety and quantity of flowers along the gravel road verge of Great Northern Highway, including leschenaultias and acacias, was actually more striking than that in the reserve. There has been major roadwork along this area over the last couple of years, so maybe the disturbance has contributed to the variety. We were disappointed, during our walk in the reserve to see considerable amounts of large household rubbish which had been dumped along the track in about the middle of the reserve. Although the area was dry and not overly exciting from a botanical point of view, a close look at the smaller plants at ground level revealed some little gems, such as trigger plants and boryas.

We then drove further north to the junction of Old Plains Road, where we stopped for a while and had a look at the Rica Ericson Reserve. There were still some tall white spider orchids, but as we didn't have the Smiths with us, our orchid gurus, that's as good as the identification went! What we did notice was that near the corner of the highway and Old Plains Road, where there are some large old marri trees, the leaf litter, predominantly from them, was over knee high. Given the risk of fires starting near roads, this seemed to be a potential danger spot, which could lead to a fire entering the reserve.

We stopped at a few more places along Old Plains Road, eventually returning to Toodyay, after a pleasant and interesting day.

Publications of Interest to Naturalists

The **Birds of Prey of Australia** - A Field Guide ISBN 1 876622 34 2.

This beautifully presented publication by Stephen Debus is a handy volume for identification of our many birds of prey. There are line drawings of gliding and soaring plus black and white and colour illustrations of both top and under belly of the birds.

Each bird has a preface of its type, followed by description, distribution, food and hunting, behaviour, breeding, threats and conservation.

Field Guide to Reptiles and Frogs of the Perth Region 2010

ISBN 9781920843410 (pbk.) by Brian Bush, Brad Maryan, Robert Browne-Cooper, David Robinson.

There was quite a long wait for this revised edition, published by the Western Australian Museum - the result was well worth the wait!

The revised edition is considerably larger than the previous two printings. However, although entitled the 'Perth Region' (and with a map depicting that boundary), the full extent of each specie's known area throughout Western Australia is shown. his publication has excellent descriptions and photography and is well-priced at \$35.

CENTIPEDE MOTHER by *Desraé Clarke*

When inspecting the newly created great hole that was to hold our house-pad, back in 1988, a large piece of rotted tree trunk protruded, perpendicularly, from the earth. Wayne, as most men would do, gave the piece a good kick.

The tree trunk fell over and out tumbled Mrs Centipede and her fourteen tiny babies; the little ones were approximately a centimetre in length. Mother, pale cream in colour and about twenty centimetres in length, was not the least indignant at this rude intrusion. She composed herself then began to tend her little ones.

Crouching, we watched in awe, as this fearsome little Lady tenderly took each baby in her feelers, one at a time, and moved it beneath her body.

We left her in peace.

THE TOODYAY NATURALISTS' CLUB INC.

PRESIDENT: Lee Francis 9574 2560

VICE-PRESIDENT: Greg Warburton 9574 5445

SECRETARY/TREASURER: Wayne Clarke 6364 3609

OBSERVATIONS OFFICER: Don Smith 9574 5854

ENVIRONMENT OFFICER: Desrae Clarke 6364 3609

ADDRESS: Post Office Box 328, Toodyay. 6566.

Editor: Desrae Clarke

Formatted by Wayne Clarke

email: toodyaynats.org.au