



# Friends of Ferguson Park



Newsletter No. 112 March 2015

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**Annual Memberships are due 1<sup>st</sup> January each year payable to President/Treasurer, Geoffrey Bishop.**

**Any memberships not current should be forwarded to the above ASAP. Please ask if you are unsure of your credit status!**

**Park Working Bees**  
First Sunday of month  
10am, Main Gate,  
Hallett Road  
Stonyfell

**Park Working Bee**  
Dates 2015

4 January  
1 February  
1 March  
5 April  
3 May  
7 June  
5 July  
2 August  
6 September  
4 October  
1 November  
6 December

## Ferguson Update

### AGM Report

Our AGM was held on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2015 at Martin and Wendy Percy's home at Clarence Gardens.

The following persons were elected as officeholders and convenors –

- President - Geoffrey Bishop
- Vice-President – James Swanson
- Secretary – Wendy Percy
- Grants Convener/Treasurer - Geoffrey Bishop
- OH&S Co-ordinator – Geoffrey Bishop; First Aid – Wendy Percy
- Newsletter Co-ordinator – Sarah Telfer

Thank you to members for being willing to continue in these roles for our group, and thanks for their input over the past year.

Other business covered included –

- (1) **Membership fees** remain unchanged; fees now due for the year 2015
- (2) **Work Plan for 2015** was circulated; work done in 2014 is also indicated in the document. Please pass any suggestions for our work's programme to Geoffrey for inclusion.
- (3) **World Environment Day planting** – adjacent to the new boundary fence with St Peters College crèche. Weed control will probably be necessary when autumn rains come. Seed has been supplied to a grower.
- (4) **Stonyfell Creek Restoration** – Ranger Amy Anderson updated the group on the call for tenders for work at the eastern end of the creek. Once quotes are in, we will need to decide which sections of the work we can afford to undertake. Our thanks to Amy for co-ordinating this process.
- (5) **Fox control** – fox activity continues within the park. Control methods in an urban park are limited by risk factors. Suggested that we close off all dens as a deterrent.
- (6) **Financial report and grants** – most expenditure during the year has been from our NRM grants and not our reserves. A DEWNR Volunteer Support Grant was received in February for our revegetation work on Stonyfell Creek (\$800). Amy has spoken with City of Burnside nursery regarding suitable plants apart from what is being grown from seed we have collected.
- (7) **President's Report** – our activities over the past year have been very similar to previous years, aided by our Work Plan. Points to mention include:

(a) continuing with the Stonyfell Creek Project and seeking contracts to best spend the remaining funds. Getting quotes from appropriate contractors has not been easy. Replanting on the sites already done has been difficult owing to the dry conditions, although the plantings of *Cyperus* in the watercourse have been most successful;

(b) strategic weed control either targeting particular species or areas of the park has been rewarding; and

(c) identifying other weeds that need tackling in season, e.g. Ixia and Rice Millet.

**Replacement trees** – Doug Nicholas suggested we replant some tree species along the Marble Terrace boundary which is very bare after the non-native trees have either died or been removed. He is also caring for trees that have naturally regenerated, including the Native Apricot seedlings/root suckers in the NW corner.

Our thanks to Martin and Wendy for hosting the meeting and to members for bringing food for all to share.

**Geoffrey Bishop**  
**President**

### Stonyfell Creek Restoration Project

Quotations have been sought and received by our Ranger, Amy Anderson, for the erosion control works which ideally will be undertaken this year while the creek bed is dry. These works include the installation of log drop and pile drop weirs at several erosion heads and an alignment fence which would alleviate the bank scour threatening the stability a large tree on the right bank of the creek.

It is likely that with the money available to us presently that only a portion of the minor works will be able to be completed.

Watch this space for further developments!

### A Creek Remedy from the Past

Recently, whilst discussing the financial problems of Stonyfell Creek, we were reminded of a previous member some 12-15 years ago by name of Paddy, who worked for the Public Service He indicated he had access to various equipment and suggested that he could get a Caterpillar D8 14ft blade (3.5mtres) and fix it in no time! Fortunately or not we did not take him up on the offer! *Doug Nichols*

## Current Projects

### PROJECT 100 TREES

As you know we have been experiencing a continuous drought since 2002 -2003, known in some circles as the Millenium Drought. This has affected our own area at Stonyfell in different ways, as outlined below.

1. A number of trees (all varieties) have fallen over due to the soil drying and contracting and the roots losing their grip. Naturally, tree roots vary; some are shallow and therefore the trees fall quite easily because of the dry soil. Others have a good root structure but have a tall, heavy and uneven canopy which increases the pressure on the roots.
2. Dryness and wind stress the boughs causing branches to fall contributing to unevenness in the canopy and overbalancing of the tree. A lot of our eucalypts are standing tall and straight but stripped of growth and do not look healthy.
3. Seeds falling to the ground either do not germinate or the lack of rain kills off seedlings when they reach 10-15cm during the summer. Around 2006, following a very dry period, some Acacias were watered each month for six months. Now these are 3-4 metres high and healthy. They are just south of the Hallett Road gates.

### Part 1 – Project 20 Trees

These trees are in an area from the Hallett Road gates to the creek steps. The object of Project 20 is to water 20 areas every seven days or so where seedlings which have germinated during the winters of 2013-2014.

Stakes have been placed in these areas for visibility and reference. These include approximately 18 Native Pines, 27 Aacacias and one SA Blue Gum. The Eucalypts do not germinate easily in this part of the Park as the soil below the steps is of a clay/gravel type. Carted water permitting, everything within the 20 areas receives a drink. If the plants get through to April/May they can probably look after themselves and we will look for another 20+ after the winter. *It is essential we retain as many seedlings as possible for the benefit of the Park.*

*Doug Nicholas*

## Extra items of interest

### The blue banded bees in Ferguson Park

If you come to Ferguson Park in January or February when the grass is dry and the weeds and flowers of springtime are long gone you will not see much insect life. You may notice small ants on the ground, meat ants leaving and returning to their mounds or every now and then a fly or a spider wasp on tree trunks. Amongst the butterflies the Cabbage White and the Common Brown are likely to be encountered. If the Claspig Goodenia or the Christmas Bush is still flowering you also may see the ubiquitous honey bee collecting pollen and nectar.

There are, however, a range of native solitary bees active which easily escape the attention of the visitor. They betray their presence by small holes in flat bare hard baked ground on the paths through the Park. The holes are the entrances to the burrows of these bees. Most of them are much smaller than the honey bee, but there are a few species of these burrowing bees which reach the size of the honey bee or even surpass it. Amongst these are the blue banded bees (*Amegilla spp.*), which occur across Australia during summer (25 spp). They are aptly named because of the bluish furry bands around their black abdomens, 5 in the males, 4 in the females.

To see the female banded bees in action you have to rely on good luck. They do not nest in flat bare ground but prefer sloping terrain along the banks of paths or waterways to dig their burrows. By chance you might see one visiting a *Goodenia* flower or returning to her nest, the hind legs powdered with pollen. Should you decide to spend some time at the nesting site you discovered, you also might notice a second female attending her burrow in the vicinity or a third one or fourth one. Clearly there is a tendency in the females to breed in loose associations.

The males, which are smaller than the females, are even more elusive than the females though they also may visit flowering bushes. At dusk, however, they assemble in groups of several individuals on plant stems, preferably of dry native grasses, to spend the night there. Again luck must be on the side of the observer to stumble on such a spot, which may be far away from the nests of the females. Where the first male settles by grasping the plant stem with the mandibles, raising his abdomen and rubbing in a characteristic way the legs against each other, a second one is likely to follow, then a third one, while the second one might leave only to return later after a fourth one has in the meantime occupied his empty "seat". This process of choosing a particular location, leaving it, returning to it only to abandon it again to look elsewhere for an appropriate roost continues for some minutes and is interesting and confusing at the same time as more and more males turn up. They also interact by bumping into each other or defending their roost by stretching out their hind legs. Eventually numerous bees will settle on the same grass which bends under the weight of its occupants (see photograph). To witness this unusual behaviour of the males lining up at more or less regular intervals on a small twig or grass is an enjoyable experience for any naturalist. It will be displayed night after night at the same grass or plant stem. If the night is stormy the bees will choose a shorter and stronger plant stem for roosting. The females of our species in the Park are most likely spending the night in their burrows. In Queensland, however, female banded bees have been observed clustering together at night in the same way as the male banded bees do in Ferguson Park.

Interestingly, another member of the banded bees, *Amegilla dawsoni*, has become known to a wider audience by David Attenborough's BBC documentary "Life". Dawson's bee lives in the clay pans of Western Australia and is one of the biggest bees in the world (up to 2.5 cm). The males of this species fight each other to the death over mating access to the females.

There is an increasing interest in blue banded bees amongst gardeners and horticulturalists because of their ability to buzz-pollinate such important plants as tomatoes. By vibrating their wings powerfully they can reach a frequency which triggers the release of pollen from the flowers, an important aid to self-pollinating plants.

Acknowledgment: I am indebted to Colin Harris who reviewed the above text, corrected mistakes and contributed a few lines about buzz-pollination.

*Gerhard Weber*



**Blue banded bees spending the night on native grass in Ferguson Park**