



FRIENDS OF THE FITZGERALD RIVER NATIONAL PARK

AGM WEEKEND 13TH & 14TH MARCH 2021

PROGRAMME

Saturday 13th March

- 9:30am onwards arrive Twertup Field Studies Centre; shared morning tea
- 10:30am ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - all committee positions available, new faces welcome!**
- 12:00 noon lunch
- 1:30pm Guest speaker Dr. Carl Gosper (*PTO for more information!*)
- 2:30pm afternoon tea, followed by free time, dinner and social evening

Sunday 14th March

Free time with the option to join Dr. Carl Gosper to collect field data for his *Banksia* decline research in the Park from 8:30am -2:00pm (approx.). This activity will entail bush walking and will require that you wear sturdy boots, have sun protection and drinking water.

THIS IS A BYO EVERYTHING WEEKEND, so please bring everything you need, including food and camping gear. There is drinking water onsite and a BBQ available for cooking.

Limited beds are available; please book by emailing admin@fitzgeraldfriends.org.au.

We look forward to seeing you!

TWERTUP FIELD STUDIES CENTRE

Twertup is accessed from Pabelup Drive along a 10km 4WD track (sandy sections). It is open during dry soil conditions only and may be closed for dieback hygiene or bushfire reasons.

For more information about Twertup and its facilities, please see www.fitzgeraldfriends.org.au.

PLEASE NOTE if roads to Twertup are closed due to wet weather, the *alternative venue is Michael Tichbon Field Station in Bush Heritage's Red Moort Reserve on 360 Monjebup Rd. Accommodation/overnight camping available.*

PLEASE ALSO NOTE that South Coast Highway is currently closed near Albany. A detour is in place, or else you can travel via Chester Pass Road.



INTRODUCING AGM SPEAKER DR. CARL GOSPER

Dr. Carl Gosper has been carrying out research in the Fitzgerald River National Park in an effort to understand the susceptibility of the flora to the putative threats of drought and reduced fire-return intervals.

This research is being carried out in an attempt to manage threatening processes and to improve the recovery of Threatened Flora and Threatened Ecological Communities. Carl has specific interests in the distribution of Threatened Flora, effects of fire on plant communities and vegetation dynamics. Much of his work has been conducted in proteaceous shrublands, mallee and eucalypt woodland vegetation.

Carl is a Senior Research Scientist in the Biodiversity and Conservation Science section of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.

His AGM talk is titled:

Threatened flora distribution and differential exposure and susceptibility to threats as a framework informing flora conservation in the Southwest Australian Floristic Region



He will discuss the intersection of our rich and endemic flora with a diverse suite of interacting and cumulative threats. These threats have contributed to the Southwest Australian Floristic Region having

exceptionally high numbers of imperilled plant taxa.

Prioritising flora conservation actions requires an understanding of:

- the spatial distribution of Threatened Flora,
- the processes that endanger them, and
- how species traits affect the sensitivity of taxa to specific threats.

These patterns and processes are underpinned by natural selection over evolutionary timescales. Threatened flora are strongly characterised by narrow range endemics which are not uniformly or randomly distributed across the southwest region. Their distribution is moulded by age and extent of soil-landscape features.

ARE THERE STILL WESTERN GROUND PARROTS IN FITZGERALD RIVER NATIONAL PARK?

BY SARAH COMER AND ALLAN BURBIDGE

In 2003 DBCA (then CALM) staff were making plans to reintroduce a small number of Western Ground Parrots (*Pezoporus flaviventris*) to an area west of Walpole, where they had not been seen since 1952. But when the project team commenced survey work on the proposed source population, they found it had crashed. This led to the significant efforts in ground parrot conservation

over the last 17 years. Feral cat control became a major focus of recovery efforts, with cat baiting commencing in the Fitzgerald River National Park in 2010. Feral cat control is now a standard part of DBCA's Western Shield Program, which manages introduced predators including cats and foxes, within the National Park.

Unfortunately, the intervention may have been too late for ground parrots, with the last birds recorded in the Park in April 2012. These calls were heard on an autonomous recording unit (ARU), a passive acoustic listening device programmed to record during the peak calling periods for ground parrots which are before sunrise and after sunset. Despite significant efforts to find birds

with both ARUs and human listening surveys, over the past 8 years no ground parrots have been detected in the Park.

Carrying out surveys for ground parrots is a little bit like looking for a needle in a haystack. However, the availability of ARUs has helped enormously by enabling an increase in survey efforts. Since 2012 units have been deployed in potential ground parrot habitat throughout the Park, with deployments in areas historically occupied or where we have had reports of potential sightings of parrots. Unfortunately, no birds have been found.

In 2019 the South Coast Threatened Birds Recovery Team were advised of a successful fund-raising effort by the Friends of the Western Ground Parrot, enabling the purchase of 16 solar-powered ARUs. Solar powered units can be deployed as permanent listening stations, recording for set times every day of the year. This presents the best chance of detecting ground parrots in

the Park if they still remain. Given the capacity for power from the solar panels, and space on large SD memory cards, recording schedules were programmed not only to record during ground parrot calling times but also to record during the peak calling period for western bristlebirds and whipbirds. This recording schedule is also likely to pick up large flocks of Carnaby's black-cockatoos as they move between feeding and roosting areas.

A number of sites were selected for deployment, based on previously occupied ground parrot habitat, presence of fire scars and habitat suitability. In autumn 2020 the 16 solar powered units were deployed, and for the first 6 months these were complemented by an additional 14 short-term battery-powered units. The survey area covered by these ARUs extends over 60 km from west to east, and 20 km from north to south with the units scattered across 1290km² of suitable and potential ground parrot

habitat extending from the northern sandplain to the wilderness.

The Friends of the Western Ground Parrot have supported servicing the units, with grants from WIRES and Landcare Australia's Wildlife Relief and Recovery Package. These grants provided for the use of a helicopter for both deployment and servicing of the units in 2020. In the longer term it is planned to service the solar ARUs annually by hiking into the wilderness. Unfortunately, preliminary analysis of recordings using computer software (machine learning processing) has failed to find any sign of ground parrot calls in the recordings. Manual scanning is now underway to validate these results.

We remain optimistic that there may still be a small number of western ground parrots in the 'Fitz', and the current survey will provide a better chance of detecting birds if they are there. Any potential ground parrot sightings can be forwarded to sarah.comer@dbca.wa.gov.au



Western Ground Parrots have not been heard or seen in Fitzgerald River National Park since 2012. Fundraising efforts by the Friends of the Western Ground Parrot enabled deployment of solar powered Autonomous Recording Units (ARUs) in potential Western Ground Parrot habitat, hopefully picking up calls of this endangered and elusive species.

For more information on the Western Ground Parrot and information on recovery strategies, please feel free to visit western-ground-parrot.org.au. Their website also has some wonderful photos and videos of both wild birds and the captive population at Perth Zoo, as well as a teaser to the magnificent Secrets at Sunrise documentary (available through Friends of the Western Ground Parrot). Secrets at Sunrise was produced to raise both awareness and funds for recovery measures of this critically endangered species – such as described by Sarah Comer and Allan Burbidge in this article. (Ed.)

BREMER BAY SCHOOL CAMP AT TWERTUP

BY DELYS HARLAND

The Bremer Bay Primary School's 12 year three to year six students travelled to Twertup Field Studies Centre for a 3 day/2 night environmental education camp in October last year.

After a stop at Point Ann, the students were excited to explore the Field Studies Centre, and were slightly alarmed at the long-drop toilets. Fortunately, the alarm turned into "It's better than I thought it would be!" soon thereafter.

Teachers and students discussed appropriate camp behaviour, respect for others and the environment, as well as the required Covid hygiene rules.

After introduction to and use of the *Phytophthora* boot cleaning station, the group set out on a walk.

Students took it in turns to read the Twertup Nature Walk self-guided brochure aloud to their peers and attempted to pronounce the difficult scientific names.

The experience promoted a lot of discussion and questions about the environment. Finishing the walk at the quarry provided the opportunity to talk about the spongolite, fossils and history of the area.

In spite of the rain and drizzle continuing on Thursday, everyone completed all planned activities:

- the Horrie and Dorrie Walk trail, and looking through a telescope

- snake bite First Aid lesson
- Art activities including etchings of plant items, leaf drawings and clay fossil imprints
- visit from Ranger Josh Woods
- Zumba action and limbo comp
- photography lesson
- quiz on camp experiences and information learnt, and
- a night walk with torches.

Camp was very wet on Friday morning as the drizzle continued! The sun had not appeared for the entire 3 days.

The group left in good time for the return trip to allow for muddy and slippery roads. The clay patches on the Twertup track were like ice-skating rinks, and two of the vehicles slid off in to the ditch!

So all passengers walked alongside the track, past the worst clay patch, while the camp "Dad" saved the day and heroically towed the vehicles through the slippery mess. It was a great relief to be back on track again!

As the school siren sounded at 3pm that day, the troupe of muddy vehicles and wet weary campers, arrived back at Bremer Bay.

Despite all the very enjoyable, worthwhile, educational activities experienced, the most exciting and memorable event of the camp was the exit on the muddy Twertup track.



First stop in Fitzgerald River National Park: Bremer Bay students



Dieback prevention at Twertup: students getting ready for a bush walk.



Drizzle at the quarry

A PARK UNDER STRESS

BY BILL THOMPSON

Further to a "Snapshot of a park in pain" in our last newsletter, I can report that large areas of the Fitzgerald River National park are under considerable stress from drought. Driving to Point Ann you can easily be fooled into thinking that all is well, however a walk along the Mamang track from Point Ann to Point Charles will soon change your mind. Some of the more iconic species are suffering the most, in particular, *Hakea victoria*, *Banksia media* and *B. nutans*.

B. nutans is an important bridging species for honey possums as it is the main nectar producing food plant during summer (Wooller R. & Wooller S. 2012 *Sugar and Sand: the world of the honey possum*). I estimate that well over 50% of this species has died. I have an unproven theory from observations, that seed shed from dying plants caused through either old age, stress or disease, are not viable, so unless there are viable seeds in the soil from previous years, then these species may disappear from the landscape. So the park needs all the friends it can get.



Right: Ron and Sue Wooller's book 'Sugar and Sand: the world of the honey possum' – as mentioned in Bill's article. Definitely worth reading if you would like to learn more about these unique creatures [Ed.]



Left and bottom: *Banksia nutans*, an important food plant for honey possums, succumbing to drought near Pt. Ann. Photos: Libby Sandiford



UPCOMING EVENTS

19th and 20th June 2021

Members' Weekend

2nd and 3rd October 2021

Twertup Open Days

THE COTTAGE IN A WILDERNESS

Steve Janicke's documentary about the Twertup Field Studies Centre is on YouTube! It's not accessible to the general public, so please email admin@fitzgeraldfriends.org.au to receive your code link to view it.

Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park Inc.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING PROXY FORM

I, _____

being a full member of Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park, hereby appoint

of (address) _____

to vote for me and on my behalf at the Annual General Meeting to be held on 13th March 2021.

Signature _____

Date _____



Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park Inc.

NOMINATION FOR MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEE

[Associations Incorporation Act]

I, _____

of (address) _____

(email Address) _____

hereby nominate (name of nominee)

for membership of the Committee of Friends of the Fitzgerald River National Park (Inc.)

Seconded by

Nominee eligibility statement:

I declare I am eligible for membership of the Committee *[see footnote below]*

Signature _____

Date: _____

Note: Under the Associations Incorporation Act a person is excluded from being on the committee (without special approval by the Commissioner for Consumer Protection) if they:

- are bankrupt or their affairs are under insolvency laws;
- have been convicted of an indictable offence in relation to the formation or management of a body corporate in the last 5 years;
- have been convicted of an offence involving fraud or dishonesty punishable by at least 3 months imprisonment in the last 5 years;
- have been convicted of an offence under the Act, where a person has allowed an association to operate while insolvent in the last 5 years.

Please return your completed form to

Po Box 199, Ravensthorpe 6346 OR

admin@fitzgeraldfriends.org.au

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