Balcanoona Re-Veg June 2025 Report

Introduction:

The support by friends attending the Fish Monitoring field trip was much valued in particular their work checking, watering and maintaining the existing plantings, and undertaking an audit of items in our shed. Thanks

Eleven friends were involved in a range of re-veg activities: Lynne & Bill, Barbara & Peter, Jill, Heather, Chris & Greg, Marg & Richard, and Roger. Chris & Greg focused on plant identification and photos for the Plant Booklet. Rangers Sian and Jesse provided valuable ongoing support and assistance.

Plantings:

Around 90 tube stocks were planted out propagated by friends Lynne, Nicki, Barbara, Martin, Roger and Ron at Copley that were collected on our way up. Excess plants were either given to Sian for planting at Weetootla Campground, or returned to Adelaide for further growth before the August trip.

The naming of the revegetation areas was revised lining up with the taps on the tap manifold. This will assist people involved in future visits to identify specific areas for watering.

The major planting effort was in Area 4, (photo below) north of the Historic SQ concrete base, which included some replacement plantings & new plantings using holes previously dug by Sian.

Many of the Balcanoona Wattles (photo below) were planted out in May 2024 south of the Historic SQ slab are doing well and revealing their characteristic shape, yet some have been knocked about by kangaroos.

We also focused on Area 3 (the Mound area) replacing some lost plants and using vacant holes. This area continues to be tough on plants, maybe due to the road fill introduced earlier.
Some replacement planting occurred in Area 7 (carpark area), again a tough area for plants due to introduced soil material

Maintenance and Irrigation:

All drippers in all areas were adjusted and plants given a good watering. After adjusting drippers, they often quickly block up again giving a much-reduced flow. A few drippers were replaced. With sufficient new and cleaned drippers, one option would be, Area by Area, to replace all dripper heads with new or cleaned heads. The clogged dripper heads can be soaked overnight using a vinegar solution. This technique was used last year. The August trip, prior to the long hot summer, would be the good time for this replacement task.

Seed and plant material collection:

Only limited seed collection and plant material collection was undertaken. The August trip is expected to include more substantial collecting.

Plant identification and documentation:

Chris & Greg with other friends continued collecting and analysing plant material from the Park adding to the existing list for the plant booklet. Heather commenced making a list of understory plants which is intended to inform our seed collection effort later in the year.

Other matters:

Chris's fall: resulted in a broken wrist and being taken to Port Augusta Hospital by the Flying Doctor. Ranger Jesse provided valuable first aid assistance and support to Chris and kept the team informed of developments. Incident Reporting was undertaken.
Tyre problems: Lynne and Bill had a slow leak puncture. Roger a busted tyre. Both tyres were repaired/ replaced at Arkaroola.

Gravel path to Trail Head: the mounds of rubble deposited by the rangers were raked out forming a trail; about half was completed on this trip. The picture shows the handiwork of Richard and Bill.

Stock take and additional items identified: These include additional white buckets, a lighter weight crowbar; a strong hoe good for mounding; extra hand trowels; extra secateurs; extra metal mallet; a basic stapler for making guards; bright flagging tape to be tied onto all hand tools to avoid loss.

Plant damage by Kangaroos: along the several kangaroo paths running East West through the re-veg areas, kangaroos have damaged eucalypts in particular Curly Mallees, some have been severely damaged. The kangaroos appear not to eat the leaves and branches, rather seem to give the plants a jolly good boxing. Plants not on these paths are developing very well unhindered.

One option could be to firmly stake some star droppers, say three, around each of the affected plants. This might deter the kangaroos or reduce the amount of damage.

Area 8 (new area, near Visitors Centre): a more limited area for planting was staked out. Holes are expected to be dug by the rangers using their backhoe in readiness for the August trip.

Roger Mathers, Balcanoona Re Veg Coordinator
(Pictures courtesy of Chris Kirby]

2025 WORKING BEES

The Friends have full program again this year with three working bees planned during the coming months –

- **Weetootla** – **9-16 Sept.** Contact Martin (m.caon56@gmail.com) to express your interest.
- **Balcanoona** – **17-24 Aug.** Contact Roger (roger_mathers@yahoo.com) to express your interest. (Please note there is an underscore _ between roger and mathers)
- **Idninha – First week of Sept.** Final date TBC. Email Dennis (dennisjury1@gmail.com) to join the team.

Fish & Water monitoring visit to Balcanoona: 23-30 April 2025
Trip Leader's Report

Wednesday 23rd April

Seven Members assembled at Balcanoona (Martin, Wayne, Libby, Annette, Helen, Mark & Georgia). Dennis arrived on Friday for 3 days, and Simon & Genevieve arrived on Monday for a separate visit with 2 friends. Martin visited the Copley Community Garden and Ron at Copley on the way in for a discussion and gave Ron a *Hakea* to plant.

Not surprisingly, the plantings around Balcanoona have grown taller. Most people were able to find the time to walk to the lookout point above Balcanoona to admire the view and our directional marker.

Urti happily growing in area 1

Ranger Bec (previously from Glenthorne NP) was at Balcanoona for a familiarising visit to the Park when we arrived. She is updating the Vulkathunha Park Management Plan & spoke to our group about the process during our briefing meeting on Wednesday evening. We will get to comment on the final draft.

Thursday 24th April. The group walked into Yuwanhinya Spring passing through Hell's Gate – which was dry – and visiting site W4 along the way. W4 had water and frogs, but no fish. At site Y2 we pulled out 5 Wild Tobacco trees. We sampled the water at the spring head & at Y2 **& caught 60 fish** in total (3 were ~8cm and 1 was 10.5cm in Total Length). We serviced the trail camera there and later found that it was pointed too high. We will tilt it down at the next visit.

Friday 25th April. The Weetootla Spring was visited, walking in from upstream and was much the same as in Sept 2024. We attempted to measure the water temperature every 20m from the springhead, but ran into dry creek bed at 40 to 100m from the springhead. 42 fish were caught at the SH including one of 12.5cm TL which is almost at their maximum size.

The trail cameras at the SH and at the "helicopter site" were serviced. Note that the "horizontal tree" adjacent to the walking trail (ie the fallen tree trunk with branches now growing vertically from the horizontal trunk), points directly to a convenient creek crossing to service the camera.

It was noticed that there is a Tobacco Tree infestation 40-50m from the Helicopter trail camera that should be re-visited as many were too stout to pull out. They need to be sawn off and the stump swabbed. Horehound is also reappearing.

The trail camera above the Lovely Pool is better accessed by climbing the hill via the gully to the south of the camera and then traversing when the "tangled tree" is reached. There were no fish caught from the LP, presumably because birds have eaten them! But there were lots of invertebrates (eg notonectids), which also indicates an absence of fish. Another flood is required to move fish into the pool. In total **we caught 59 fish** at Weetootla. On Friday evening we were treated to a spectacular lightning show to our south, but too far away to hear thunder. Perhaps it was over Ikara NP.

Saturday 26th April. From about 7:30am a gentle rain fell at Balcanoona – something that I have never seen at Balcanoona before! However it was localised as it did not reach to Arkaroola and merely settled the dust.

Misty rain at Balcanoona

We drove to the Nepouie Creek and walked into the spring head. Again, the conditions of the creek were similar those in Sept 2024 - that is, lots of *Typha* reed making access to the water with dip nets and our regular sampling sites, difficult. Nevertheless **we caught 124 fish** and saw many more.

Between our Nepouie sites of N3 and N4 is the "Big Pool" - the last pool which has a good stream of water flowing into it. It is about 50m long and 15m wide and up to 2m deep, contains fish and is overhung by Gum trees. It seems to me a poor habitat for fish as there is no floating algae nor fringing *Typha*. Hence it appears to be susceptible to predation by birds. Yet the fish persist there!

Left: Mark measuring water temperature after bulldozing into the *Typha* reeds.

Balcanoona kitchen's rainwater tap had an Electrical Conductivity (EC) reading of 0.323mS/cm (very drinkable).
Balcanoona kitchen's bore water tap had an EC reading of 2.04mS/cm.
And for comparison: Weetootla spring head had an EC reading of 1.293mS/cm.
While Nepouie spring head had an EC reading of 2.16mS/cm

Left: Fish suspended in the water of the Big Pool at Nepouie.

Sunday 27th April. Sunday morning we drove to Munda (Lake Frome) to service the cameras which we were once again able to find (For Martin's benefit the GPS reading is: (54J 03 67758; UTM 66 10663). Immediately upon walking onto the "lake", Wayne spotted a Lake Eyre Dragon (*Ctenophorus maculosis*).
Monday 28th April. The bushwalk for the trip was along the Italowie Creek bed starting from its intersection with the Mt McKinlay Spring vehicle track. After unlocking the gate, our party of 4 drove the challenging 4WD track to the junction with the Creek. We walked into the North Branch and then into Wildflower Creek where we stopped at "2 Gums" for lunch. This is a pristine arid lands Creek and a possible future site for trail cameras. On the "road" leading away from Grindell's Hut we passed the 6 vehicle convoy of Rangers (including Rob Brandle & Tahlia Moyle) arriving at Grindell's Hut for Quoll trapping. Early the next morning 3 Rangers came to Balcanoona to borrow the rifle to dispatch a feral cat lured into a cage trap!
Tuesday 29th April. All 7 of us travelled to Arkaroola to meet Dougie the Gardener and had a tour of the garden. We presented him with 42 plants. We subsequently were able to plant 20 of them into the ground along existing watering lines. Their growth will be followed by us with great interest. Dinner that night was in the restaurant and we were joined by Ranger Jesse.
Wednesday 30th April. Bump out and travel home. Martin stopped at Copley Quandong Café for breakfast and to give a bundle of 50 bird brochures to the Café which were very much appreciated.

Martin Caon, May 2, 2025

Looking for a water chemistry Leader (or two), to analyse water samples.

Ray Hickman, after many years in the role and having conceived of the project, purchased the measuring devices, doing the analysis, and writing the article (see the publications page on our website), has decided to retire from his water chemistry analysis role. Consequently we need a keen volunteer (or two) from the Friends to take the lead role in water analysis. The role involves learning about the devices, storing the devices at their home and making the measurements in the field and on water samples returned to Adelaide.

In the field (commencing in September 2025), the WC Leader would ideally be present to calibrate the instruments and be responsible for on-site measurements and collecting water samples for analysis back in "the Lab" (Adelaide).

Ray is very happy to smooth the transition by instructing the candidate(s). Please send your expressions of interest to Martin ASAP - (m.caon56@gmail.com)

Idninha Preservation Project work visit 12-17 May 2025
Trip Leader's Report

Monday May 12. Four Friends (Russell Chaffey, Mal Kirkham, Mike Tanner, Dennis Jury) and one guest (Rob Duncan - friend of Russell's) travelled to Idninha arriving over the course of the day.

On assessment of camping options in the nearby creeks, around the building or at Mainwater Well campground (a 15 minute drive away) it was decided to set up on some flat terraces behind the building. We were able to utilise the building for storage and to set up our camp kitchen on the Western verandah providing a convenient hard surface under cover.

Ranger Jessie Evans called past on Tuesday morning to drop off a number of ladders, a generator, fuel and extension cables, some drums of water and various implements which were gratefully received.

Work Activities. Over the following 4½ days we worked through a series of tasks covering most of the aims for the first visit set out in the project plan.

Gables

- Old, broken sheets of fibro and Masonite removed
- Supporting timbers installed
- New Hardiflex sheeting cut to size and attached
- Covering battens installed
- Old and new sheets and timber surrounds painted

Roof

- Nails hammered back down and Tec Screws added where needed to secure corrugated iron sheets
- Some additional securing of sheets with wire needed where top of fascia board was unsuitable for nails or screws

Gutters

- Existing brackets reattached where they had pulled away from fascia board
- Additional brackets added in where missing or extra support needed
- All brackets tightened over lip of gutter to lift front edge higher
- Tec Screws used to secure back side of gutter to fascia board for additional strength
- Additional downpipe added in on NW corner where an old tank stand may allow for a second rainwater tank to be installed in the future

Ceilings

- Repairs to ceiling in kitchen and lounge rooms
- Broken/missing Masonite sheeting removed/replaced
- Additional timbers added in to ceiling beams where needed for support
- Battens used to cover gaps (some additional finishing work to be done)

Painting

- Fascia boards on main roof scraped back then painted
- Fascia boards on verandah painted (incomplete)
- Verandah posts painted

Rooms

- Swept out to remove animal dung and accumulated dust
- Wasp nests removed

Measurements

- All external windows and door openings measured in preparation for
- Repair/replacement.

Friday May 16

In the afternoon we went for a drive out on the track that ultimately leads to Arkaroola to visit the ruins of Old Illinawortina sheep station and well.

Saturday May 17

We decamped and went our separate ways during the course of Saturday

Considerations and Tasks for Future Work
For our next visit in the first week of September there will be a wide range of potential activities to be undertaken.

We will also include some time for the opportunity to explore this remote and interesting part of the park.

Windows

- Repair/renovation of existing sash windows
- The window frames and sash windows are mostly in good condition opening the possibility to renovate rather than replacement
- Suggestion is to refit with Perspex instead of glass
- Aim to achieve fully opening sash cord window for bottom half of each window
- Upper pane fixed either using existing window sash or a constructed timber surround to fit within existing window frame
- Fix lightweight screens to bottom half of window to allow ventilation when window is open
- Fit security bars over bottom half of window

Doors

- Source second hand external doors from salvage
- Fit into existing door frames following repair/reconstruction where needed
- Install security screens/bars

Internal

- Repair ceilings, battens and scotia as required
- Clean walls, fill cracks
- Paint walls and ceilings
- Consider installing doorway between western and eastern sections of building (aligns with large crack in wall in bedroom)

Roof/Guttering

- Install rainwater tank on old tank stand on NW corner of building
- Consider need for additional downpipes in remaining corners
- Install guttering or flashing on main roof to preserve fascia boards
- Cap for chimney
- Repair flashing around base of chimney
- Flashing over covering timber on gables
- Fit 90 mm PVC pipe to rainwater overflow to direct water flow away from building
- Fit 150 mm corrugated iron strips to end of roof sheets to take water to centre of gutter

Dennis Jury, May 25, 2025

Friends of Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park bestows its first Honorary Life Membership on

Graeme Oats - 21 March 2025

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak about Graeme tonight on this occasion of him being awarded life membership. His role in our Friends Group goes back 24 years, to the group's initial establishment in 2001. His connection with Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges goes back further than that. Back at least to the 1980s.

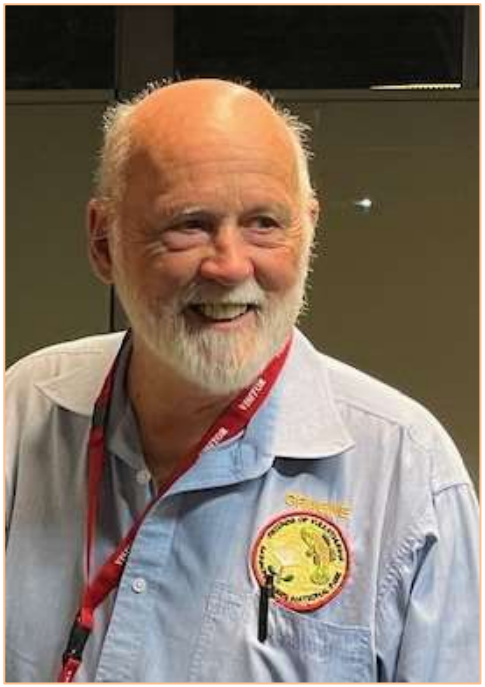
In its early years the group was not able to establish ongoing activities and I think it is fair to say that Graeme kept the group on Life Support until 2013 when it received a bequest from the estate of Warren Bonython. Graeme's long association with Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges allowed him to contact sufficient people, sharing an interest in the ranges, to have about 30 of them attend a meeting in March 2015 to consider whether it was worth having another go at getting the group active. This meeting set our Friends Group on the path leading to what it has become today. Something we all take pride in.

Graeme has been a key contributor to the effort that has seen our Group move from a state of inactivity and uncertainty to its present status as a fully incorporated body with a convincing set of activities underway and completed.

Oocaboolina outstation, which was at risk of succumbing to the elements a few years ago, has now been rendered safe and secure as a result of a project managed and led by Graeme with the support of a dedicated group of members. Most recently he has been involved in the installation of a cairn and toposcope on the high point of the Ridge Walk near Balcanoona. Fittingly, this acknowledges Warren Bonython's part in the history of our group. All the while Graeme has also served as Treasurer.

Graeme, please accept this certificate of Life Membership along with the sincere thanks of the entire group.

Ray Hickman



“Gammon Ranges” Exclosures

An "exclosure" refers to a limited area where unwanted browsing animals, like kangaroos, goats or rabbits, are excluded, often through fencing (fig 1), to allow for the regeneration of native vegetation; to study the effects of grazing; or to protect significant plant species. Several exclosures have been built in the Vulkathunha NP.

Exclosure EX-4559 was constructed in 1995 to protect ***Swainsona tephrotricha*** (see fig 2). They are adjacent to west side of road to Grindell’s Hut and approximately 3.5 km north of the Hut. There are two of them: one to exclude all herbivores (goats, rabbits & kangaroos) and one to allow access to rabbits.

Swainsona tephrotricha is considered a nationally “rare” species. It is also known as Ashy-Haired Swainson-Pea, a pea plant closely related to (Sturt’s) Desert Pea. When the Friends inspected the exclosure in September 2023 we *S. tephrotricha* flowering inside and outside of exclosure. Furthermore, while walking on the Gibber Plain (south of Grindell’s Hut) after leaving the vehicle track that leads south towards Mt McKinlay Spring, then walking west on the area north of Red Hill, we found flowering *S. tephrotricha* to be common.

Fig 1: The exclosure fence

Fig 2: *S. tephrotricha* in flower (Sept 2023)

Exclosures EX 4560 were fenced in Dec 1992 to protect ***Acacia araneosa***. They are located alongside the west side of walking trail, 3.2km from Nudlamutana Hut towards Mt Warren

Hastings. *A. araneosa* is also known as Spidery Wattle or Balcanoona Wattle. The plant has wire-thin phyllodes (leaves) and hence little canopy so is difficult to photograph (fig 3). It is considered a nationally "vulnerable" species.

One of the exclosures is intended to exclude all herbivores and one to allow access to rabbits. When the friends inspected the exclosures in May 2023 we found no (or few) *A. araneosa* inside. However they were common on both sides of the walking track amongst *Eucalyptus gillii* and indeed growing in the walking track. One could not walk the track without pushing past specimens that were growing there (fig 4). The largest specimen that we found had a trunk that was 5cm in diameter and 5m tall. The plants stopped abruptly at the end of the exclosure. *A. araneosa* again occurred on the track as it approached Arkaroola Village. These specimens were identified by PVC pipe markers. We conclude that *A. araneosa* have a restricted range but are locally common. Note that there is a small grove of *A. araneosa* growing at Arkaroola Village near Greenwood Lodge and a planting of a dozen or so (planted by The Friends) at Balcanoona Headquarters, opposite the pubic showers.

Fig 3: Angelo with a large specimen of *Acacia araneosa* (May 2023). *We are adjacent to the exclosure*

Fig 4: *Acacia araneosa* growing in the track.

Martin Caon, 25 March 2025

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