



Toodyay Naturalists' Club Inc.

THE TNC NEWSLETTER

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

by Desraé Clarke

2020 began with an excellently attended February meeting when the TNC and Toodyay Historical Society members joined to support the Toodyay Friends of the River (TFOR) with the requirements of community consultation for the group's long term venture, the Pelham Brook Outlet Restoration Project. TFOR received a funding grant from the Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management (NRM) Healthy Soils, Healthy Rivers Small Grant Scheme with the finance used for consultation and planning.

Helen Brooks, hydrologist and director of the not-for-profit company, Urbaqua, had been appointed as the consultant for the initial phase of the project with Helen as guest speaker at the February meeting. It was an enlightening evening and enjoyed by all attendees in gaining information and understanding of the proposed significant Toodyay project.

In early March members of both TNC and TFOR re-painted the John Masters bird hide as a protection of the structure. Situated in the vicinity of Red Banks Pool on the Bilya Walk Track and now with the addition of picnic seating it is an ideal area to observe bird life.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions the Nat's year's plans have been, at this time, curtailed. The March excursion to the Gingin Observatory was to be led by Aboriginal Elder, Dr Noel Nannup, but hopefully the visit will be able to be re-scheduled for 2021.

A second postponement was that of a visit in April from reptile expert, Bob Cooper. Bob is an extremely interesting and accomplished character in not only reptile handling but survival in harsh environments such as the desert of Botswana, USA and, of course, Australia. We look forward to an opportunity to enjoy Bob's presentation at a future date.

Despite the turn of 2020 events please continue to observe flora and fauna, within the restrictions to be followed, and report sightings and observations. It is noted the Rainbow Bee-eaters and White-tailed Black Cockatoos have moved on but the Fan-tailed Cuckoo was calling on the first days of April. Mice, food for so many creatures, are appearing, and one of the tiny-flowered Hibbertia sp. is brightening the landscape as is the Mistletoe on both Acacias and various species of Eucalypts.

Phone calls and emails are arriving from the general community with sightings such as the Dusky Woodswallow (featured in the Herald), a single Black-glove Wallaby that has been seen around a home in a forest area on multiple occasions and a road kill of an Owlet-nightjar; there have also been a number of bird and plant identification queries. If an ID is not able to be made locally by TNC's amateur experts the Club has assistance from professionals within the area of the query who are more than willing to help. It is interesting to note that the people who have reported the above sightings, for which we are really grateful, are not members of the Toodyay Nats but people who care for and love our environment.

The Shire Manager Planning and Development has asked if interested TNC members with knowledge and expertise of our environment could offer their services as Community Members to the Environment Advisory Committee; applications close Thursday April 30th. It is an ideal opportunity for members, with this expertise, to nominate.

Despite these times being extremely stressful for many, our natural environment is free to be enjoyed. Encourage listening to the birds and noting early wildflowers with the changing season.

*Cover Photo: A 0.5 metre mulga snake on the beach at Exmouth, almost under the foot of our unsuspecting Treasurer, Sharon Richards. She was lucky to have her camera with her **and** avoid a strike, as the snake had its head buried under the sand..*

YELLOW PAPER WASPS

by Andros (Andy) Szito, Taxonomist/Curator,
Biosecurity & Regulation - Diagnostics - Entomology,
DPIRD



These wasps appeared on the laundry/toilet door at Drummond House. Andy Szito was asked if he could identify them for us. Below is his valued response.

THEY are yellow paperwasp nests, *Polistes dominula* [from the Family – *Vespidae* and Order - *Hymenoptera*]

These wasps are an introduced colonial species, first discovered in WA in 1977, and are now prevalent throughout the south west of Western Australia. Colony size for these wasps usually only number in the dozens, however they can become aggressive if you approach the nest, especially in autumn

Some claim these wasps are beneficial because they feed on caterpillars from the garden, however, it is also likely they monopolise this food source which is also important for native fauna. Considering these wasps are exotic and can be aggressive with a painful sting, if they are in high numbers it may be wise to eliminate them

Once nests are discovered, control can be effected by spraying the nest at dusk/night with ordinary pressure-can insect sprays. Surface spray is better since it contains longer lasting active ingredients

When you do the spraying do not use a torch because wasps will attack the light and the person holding it. The nest should then be destroyed the following day to kill developing pupae.

[FOOTNOTE: It can be extremely fascinating tracing the relationships between the *Order*, *Family* and *Genus* of the yellow paperwasp. A lot has been written about their relationship in Wikipedia; it's worth checking it out with your search engine (search: *Polistes dominula*). You can then click on the Order and Family within the article's Scientific classification to further your knowledge in this field]

Why Toodyay?

by Lee Francis

WHEN Desrae asked me to write something for the TNC newsletter my first thought was what?

Unlike some adventurous members of the Club, I haven't travelled to exotic places like Mongolia, the Galapagos or Antarctica, although I have seen a fair bit of Australia.

So I decided to write about what brought me to Toodyay in the first place, and why I have stayed for 17 years.

When circumstances necessitated a move from Mundaring in the early 2000's, having lived in the hills since 1991, I had no desire to move back to the 'flatlands', so I looked around areas like York, Cunderdin, Bakers Hill, Wooroloo, Chittering/Bindoon and Toodyay.

Three factors made me decide on Toodyay. Firstly, that there was a choice of land available, from town blocks, to hobby farms and bush.

Secondly, it was a location from which, if I had to, I could still commute to Perth, Midland or Northam for work and family contact.

The third factor was that I knew there was a Historical Society and a Naturalists' Club. In fact, the first conversation of any consequence that I had after moving to Toodyay, besides the real estate agent, was with Desrae, whom I rang as the contact for TNC to find out about meetings, and was invited to what was to be the Christmas meeting for that year.

I felt a bit rude, making my first appearance at the "party" end of the season, but was made most welcome by everyone. I especially recall Nina Paterson being particularly welcoming.

Over the years I have made good friends and learned so much about the flora and fauna of our region. The guest speakers who have shared their knowledge have been amazing and have enlarged and broadened the scope of my interests (and my library).



A group of 'visitors' wander through Lee's property.

Photo Lee Francis

Why Toodyay? (cont. from Page 4)

But it has really been the members themselves who have taught me so much. Ray Paynter and Dawn Atwell were so generous in their sharing of all they had discovered in their long, fascinating lives. The Boase family too have taught me much, and hearing about the travels of Greg and Vicki, Desrae and Wayne, Don and Eva and others has made me not mind so much that I have stayed mostly within Australia.

The picnics, excursions and camps in places I would otherwise never have even known about, much less been to, have been highlights and the achievements of the Club in getting certain areas recognised as environmentally significant have made me glad to be associated with such people.

But what has kept me in Toodyay? When I was working in the city, in winter I didn't see my place in the daylight except at the weekend. I sometimes wondered, when I was on my way home from a 2 hour each way drive to visit my mum, why I didn't move closer to the city (and the beach and sea breeze).

But always as I drove up the hill to my little hideaway, I would smell the bush and experience the silence and realise... this is why I stay.

On my little patch of bush I have had the great privilege of seeing (and hearing) around 40 different varieties of birds, from emus and wedge-tailed eagles to scarlet, red capped and yellow robins, splendid fairy wrens and tiny baby quail. Just this morning I was bewitched by the haunting sounds of at least three butcher birds singing to each other.

There are the numerous and ever present kangaroos (including once much to my excitement a euro), echidna, possums, bobtails, black-tailed monitors, geckoes, thorny devils and a couple of carpet pythons, dugites and a gwardar. As I'm sure many readers have experienced, you can spend an awful lot of time just watching and noticing what lives around you. And isn't that a joy? We are so lucky.



*Above: A Bobtail - Tiliqua rugosa (also called Shingleback, or sleepy lizard) licks jam tree gum.
Photo by Lee Francis and featured in an article in Newsletter 4, April 2011.*

Back-yard Bathing Beauties

by Sharon Richards

AS a person that can spend a whole day just sitting watching the feathered visitors at my several birdbaths I thought it was worth taking a moment to share the joy and maybe encourage others to take the plunge, as it were.

In Toodyay we are so lucky that we see a myriad of birds. Just in my back yard I have noted so many different species of birds that I could identify - from Carnaby Cockatoo's to all the small birds of Weebills, Honeyeaters, Fantails, Robins and Wrens - to name a few. Why do they all come? They enjoy and need the water in the bird baths and it's such a simple thing for me to do.

Part of my fascination is the many different behaviours the birds exhibit. You get the quick dippers with the Honeyeaters great at this - just a flash in and out of the water and back to the tree for a preen. They may do this a number of times before they are satisfied that their feathers are properly spruced and they are off on their merry way.

I have a female Scarlet Robin that has a more leisurely approach. She appears to like to swim around in the bath, calm and quite dignified, then off she flies to a favourite branch and diligently readjusts all the feathers to their appropriate place.

The Red-capped and Ringneck Parrots compete as to who can splash the most often emptying the bird bath in a single sitting. It looks like a lot of fun, but there is definitely a hierarchy involved and the Ringneck usually is the first in the water.

The White-cheeked Honeyeaters appear to view bathing as a family affair. They are noisy and just seem to dive-bomb in and out of the water with each one out-squawking the other.

Others, such as the Carnaby Cockatoo, only appear to have a drink but are not so keen on the idea of a dunk. They approach silently and wait in a nearby tree. Usually one sits on a branch and watches while the other has a long slow drink - then they swap over. If they are vocal and I hear them coming they don't usually stop at the bath.

Providing bird baths gives me great pleasure as it is useful for the local wildlife especially in the summer; however, I do get visitors all year around. If you plan to install some bird baths the following suggestions will give good results.

Where should they be placed? Dappled shade is a good start. I find the most popular bath is where the birds can approach from a protective close-by tree or bush.

What height should it be? Some birds prefer high baths, perhaps up to three quarters of a metre, and others, especially the smaller birds, seem to enjoy the lower bath. Also, offering a water source at ground level is popular with other wildlife such as the bobtail that is often seen enjoying a cool drink.

It's important to place the bath where you, too, can enjoy watching the antics. My most popular one is one I can see from the kitchen window so washing the dishes also becomes bird watching time. If you have room for more than one birdbath you can place them in different types of habitats and see which is the most popular.

You will also need to consider safety for the birds. At one point one of my baths became the haunt of a visiting cat that saw the opportunity of an easy meal. Avoid placing the bath in an area in which a cat can hide such as nearby thick shrubbery. This particular visitor has since moved on so the birds can now bathe in peace

Once you start to fill the bath then it's important that it is a reliable source of water for the birds especially in the warmer months and, if away, ask a friend to top it up for you.

It's also important to keep bird baths clean with regular rinses of fresh water. However, if the bath is particularly dirty then a very weak bleach solution of 1 part bleach to 20 parts water is recommended by Birdlife Australia; rinse the bath very thoroughly with fresh water.

Images top of Page 7: Everyone watching everyone else... bathe.

Photos Sharon Richards

Clockwise from top left: Elegant Parrot; Scarlet Robin; Rufous Whistler and White-cheeked Honeyeaters

Back-yard Bathing Beauties... cont.

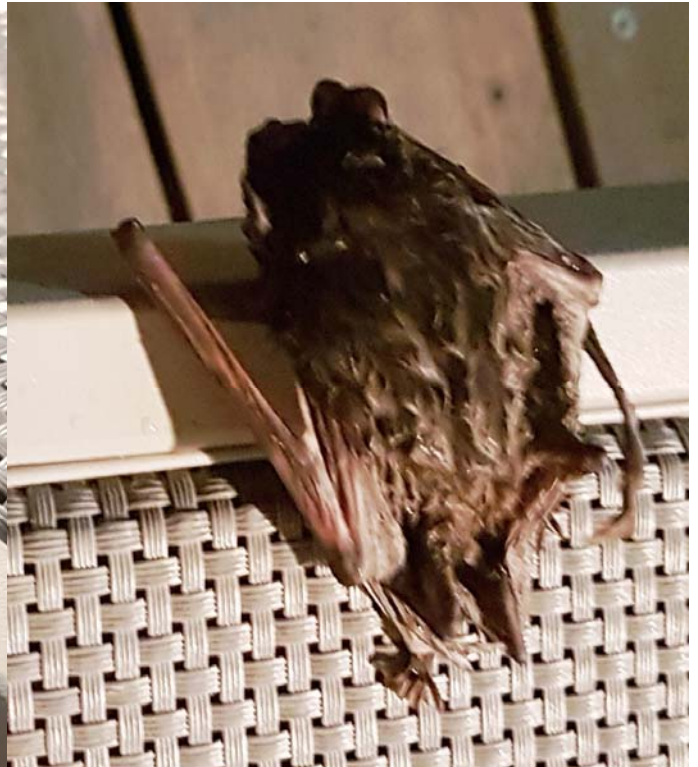


A tiny unexpected pool companion

by Jan Manning

Look who joined me in the pool at 9pm, two days before Christmas! After scooping it out, I left this little fellow in the dark on the deck. It must have eventually dried off and had disappeared 30 mins later.

Photos: Jan Manning



The Beard Orchid (*Calochilus stramenicola*)

by Desraé Clarke

On the 19th September of last year I found two small orchid plants along the driveway verge of our neighbour's property when walking to the home to feed their cat.

The property is breakaway country. The plants were growing in thick Powderbark Wandoo leaf litter and partially hidden beneath a very small bush. The first plant had two flower heads and a second plant nearby had two unopened buds.

The single leaf was shiny, like a Donkey Orchid plant, and has a red blush on the upper side near the plant's stalk with both plants approximately 20 to 25cm in height. The plants appeared quite insignificant until they were observed closely.

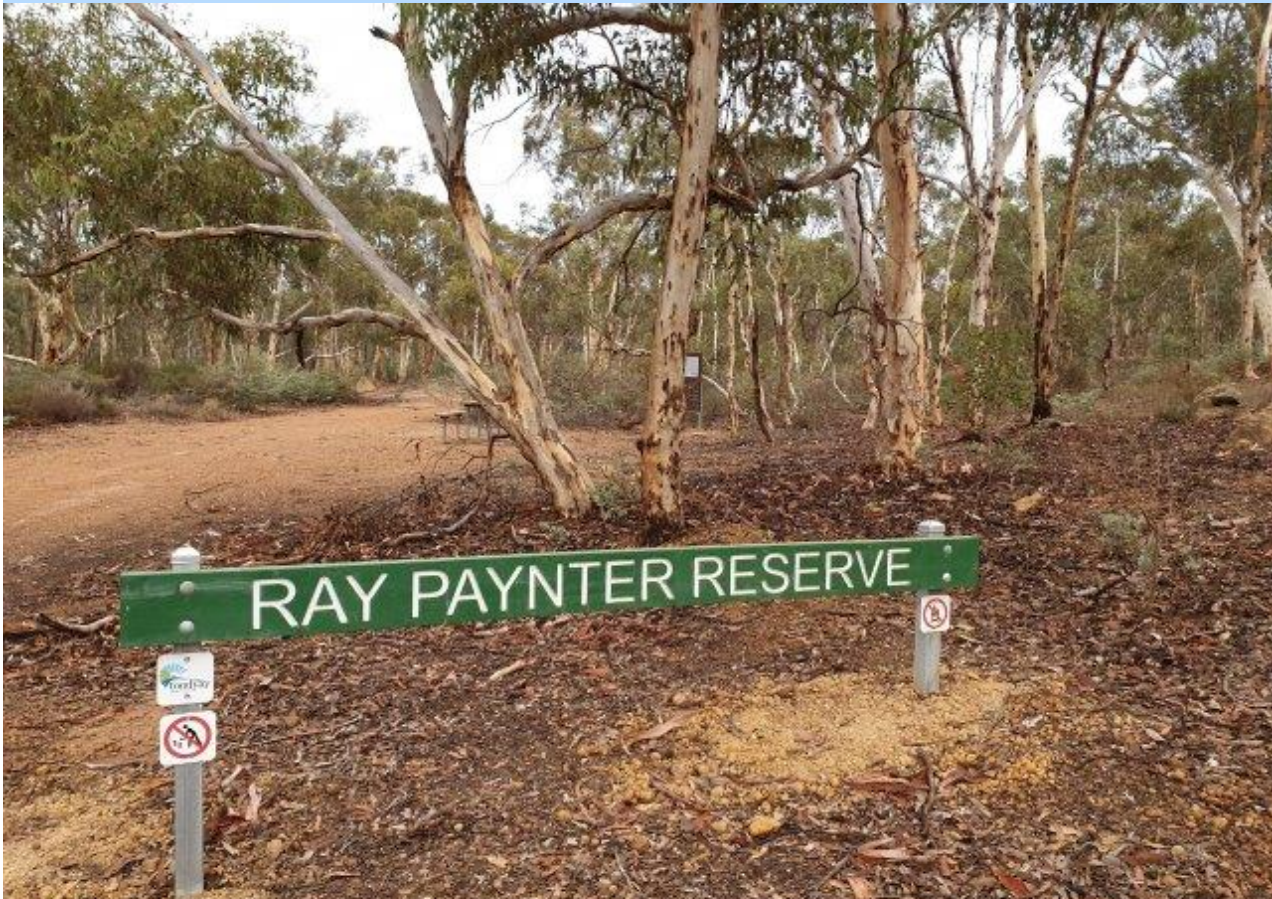
A call was made to TNC's orchid gurus, Eva and Don Smith, who identified the species as *Calochilus stramenicola*, previously known as *Calochilus robertsonii*, which is its Eastern States close relation. Its common name is Beard Orchid. Their Orchid Bible says distribution is from Clackline to Dryandra. "We do have at least 2 colonies here on Dewars Pool Road," they said.

Our young neighbours were very pleased with the discovery and James was eager to find where the orchids were found so that he doesn't rake the area for fire protection. James had worked for the Shire of Kojonup as a grader driver and stated he often had to go around rare plants and in one area the roadway was altered because of a rare species.



Photo: Desraé Clarke

The Ray Paynter Reserve



Above: Newly-erected signage and picnic table at the Ray Paynter Reserve, Forest Road, Wongamine. The picnic table is just visible behind the wandoo left of centre in the top image.

Photos: Greg Warburton

New Reserve Signage

by Greg Warburton

AS members will recall the Toodyay Naturalists' Club were closely involved with the "Pelham Drummond Memorial and Lookout Project" last year which saw a number of improvements and upgrades completed.

This included picnic tables and interpretive signage installed but frustratingly for me the financial year closed off before the final sign could be completed.

It was intended to augment the original plaque commemorating the famous Naturalist and Explorer John Gilbert, which is small and hard to find, with a more prominent and informative one.

As we know James Drummond and John Gilbert set out on a number of collecting expeditions together which led to many important natural history discoveries.

Happily, in March this year the long-planned plaque finally took pride of place at Pelham and now augments the other signage installed last year highlighting the life and achievements of Toodyay's revered pioneering Botanist.

At the same time two other signs were produced and installed both commemorating esteemed founding TNC members Ray Paynter and Dawn Atwell.

Appropriately, these new signs can be found at the respective reserves named after Dawn and Ray with associated picnic tables, parking areas and nature trails adding to the interest and amenity of these special places.

I'd like to thank the Shire for their support of this work and members of TNC and the Toodyay Historical Society who provided information and grammatical guidance.

The signs were produced by Allmark & Associates of North Perth and are anodised aluminium guaranteed to last at least until the Club's Centenary!

DAWN ATWELL (1927 – 2008)

This reserve is named in honour of local farmer and conservationist, Dawn Atwell.

Dawn was the younger daughter of Frank and Olive Atwell whose family purchased the farm, Woodendale at Nunyle in 1913 which would become her lifelong home.

Dawn was one of the four 'founding members' of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club and an Honorary Life Member. She served on the Club's Management Committee from 1968 to 2001, as Vice President (1980-1984), President (1984-1987) and Minutes Secretary (1987-1992).

Dawn Atwell had a love of nature, an exuberance for life and continued farming until illness forced her into retirement. She is buried at St. Philip's Church, Culham the resting place for many pioneers of the district.

The Toodyay Naturalists' Club successfully campaigned to have this 65 hectare bushland reserve converted to a conservation purpose in 2011. A broad range of native flora is found within the reserve including Jarrah, Marri, Wandoo and Banksia communities.

The Declared Rare Flora orchid species *Thelymitra stellata* along with a vast array of other wildflowers bloom here in spring. Over 50 native bird species have been recorded in the reserve.

Enjoy this special reserve and please respect its precious environment.



Above: The sign at Dawn Atwell Reserve.

A similar sign has been placed at the Ray Paynter Reserve (see Page 9)

New Reserve Signage... cont.

JOHN GILBERT (1810 - 1845)

John Gilbert was an English naturalist and explorer who had a deep fascination with the Australian landscape and wildlife. His skills as a collector and bushman were recognised by the famous ornithologist John Gould (1804-1881) who commissioned Gilbert to collect specimens in the Swan River Colony.

Gilbert arrived at Fremantle in 1839 and over a four year period explored and collected across much of the South West. He and James Drummond set out on several expeditions together including to the Albany district where Gilbert described a species of marsupial that was later named Gilbert's Potoroo *Potorous gilbertii*.

By the end of the 19th century this animal was regarded as extinct but in 1994 it was re-discovered and is currently one of Australia's most critically endangered mammals. Gilbert and Drummond also explored extensively north of Toodyay. Near present day Wongon Hills Gilbert described the Malleefowl *Leipoa ocellata* and observed the bird building its nest mounds.

In 1843 Gilbert left the Swan River Colony and travelled to Queensland where he joined Ludwig Leichhardt's expedition as a naturalist but was soon promoted to second in command. Tragically, he was fatally speared by Aboriginals at an expedition camp in the Gulf of Carpentaria in 1845.

John Gilbert has a town, river and range named after him along with several species of plants and animals.



Above: The new sign commemorating the naturalist/explorer John Gilbert

Below: The outlook over Toodyay with the new sign in the foreground

Photos: Greg Warburton



ENVIRONMENT MATTERS

Cancellation of the 2020 Australian Naturalists Network Get-Together

IN the light of the current restrictions on group gatherings, interstate and regional travel and exclusions of public access to many national parks and state forests, the organising committee of the Australian Naturalists Network has very reluctantly decided to postpone the get-together planned for this September in Stanthorpe [Queensland].

Although this get-together is some months away, it is difficult to predict when life may return to normal and we therefore decided it was only fair to make an early decision so that potential participants could cancel their travel and accommodation arrangements. We were very much looking forward to showcasing the diverse natural values and beautiful scenery of Queensland's Granite Belt as the region is starting to recover from drought and bushfires following recent rain.

If it is agreeable to the Australian Naturalists' Network Steering Committee, we are hoping to be able to offer the get-together at about the same time in 2022.

Meanwhile stay safe everyone and we look forward to seeing some of you visit our special part of Australia in 2022.

Liz Bourne - on behalf of the Stanthorpe Field Naturalist Club ANN 2020 Organising Committee

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