# FRIENDS OF PARKS INC

VOLUNTEERS WORKING FOR CONSERVATION

# BANDICOOT TAILS

**Newsletter of the Friends of Scott Creek Conservation Park**

**No. 85, November, 2003**


**The President's Words:**

With alarming rapidity, the AGM is upon us again. This year our Guest Speaker is Simon Attwood, who is the Birds for Biodiversity Extension Officer. The talk is entitled "The Integral Role Of Research In Bird Conservation – A Global Perspective". We tried to think of a more descriptive title but it may have been longer than the talk. Simon is charged with many tasks associated with programmes aimed at slowing the decline of bird species across the MLF, one recent initiative being a single species survey involving seven of the declining bird species in the MLR. Forms and details will be available at the AGM for those wishing to participate.

The web site has recently provided an interesting diversion for former South Australian entomologist Peter McQuillan. He came across the site by accident and noticed the moth photo thereon (Gastrophora henricaria). Peter has a particular interest in moths and emailed for more information as he said it was regarded as extremely rare in S.A. and uncommon elsewhere. The only previous record he was aware of was a specimen collected at Balhanna in the 1880s. I had to admit that the photo was taken on my front lawn (which, as the moth flies, is about 500 metres north of the Park) about seven years ago. I have sent Peter some more photos and hope to find out more about this elusive creature, which he says "-adds greatly to the natural values of the area.".

On the night of the full moon in October, about 150 people attended a 'friendship fire' gathering at Warriparinga. Georgina Yambo Williams welcomed us and spoke of the importance of the fires in bringing people together in a sprit of peace and reconciliation. Warriparinga is Kuarna for windy place by the river. Windy it wasn't but cold for the dancers it certainly was! However, they performed some half dozen beautiful dances, breaking briefly between each to rush to the fire to thaw bare feet. The friendship fires are held every full moon and people are invited to come and share some food and talk.

Last weekend we took the Regional Conservator, Laurie Haegi, on a tour of the Park. We visited many of the creek lines where restoration is or has been carried out. Having been a botanist in his former life, Laurie obviously enjoyed the wonderful diversity of species therein. We appreciated his interest and enjoyed the tour around with him. On his return visit I promise to show him a different set of ecosystems, as he must presently think the Park consists primarily of valleys.

With the worst of the winter over, the springtime park is looking particularly lush from the soaking rains. All the trackside ground covers and herby plants are flowering well and the sun orchids are already putting on a show as soon as the day warms up. It is altogether an excellent time to combine a walk in the park after a conscience-clearing working bee in the morning.

I hope you can come to the AGM or the fundraising Rotary Fair on the following Saturday – any flowers, bunched or loose, will be gratefully accepted on the day.

# BRACKEN

## A MALIGNED BUT USEFUL PLANT

There has been so much negative publicity concerning bracken *Pteridium esculentum* that some of its qualities, particularly as wildlife habitat, have escaped notice. Look at the positive aspects of bracken - a plant that will have drawn many a frustrated sigh from landholders who battle to control it on their land. But this was not always so. Bracken has enjoyed considerable status in the past.

**A highly successful plant**

Bracken is a highly competitive and adaptable native fern with a widespread distribution throughout eastern Australia. Bracken species occur throughout the world. Its competitive advantage is in part assisted by allelopathic chemicals produced from dead standing fronds. Bracken is a relatively efficient user of water (it reduces soil moisture values) and can be prolific in well-drained light-textured soils. It is highly resistant to diseases, such as fungal attack. Physical attributes, such as heavily lignified tissues, as well as chemical defences are probably involved.

**Uses**

Bracken has been used as food, for potash production in glass manufacture, for soap and bleaching, as fuel especially in brick-making, thatching (reported to last about 20-30 years), bedding ( for livestock and humans), compost, fertilizer and in medicine. In Japan, young bracken fronds, served with soy sauce, are used as an appetizer in bars (Rymer, 1976, ref. health risks) Other uses have included protecting plants from frost, as packaging for fruit, for dyeing wool yellow, to repel midges and kill aphids on roses. Bracken also has a place in superstition as burning it was believed to bring rain.

Aborigines used bracken as a source of food, particularly when alternatives were scarce. The under-ground creeping rhizomes were either roasted and chewed or roasted and pounded (to extract the starchy meal inside) to produce a flour which was eaten with water as dough or made into cakes. The rhizomes 'contain more protein per unit weight than carrots and pumkin, and more carbohydrate, kilo-calories and fat than potato, carrots, pumkin and spinach (ref. Veitch in Thompson & Smith, 1989, note health risk) Young stems were rubbed on insect bites for medicinal purposes (Gott, 1993)

**Agricultural values**

Shelter for livestock during adverse weather conditions has been suggested and can confer significant benefits by increasing young lamb survival. Also reduced erosion as a result of breaking rainfall impact and runoff.

**Wildlife values**

Bracken is an important structural component in many forest and woodland ecosystems, providing cover and foraging opportunities to animals that inhabit near-ground vegetation. These include birds such as robins, thornbills, whistlers, scrubwrens and thrushes. Small mammals also benefit by the cover.

The rate of litter decomposition of bracken is very slow and so fronds contribute to a structural layer at ground level, and slow nutrient release, which will provide habitat and food for small organisms and these in turn for larger organisms (e.g. bandicoots).

Bracken has a remarkable post-fire response. The established underground rhizomes and root system survive fire as do dormant frond buds. Following adequate rain, rapid post-fire regrowth occurs, ahead of potential competitors. The fast emergence and expansion of fronds allows bracken to quickly shade its potential competitors and, combined with the allelopathic effects of chemicals leached from its fronds, allows it to dominate the understorey after fire. Bracken thrives in the increased light intensity and will decrease in density as the forest canopy

redevelops and creates shade. For the animals that have survived the fire, and those that recolonise, bracken is likely to play an important role in escaping predation.
Bracken's colonising features are also important in native bushland disturbance situations, e.g. erosion, tree-fall etc.

**Real and alleged offences**

- Competition with pasture for light, moisture and nutrients
- harbour for vermin
- a fire risk as it is a light and quick-burning fuel
- health risks - most evidence relates to the northern hemisphere species *P. aquilinum.*

Poisoning has been reported for sheep, goats and horses. Cattle are most likely to be affected. Thiamine deficiency, haemorrhaging, blindness, urinary problems including cancer have been associated with prolonged exposure. The carcinogen in bracken occurs in milk from cows feeding in bracken-infested pastures and may occur in meat but Smith (in Thompson & Smith, 1989) suggests considerable dilution between plant and animal. There is variation between areas. Rock fern *Cheilanthes seiberi* also has high concentrations of the bracken cancer-causing chemical. This chemical can be destroyed by cooking and wood ash (Gott 1993)

**Management and control**

Bracken can be eliminated by ploughing and it can be weakened by repeated cutting or burning. Under natural conditions, bracken is prolific after fire or disturbance but decreases in density as the canopy creates shade.
Recently developed chemicals offer considerable scope for its control.

So, why all this information about a plant that is common and not directly related to the survival of a threatened species? Even common native plants can have their own intrinsic values if viewed in the right context. Bracken is not all bad nor all good.
If it naturally occurs in areas managed as wildlife habitat on a property then it will add value to that area, not only for native plant management but for wildlife, encouraging a range of animals that may not otherwise be present if the only other habitat is cleared pasture.

*Adapted from an article by Stephen Platt, Land for Wildlife News, Vol.2, No.1*

References:
Gott, B. (1993) Use of Victorian Plants by Koories in Foreman, D.B. & Walsh, N.G. Flora of Vic. Royal Botanical Gardens, Melb.
Thompson J.A. and Smith R.T. (ed.) (1989) Bracken biology and management The Australian Institute of Agricultural Science.
Rymer L. (1976) the history and ethnobotany of bracken in Perring and Gardiner
Perring F.H. and Gardiner B.G. (ed.) (1976) Biology of bracken. Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society, Vol. 73 Nos 1-3, Acadamic Press.

**Bird Banding:**

Our last foray into the banding scene was carried out at Derwentia Creek on the 18th. and 19th. of October. The weather was perfect, but the yield on Saturday was modest, with only 12 birds being caught. Sunday started out the same way, with a slow rate of capture. We were visited by the Longwood Agricultural Bureau, whose members were being shown over the panhandle by Tom Hands. He and his visitors left the scene at about 11.30 am. It took yours truly until nearly 2 pm. To take the nets down, with a stream of Silvereyes, Superb Wrens and Crescent Honeyeaters insisting on being caught. The tally for the weekend was 45 birds, one of our better sessions. The before-mentioned species led the list of most captures, with New Holland Honeyeaters and Whitebrowed

Scrubwrens not far behind. We recaptured wrens and scrubwrens from our previous work here. Jim Spiker sighted a Whitenaped Honeyeater, with two red colour bands. This would have been banded by the student who was studying this species in 2002.

Please note our last two banding weekends for this year, at Gate 3 crossroads on the 29th-30th. November and at Gate 7 on the 6th.-7th. December

**Blackwood Rotary Fair:**
As usual, we will be holding our stall at this event, which runs from 9.00am to about 2.00pm. at the Rotary Park on Shepherds Hill Road, Blackwood.We will be setting up our signage on Friday evening, from 5 pm on. Anyone who can help on Friday or Saturday will be welcome. This is our fund raiser for the year. We will be selling Proteas and other flowers.

**Annual General Meeting:**
This will be held at the Coromandel Valley Primary School at 7.30 pm., where, besides hearing President Tom summarise our year, we will have an interesting speaker in Simon Attwood, whose talk has been already revealed in the President's Words. We will be waiting to see if our Poetess Laureate is again inspired by her Muse. **Nominations are called for all positions on our Committee.**

**Friends Of Parks Forum, Southern Hills, 2006 or 2007.**
Dene Cordes, Manager of Community Liaison, has arranged a meeting to discuss this proposal. It will be held at the Cherry Gardens Hall Supper Room on Thursday, 20th. November, at 7.30 pm. Dene is looking at the Scott Creek Friends to form the nucleus of the Forum organization. This will be a topic of discussion at the AGM.

**Miscellanea:**
Members may be aware that John Butler 'misplaced' his GPS some time ago. All he could be certain of was that it was somewhere in Scott Creek C.P., a small black, rectangular object hiding in the vegetation. Lo and behold, he found it, in the bottom of Derwentia Creek. This proves that John has very good eyesight and that immersion is fatal to GPS units. His replacement unit is firmly attached to his person at all times

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## FRIENDS OF SCOTT CREEK CONSERVATION PARK

PROGRAMME FOR 2003

| Month | Date | Activity | Location |
|---|---|---|---|
| November | 4th. | Tuesday Working bee | C&S broom (flowering plants esp., Mt. Bold Tk, between G7 & G8 |
| | 13th. | Annual General Meeting | Coromandel Valley PS, 7.30 pm. |
| | 15th. | Blackwood Rotary Fair | Blackwood Rotary Park, 8. am. – 3. pm. |
| | 16th. | Sunday Working bee | Dig Watsonia bulbs, SE of G6 |
| | 22nd. | Saturday Working bee | Pull, C&S boneseed, N of Stringybark Tk. Enter G17 & head S, second track on left |
| | 29th. – 30th. | Bird banding | Gate 3 Crossroads. 7.00 am. |

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| December | 2nd. | Tuesday Working bee | Pull, C&S boneseed, gully W. of Blackwater Dam |
| | 6th. – 7th. | Bird banding | Gate 7, 7.00 am. |
| | 13th | Propagation Day | Thompson's, Frith Road, 9.00 am. |
| | 14th. | Sunday Working Bee | Pull, C & S broom, Thorley Rd. Gate 24 |
| | 19th. | Christmas function | TBA |
| | 27th. | Saturday Working Bee | Pull, C & S boneseed, gully NW of Gate 9 |
| January | 6th. | Tuesday Working Bee | Briar, African Daisy, drill olives, SW of Gate 12 |
| | 11th. | Sunday Wrking Bee | Dig watsonia, W of Gate 7 |
| | 17th.-18th. | Bird Banding | Kangaroo Gully, 6.30 am. |
| | 24th. | Saturday Working Bee | Broom, Erica, etc., Breakfast Ford, S. of Gate 4 |
| February | 3rd. | Tuesday Working Bee | Boneseed, olives, briar, Echidna Track, E. of stockyard, enter Gate 20. |
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Don't Forget: Meeting point for working bees is the Almanda Mine/Gate 19 at 9.00 am.

Officebearers:
Any queries on Friends activities, please contact your office bearers.

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