



Toodyay Naturalists' Club Inc.

THE TNC NEWSLETTER

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We gratefully acknowledge the Ballardong, Yued and Whadjuk Peoples as the traditional custodians of this land and duly respect a deep and unbroken connection to their cultural, physical and spiritual existence. We pay respect to their Elders, both past and present, and emerging.

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

by Sharon Richards

IT'S been another busy start to the year. We've been fortunate enough to have some fabulous presenters at our meetings. In January we hosted our enthusiastic and inspiring young presenter Andrew Wallace who enthralled us all with his knowledge of some of the smallest inhabitants in the garden, the insects. His boxed display of his jewel beetle collection was just beautiful. Thank you Andrew for reminding us just how important these litter critters are in the garden.

For March we were delighted by the very knowledgeable and lifelong "birdo" Max Howard. Max had some fabulous photographs of the birds found in and around Toodyay taken by his Avon Valley Birdlife Group members. He reminded us how fortunate we are to live in such an amazing place and how wonderful that the Regents Parrot has been seen again in Toodyay after all these years.

April was a bit of a mixed month; on the 8th members were greeted by the news that Chalice Mining had made an application to the EPA to commence the Gonnevillie Mine project, on a farm which abuts our beautiful Julimar Forest. A seven day turnaround puts a bit of pressure on people to respond, so I'd like to say a big thank you to all our members who took the time to do so, many asking for a Public Environment Review. It clearly was the popular choice with 708 out of the total 743 respondents asking for this. Hopefully this thorough scrutiny of the proposal will serve us well.

I know that Desrae and others will cover the trip to Narembeen and the Waddering Wildlife Sanctuary, but I would like to thank Desrae for looking after all the logistics and Lynn Phillips for making the original suggestion at our planning meeting in December.

Julimar Conservation And Forest Alliance (JCAFA) Update

Over the last few months the focus for JCAFA has been developing three different documents, the first a massive resource document, over 100 pages, there has been many contributors to the text, including, to name a few, Bridget Legget, Max Howard, Desrae Clarke, Melissa Adams, Greg Warburton, Doug Blandford, Jacquie Lucas and others. The JCAFA team has spent a substantial amount of time working on the layout and content.

From this huge resource, Bridget has brought together a "sharing" document which is a more succinct version and contains what we believe are the most important reasons that Julimar Forest should become a National Park. This document will be shared with interested parties so they can learn about Julimar and hopefully support us in our quest. It's almost complete.

The third document will accompany the petition as it goes to the Legislative Council Committee for consideration. It is two pages which contain, what we hope, are the most convincing arguments for Julimar being conserved as a National Park. It will provide the relevant Members of Parliament the information they need to at least understand some of the important aspects of Julimar. Melissa is busy formatting this as it needs to be submitted before the 10 May.

At the moment members of the JCAFA team are filling in the missing postcodes on the paper petition. The plan is to present this to Darren West, MLA prior to the 10th of May so both paper and online petitions will be considered as one.

At every opportunity we are still collecting signatures on the petition, and a special thanks to the folks who have been busy adding postcodes where they are missing.

Again, a huge thank you to the Members of the JCAFA team who have put in so much time and effort over the last months, the petition being submitted is a huge milestone and we are almost there. Then it's on to the next stage!

THE AVON BIRD GROUP'S MAX HOWARD

Desraé Clarke

NOTED amateur ornithologist, Max Howard, spoke as guest to a large audience at the March general meeting. Max is one of the three foundation members of the now 50-strong membership of the Avon Bird Group. The publication, 'The Birds of the Avon River Basin' was featured in the February edition of the Herald.

Gathering knowledge on birds, and their interesting lives, has been Max's passion since a young 15 year old. He heard the Duke of Edinburgh, who was visiting Western Australia at the time, speak of the importance of maintaining suitable habitats for wildlife especially in the metropolitan area. Max was impressed and followed his interest that is now his passion.

For the week following the Duke's visit a Perth daily paper at that time, The Daily News, featured articles on the various suitable habitats for birds that would be found around Perth.

Max's talk was sprinkled throughout with snippets of knowledge, not generally mentioned in books but from his lifelong interest and observations.

One example given was that of learning the difference between the very similar-looking Collared Sparrowhawk and the Brown Goshawk. The Sparrowhawk has a wide-eyed expression and an extremely long middle toe whereas the Brown Goshawk has a lowered eyebrow that makes it look very angry. The Square-tailed Kite and the Little Eagle appear similar but the Kite has a white face.

Max spoke of the exciting finds of rare birds in the Julimar Forest that have not been seen for many years. The Shrike-tit was a common bird in the 1980's but may have been absent for well over 20 years until the recent thrilling find!

Max's presentation was inspiring. He encourages the community to take time to observe birds, noting their movements, their assorted calls and, if a bird has been found and is not familiar, record its time of observation and what it was doing to grab your attention. If a photo is taken, even if not an entirely clear image, shape, stance, colouring, head and tail shape and flight and wing markings can all assist in identification.



Above: A Brown Goshawk stands in a bird bath during summer. It has a lowered eyebrow making it look angry at being photographed. The similar Collared Sparrow-hawk has a wide-eyed expression.

Left: Max Howard sharing some of his knowledge

Photos: Wayne Clarke

Wadderin and Narembeen Excursion

by Lynn Phillips

ON Friday the 19th of April, 12 members of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club congregated in the charming wheatbelt town of Narembeen, situated 286 km east of Perth. The main purpose of our trip was to visit the Wadderin Wildlife Sanctuary which is a 9 km drive out of town. Since most of the members had booked accommodation in the caravan park, Don & Eva and Jen & Avon joined the rest of us for pre-dinner drinks in the BBQ area of the park. It was decided we would have a club meeting on Saturday morning followed by museum visits in the afternoon. On Saturday evening we were organised to have dinner at the sports club followed by our visit to Wadderin.

During the meeting on Saturday morning, Jen was keen to keep the agenda moving along at a good pace before it was discovered that she was anxious to visit the enormous op shop in town before it closed at 12 o'clock. Jen and other op shop enthusiasts did get to the shop in time and Jen was able to wear her new purchase of a lovely black T shirt to dinner on Saturday night.

After 1pm we gathered at the Narembeen District Road Board building, constructed in 1927, that currently houses the town's museum. Rhonda, a very pleasant and knowledgeable local Historical Society member, met us at the door and showed us through, answering our questions and pointing out items of interest. There was an entire room dedicated to sports memorabilia of Narembeen which has produced some pretty impressive sporting figures. One year the different Narembeen teams won every competition they participated in (there must be something in the water!) Beth was keen to find information on her own family history which included the local Hallyburton family.

Also in the museum precinct, Rhonda showed us the magnificent Art Deco Public Hall built in 1939 with its circular design. Beside the Public Hall was the wonderful sculpture of a draft horse constructed from a multitude of metal tools welded together with chains and other bits and pieces. It was made by a local sculptor, Jordan Sprigg who also created a Hawk, on display outside the Sports Club. The craftsmanship and detail of both pieces is extraordinary. Another of Jordan's sculptures is the magnificent bull, El Toro, which is proudly displayed in the nearby town of Quairading. A visit to the war museum was next on the agenda.

It was good to catch up with Nats member Rick from Kellerberrin who met us for dinner at the Sports Club. Fortunately Desrae had organised our dinner in advance and our meals had been pre-ordered making the process quick and easy (except for Don's sticky date pudding that failed to show). The club was buzzing with a multitude of Narembeen sports people and their families who had recently finished their games for the day. The ages varied from young to younger. Needless to say the Nats members didn't exactly "blend in" which helped to avoid confusion for the staff delivering our meals and for our tour guides, Peter and Des, who came to lead us out to Wadderin.

Wadderin is a community managed wildlife sanctuary of 430 ha run mainly by retired farmers and local towns people who are passionate about conservation. Before it was surrounded by 9km of predator proof fencing in 2007, there were very few of the original small native animals remaining in the area due to land clearing on the surrounding farms and predation by foxes and cats. Since the fences were erected, there has been a series of re-introductions of the small mammals which would have once inhabited this area.

A line of vehicles snaked its way out of town in the dark along the 9km run to Wadderin Wildlife Sanctuary and through the gates in the high fence. We parked up then climbed aboard the electric bus with just enough room to seat us all. We were handed bright spotting torches and tucked up with warm doonas. Our first stop was at the large dam which had been constructed 100 years ago along with many metres of low catchment walls and drains, to trap the rain water running off the granite rock nearby and channel it into the dam.

cont. Page 7

Wadderin and Narembeen Excursion

cont.

Peter explained the reason the wildlife sanctuary existed was because the rock outcrops made the land useless for cultivation so it remained relatively undisturbed (except for the water catchment infrastructure, pump house and tracks). Thank goodness for rocky outcrops I say! How many other wheatbelt reserves have been created for the same reason

When we saw our first Woylie we all got very excited and wanted to jump out of the bus to take photos. Peter reassured us there would be more and there was – many more! About 400 woylies were relocated to the sanctuary some time ago and because predators were excluded by the fencing, the numbers rose to over 500. Finally it has balanced out to about 300 animals today. Our guides had laid a trail of wheat along the track so we did get to see a large portion of the population. “Just another woylie” became the tongue-in-cheek catch phrase. We did however see other creatures including a good number of brushtail possums, quenda and unfortunately, lots of rabbits. Peter also reported the sanctuary contained reintroduced Red-tailed Phascogale, Western Brush Wallaby and a small population of Banded Hare-Wallaby. One of our most exciting sights was a beautiful Tawny Frogmouth, perched motionless on a short stump not far from the track. We would have missed it completely if not for the sharp eye of our illustrious twitcher, Jen.

What a wonderful experience! I think everyone was very satisfied with the tour and the number of animals we encountered. We all made a small donation towards the maintenance of the sanctuary, thanked our guides and headed back to our accommodation. Beth and Bob stayed in Narembeen for another day of exploring while the rest of us headed home to Toodyay the following day.

Narembeen is a wonderful rural town with a great vibe. It won the Tidy Towns award in 2020 and you can see why. The community must take great pride in the town’s appearance and the visitor facilities are superb - modern, spacious, clean and affordable. What better way to attract tourists and business?

At this point I’m certain all the participants would like to thank Desrae for her time and excellent organisational skills, Peter for finding and recommending Wadderrin as an excursion destination and everyone else for their good company.

See photos on page 10

Young inspiring naturalist, Andrew Wallace

by Desraé Clarke

CLUB members were delighted to enjoy the company and inspiration of year twelve student, Andrew Wallace, together with his Mum, Frankie, to give a wonderful presentation on his pet subject of ‘invertebrates’ as guest for the first meeting of 2024.

TNC member, Bridget Leggett, introduced Andrew as she had met him several years before when he gave an impressive talk to his club, the Darling Range Branch of the Western Australian Naturalists’ Club, on his favourite topic of the spineless creatures.

Enthusiasm was the key word throughout Andrew’s talk which was further enjoyed with his excellent photos of beetles, spiders, millipedes, centipedes and cockroaches. His display case of precious specimens was a great drawcard with the emphasis of ‘look but don’t touch’; the freezer at home is also an area holding his creatures.

See photo on page 11

THE IMPORTANCE OF OBSERVATION

by Wayne Clarke

THE advent of climate change and its impacts on our natural environment needs to be meticulously recorded, particularly where species are going 'off the edge' and possibly becoming extinct. This applies to both our fauna and flora.

While standing near a small grove of *Calothamnus* recently I was shocked by a feral bird from the eastern states - a Laughing Kookaburra - plunge into the foliage not more than a metre in front of me to take a small bird (possibly a Silvereeye). This could be considered a *part of nature* but the fact that it was a feral bird did annoy me. This is the type of observation that should be recorded (and it has).

The change in climate heralds changes in our natural environment - feral animals and weeds that have adapted to the change at the expense of some of our more treasured or valued species. When native vegetation is removed by fire, storms, droughts or floods new opportunities arise for weeds.

A good example is the native grasses formerly eaten by kangaroos being replaced by crops or garden plants (such as roses); or fruit eating birds arriving earlier and migrating later, with greater dispersal of seed from fruit bearing weeds, an undesirable outcome particularly in agricultural areas.

Observing new weed invasions and reporting the more serious ones to the Department of Primary Industries and Rural Development - Agriculture and Food on <https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/apps/mypestguide-reporter> is a must. Similarly if you observe certain undesirable feral animals (such as Rainbow Lorikeets) you can report them through this service.

Placing a sensor camera near a bird bath can present great opportunities for observation. I never cease to be amazed at the variety of animals (including invertebrates such as Potter's Wasps) either drinking or bathing. A Potter's Wasp (see TNC Newsletter Number 34, April 2021) was captured attacking a New Holland Honeyeater. I also observed three species of Honeyeaters drinking together (see image Page 10)

It was also exciting to see a Western Whistler (formerly called the Golden Whistler) in the garden, and even more exciting to capture it on the sensor camera having a swim.

These 'Observations' or 'Sightings' are added to the TNC Data Base, currently with a repository of nearly 5,000 observations dating back to 1925. These are not just 'Members' observations but include extracts from the diaries of old Toodyay residents.



Above: A New Holland Honeyeater draws back from an attacking Potter or Mason Wasp '*Abispa ephippium*' (photo inset). The honeyeater's white eye seems to be rather enlarged. Usually quite an aggressive bird it was certainly uncomfortable with the wasp.
Photos: From a Bushnell Sensor Camera

REPORTING FROM THE COMMUNITY

by Desraé Clarke

IT has been noted by community members, over the years, the 'comings and goings' of not only birds, mammals and herpetofauna (reptiles, fish, frogs, turtles) and also plants that may be 'out of place'. With these trends reported it is vital to record them for the well-being and health of the community, the gathering of statistics for historical records and knowledge for the future well-being of a species.

Gathering information is a gigantic but exciting activity. If the community is encouraged to assist in observations, and the reporting is recorded of those observations, the contribution to records is immense.

With the clearing of land for agriculture there have been shifts of birds from one area to another to take advantage of cropping, orchards, vineyards, etc. The following stories are examples of some of the valuable records gathered.

A farmer's wife made frequent entries of 'day-to-day' happenings in her expenditure ledger keeping a record of farm purchases, eggs and fruit sold, and to whom, and other data important to her.

September 23rd 1942 she wrote in her ledger that she "saw 3 pink Galahs".

Her son has given a description of life at that time.

'Galahs were a rare sight in Toodyay in those days but moved west and south as the agricultural areas were cleared for farming. Plovers and Quail, both ground nesters, were numerous; unfortunately, the rabbit plague caused a massive increase in the fox and cat numbers; they cleaned up all the ground-nesting birds.'

A large python found in the south of WA was the Woma who has a ground colour of pale brown with darker brown, irregular markings. This species has no visible neck, a feature that is a usual aspect of a python. Since clearing the last recorded sighting of this beautiful creature, within the Toodyay Shire, was in the 1950's. A local elderly gentleman told of a very large animal, estimated to be of three metres in length, being loaded into the back of a farm truck. The Woma is still resident in the arid regions of the State's north where it is a glorious golden colour with irregular brown markings.

In the 1990's a cat was sitting on a rock wall on Toodyay town's perimeter, transfixed. On investigation its owner found it watching a large python. She alerted Brian Bush, a noted herpetologist, who rushed to Toodyay as, from the lady's description, he thought it may have been the supposedly 'extinct' Woma. It was the glorious Black-headed Python, a member of the same species as the Woma and found in the north-west of the state. The animal was severely dehydrated and had several partially sloughed skins. Brian rehabilitated the lovely female to return her to her home in the north of the state. It was thought that it may have travelled south on a truck.

In December 1999 a Morangup gentleman phoned saying that he had a beautiful small snake, measuring approximately 40cm in length, on his patio. From his description it was a Southern Carpet Python; he posted a photo of it.



The following December he contacted again to say the python was back and curled around a coconut shell containing a garden plant suspended from the veranda roof. The Python had grown significantly in length and, once again, a photo was posted.

When contacted a third time, a year later, the python had grown so much that the observer was a tad concerned as his wife bred Chihuahuas. She put the pups outside the house in a playpen and asked whether the python may take them. The reply was "most definitely"! The couple asked advice for relocating the visitor. The Avon Valley National Park had a permanent ranger employed at that time so he relocated it to the wonderful bushland of the area.

Left: Carpet python taken up residence in a coconut shell. Photo: Gerry Clarke, Morangup

REPORTING FROM THE COMMUNITY

cont.

In March 2003 a Morangup couple called following reading an article in the local community newspaper, *'The Toodyay Herald'*, on the species, the Broad-banded Sand Swimmers. Three reptiles visited their home so a photo was received with the following on the back: *'As discussed with Frans herewith the photo of our friendly Sand Swimmers. We go for ages not seeing them and then suddenly they appear'*.

To further this tale the Sand Swimmers obviously enjoy cat biscuits and were not perturbed by the cats - or the cats by them.

The last heard from the Family was an increase to four visitors!

The following is contributed by TNC member, Robyn Taylor.

Like many of us I hear lots of lovely stories from locals about their experiences with our wildlife.

Claire, who helps me clean house, told she found a baby Bobtail that appeared too young and vulnerable to be out on its own. She made a home for it in a deep pot with soil and litter and slices of fruit. Next morning it wasn't there! As she fretted about its survival, it popped up out of the litter.

This led to my story about rescuing a 'drowned' Bobtail in our pond. It was at the very bottom and as stiff as a board. Fortunately, the warmth of my hands revived it a little so my husband, Richard, rang the local vet, just on closing time, to ask if the office could stay open to bring it to them. The office rang the next morning to say the Bobtail was fully recovered.



Above: The 'Critically Endangered' Woylie (*Bettongia penicillata*) photographed at Wadderin
Photo: Wayne Clarke

From the Archives...

POSITION STATEMENT ON DRAINAGE

A Special Meeting of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club was held on 2nd April 2004 to discuss the issue of Deep Drainage. At that meeting it was resolved that the following *Position Statement* be adopted by the club.

TNC POSITION STATEMENT ON DEEP DRAINAGE

The Objects of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club are directed towards the preservation of native flora and fauna and of the natural environment and habitats of Western Australia, in particular that of the Avon Valley.

The Club acknowledges that there are major concerns in a number of the farming communities, particularly those in the Valley Floors of the Avon River Basin, regarding the loss of farmland to salinity, and of consequential loss of income and quality of life. It accepts that engineering solutions may be necessary to remedy some of the issues facing these land managers.

At the same time, the Club has resolved that any remedial measures that are undertaken are meticulously researched prior to establishment so as not to cause degradation of the downstream flora and fauna, increased flooding, sedimentation, or other detrimental impacts on the Avon River.

The Club has also resolved that a comprehensive monitoring program should be undertaken throughout the life of any project. Further, if any engineering options are installed, they have contingency plans developed to immediately cease operating the installation when any adverse affect is detected. All projects that are approved should provide a bond that will cover remedial actions in the event of the project having any adverse impacts on the riverine environment.

The Club has agreed to adopt the following Precautionary Principle in relation to drainage:

When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken **even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically**. In this context **the proponent of an activity, rather than the public, should bear the burden of proof**.

The process of applying the Precautionary Principle must be open, informed and democratic and must include potentially affected parties. It must also involve **an examination of the full range of alternatives, including no action**.

This Position Statement, developed twenty years ago this month, stands in response to drainage of highly saline or acidic groundwater into the Avon River. The source of any contamination needs to be urgently and properly assessed, classified and remediated.

Undisturbed naturally occurring hazardous substances such as groundwater salinity or acid sulphate soils may represent a significant health risk, but are not classified as 'contaminated sites'. However that situation could be challenged once disturbed by drainage. It was a contentious issue in 2004 and still is in 2024 - twenty years on.

Members Gallery



Above: Members looking at the stars at Wadderin, and the orientation of the Southern Cross.

Photo: Wayne Clarke



Left: White-eared Honeyeater at Narembeen.

Photo: Jennifer Donegan

Members Gallery



Above: Andrew Wallace with his net and some of his invertebrate collection

Photo: Desraé Clarke

DID YOU KNOW...

... that with the onset of climate change, there are some species of plants that will benefit while others won't be so lucky. Many of Australia's most invasive weed species benefit from extreme heat. This is particularly so with 'Weeds of National Significance' (WONS) such as Athel Pine - we know it as Tamarix.

Vigilance is the key to stopping the spread of many weeds. However if there is a change in the habit of pollinators new strategies will have to be developed. Fruit eating birds may arrive earlier and depart later; fruit-bearing weeds may benefit from dispersal by these birds.

More than 3,200 introduced plant species have become invasive in Australia and are considered weeds; however there are also Australian native plants that have become weeds in areas outside their original range.

Which brings us to the definition of a weed - *a weed is any plant that arrives and thrives in ecosystems where they previously didn't exist.*

ENVIRONMENT MATTERS



The Toodyay Naturalists' Club agreed to purchase two cat traps at a cost of \$180 each, to be donated to the Shire for loan to residents. It was also requested that signage be placed onto the traps to inform the borrower of where they came from.

Left: Signage for the cat traps

Photo: Greg Warburton

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