

April 2016



Biddip



Newsletter of the Toodyay Friends of the River

Volume 10, Issue 1



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*The Toodyay Friends of the River
are grateful to the Wheatbelt NRM
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April 2016 newsletter*



wheatbelt
natural resource
management

Presidents message by Robyn Taylor

WELCOME TO our first issue of *Biddip* for 2016.

This year the Avon is looking great after heavy rains in the catchment followed by recent soft soaking drizzle. And the birds are loving it. The spoonbills probably preferred the lower river level that made dinner easy to catch, but now we have increasing numbers of ducks, herons, cormorants, egrets, and several pelicans have been calling in. Is it too much to hope they are actually finding fish for supper? Its also music to our ears to hear the frogs' orchestral concerts along the river at night.

It was a good decision to have our planning meeting in December so we could have a TFOR commitment-free month in January. We met in Duidgee Park for a BBQ breakfast, followed by Vice President Sarah and Project Officer Greg leading the discussion about projects for 2016. An exciting monthly program was finalized at the following Management Committee meeting that combined working bees with excursions and a big community project at Millards Pool.

At our first working bee in February we worked on the Duidgee Park entrance section of the John Pyle Walk. This is also a part of the Bilya Walk Track that leads to the caravan park. In a short time, we had removed most of the weeds and cleared the watercourse of fallen debris. The previous Sunday I followed this watercourse to find where it might start. Heavy rains in January had brought down a load of water and the flattened vegetation was a give-away. The watercourse is in fact an unnamed brook that once flowed from a property above Folewood Road then down through the historic 'Cascades' property, apparently named for what may have once been a major feature (similar to what can be seen at Pelham Reserve in a good season), before it continued its flow through the Watkins property. The flow eventually made its way under the railway embankment through large storm water pipes into Duidgee Park. Some years ago the then owner of the property above 'Cascades' had illegally dammed the spring that fed into the brook. The brook is now dry to the detriment of riparian vegetation that it once supported. The map in the Toodyay directory shows this brook as more or less equivalent to Pelham Brook, that also ends up flowing through storm water pipes before entering the Avon behind St Stephen's church.

One of our intentions is to work with members of the Toodyay Historical Society to draw attention to Pelham Brook and investigate ways in which we can provide interpretation about how this historic watercourse once flowed through the old convict hiring depot. There are many places along the river where the two societies have a common interest, not least of which are Millards Pool and Nardie Cemetery in the upstream section of the Bilya Walk Track.

This year, in conjunction with Greening Australia, we are looking forward to a major biodiversity revegetation project that will take place along the south bank of Millards Pool. There is lots of work to do along the Avon, and it is gratifying to know there are other groups and organisations in the region who are equally passionate about its health and restoration.

THE HUMMING FROG



Rebecca found by torch light a beautiful burrowing frog of 45mm It is a robust, short-limbed animal with no webbing of the hands and partial webbing of the toes.

It is blackish-brown, greenish or maybe pale yellow in colour with irregular pale or dark patches and often with a narrow red or white stripe from the snout, over the head and down its back.

It is found in clay or loam soils and breeds between May and July in areas temporarily wet; its eggs are laid in a long string.

The call of the Humming Frog is a low-pitched trill or hum and is heard over a short distance only.

Cover and above photo: *Humming Frog*

Rebecca Meegan-Lowe

TOODYAY TIDY TOWNS NATIONAL AWARDS

by Beth Frayne

TOODYAY TURNED IT ON for Australian Tidy Towns awards on Friday 18 March when the Western Australian Governor, the Hon. Mrs Kerry Sanderson AO, and 150 guests from all over Australia joined Toodyay locals, including Toodyay Friends of the River (TFOR) members, in the Memorial Hall to see Tasmanian town Triabunna win the overall competition and take out the 2016 National Tidy Town Award at a gala dinner. Triabunna is an East Coast fishing and timber town brimming with innovative ideas to keep its community prospering, for which it also won the Environmental Sustainability award.

This prestigious event culminated months of local planning by 2015 National Champion, Toodyay, coordinated by the Keep Australian Beautiful National Association (KABNA) and major event sponsor the Shire of Toodyay, with the assistance of Toodyay Tidy Town (TTT) Chair Greg Warburton and the Committee.

The lead up to the event was frenetic to put it mildly. Volunteers managed to keep local roads litter-free, picking up over 100 bags along 80kms of roadside. This, combined with a concerted effort by Adopt-a-Spot groups, ensured that our interstate delegates were given a litter-free welcome to Australia's Tidiest Town.

A morning bus tour showcased the excellent projects which contributed to Toodyay's win last year, taking in the sights of West Toodyay, Majestic Heights, and Millard's Pool on the Avon River. A stop at Pelham Lookout allowed passengers time to enjoy the views and cool refreshments offered in KABWA Keep Cups. A foray down Railway Road, via the Community Depot, ended in a talk by staff at Toodyay's impressive Waste Transfer Station, which was augmented by a BinSpring product presentation by Western Australian inventors and event sponsor, the Sherrards.

Having been asked to devise the Award's Dinner table centre pieces and also a 'Favour', the Committee decided to reflect aspects of the Toodyay landscape, with the Favour being a scroll describing these aspects, and enclosing a small piece of our Toodyay Stone. Greg Warburton wrote the words for the scroll, with historical details supplied by our local historians. The scroll message was as follows:

"TOODYAY STONE is an ancient quartzite unique to the area. Its sparkling mica, varied colours and flagstone form make it sought after by stonemasons and landscapers. It features in gardens and on buildings across Australia and overseas. This stone forms the pillars of Toodyay's entry statement.

ACORN BANKSIA (*Banksia prionotes*) represents the extraordinary biodiversity of Toodyay. The plant was first collected by Toodyay pioneer, explorer and botanist James Drummond (1787-1863). In spring, spectacular wildflower displays can be seen throughout the reserves, bushland areas and roadsides.

WATER and SAND symbolises our human connection to the Avon River. Ballardong people travelling through country would throw sand into the waters as a sign of respect to the Waugyl – their spirit ancestor and creator. Europeans established their towns and farms along the Avon and its incoming tributaries. Today, local conservationists work to address the many environmental threats to our waterways.

SANDALWOOD (*Santalum spicatum*) was an economic saviour for the struggling Swan River Colony in the 1840s. Now, it is grown locally providing increasingly important commercial products such as nuts and oil.

CANDLES shine a light for our communities as we strive for a sustainable future, where generations to come will value and respect our heritage and environment."

Greg Warburton led a walk along the Bilya Track on the Saturday after the TT Event. The Committee is currently preparing a submission for the 2016 State Awards, for just one category: Heritage and Culture, as Toodyay has never won this particular Tidy Towns Award in recent years. Lots of artistic ideas have been forthcoming at recent meetings.

*TOODYAY MEMORIAL HALL
NATIONAL TIDY TOWNS AWARD*



Above: The glittering Memorial Hall, with tables featuring the special centre pieces.

(Photo: Angie Roe, courtesy KAB National)

Fire and Flood in the River

by Greg Warburton



Left:

Jamie Norgate and Heather Frank from Coondle-Nunile Brigade attend a lightning strike fire in the river at Dumbarton

Photo:

Greg Warburton

A warning had come through for possible lightning strikes for Saturday 9th January. So, "firies" were on high alert as they are no strangers to responding to lightning strike fires. We all remember the multiple fires across the north of the shire started by a lightning storm a few years ago that had all units scrambling to keep up with the outbreaks. As predicted there were strikes but with some accompanying rain so we all breathed a collective sigh of relief as no serious ignitions occurred.

Later in the day a triple zero call came through for a fire in the river at Dumbarton. Having a keen interest in the river and knowing the fuel loads there I hi-tailed it out to the location. A good turnout of local brigades and private units were standing by waiting for instructions. Meanwhile, Rob Koch, our Community Emergency Services Manager, was trudging up and down the dry river bed in drizzling rain trying to locate the source of the smoke. It turned out to be a large Sheoak (*Casuarina obesa*) on fire, obviously struck by lightning and burning away merrily despite the rain. Once access was determined and with the help of the landholder a couple of light units diligently extinguished fire.

As I left the area I could see leaden storm clouds to the west over Salt Valley Road and by the time I got to Harper Brook Bridge the creek had broken its banks and was over the road. Debris had banked up at the bridge and water was spreading out across the revegetation site and Ted Godwin's paddocks. Down towards the river it was a sheet of swirling water.

The sheer volume and velocity of the flow made me worry about the Bilya Walk Track walk bridge over Harper Brook so I waded through turbulent, thigh deep water to get to Extracts Weir. Here, I couldn't believe the torrent of water gushing into the pool above the Weir while Harper Brook enters the river 200 metres downstream of it normally.

I struggled down to the bridge and saw that it was a comparatively modest flow and the bridge was uncompromised. It was a lesson as to how flood waters can behave - I never would have thought that Harper Brook would change its course so dramatically from its defined channel.

I must have looked incongruous arriving back at the vehicle in soaking wet fire clothes. Meanwhile, the Shire crew were out inspecting damage and had to close Salt Valley Road such was the effect of the down-pour and localised flooding. I will always remember my day of 'fire and flood' in our River.

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(See Page 6 for the 'flood')

FLOODWATERS IN HARPER BROOK



Photos: Greg Warburton

EXPLORING THE ALBANY AREA

by Greg Warburton

We have just spent a week camped on the Kalgan River kayaking, bike riding and walking the "Luke Pen Track" and generally exploring the Albany environs.

Enjoyed the 20 degree cooler weather (than Toodyay) while visiting the National ANZAC Centre, Lake Sepple bird walk with bird hide, Wychinnicup National Park, Cheynes Beach and Bald Island etc.

There were Ospreys and Sea eagles along with squadrons of Pelicans and other water birds.

Watched hang gliding and paragliding at Shelley Beach enjoyed a couple of pints at the pub.

However, could not find any indication that Albany is the State Tidy Towns winner and Emu Beach had nothing showing it is a "litter-free" suburb.

Even the Visitor centre staff didn't seem to know much about TT.

Hi-tea at the Vancouver Café was followed by New Year celebration among the Karri trees in Denmark.

Home to 44 degrees, a fire call, two days of leaf raking and an all-night emergency trip to the Vet for a certain little dog that decided to eat a rat bait! (he's doing OK) But it's good to be home.



HARPER BROOK REVEGETATION STAGE 1

by Rebecca Meegan-Lowe



*Above: Callie and Harry Beets
Photos: Wayne Clarke*

Ric and I recently walked past the TFOR Harper Brook rehabilitation site and we couldn't help but marvel at how wonderful it is looking, even in mid-summer. What a testament to the group's hard work and dedication!

So, to all members involved in that 2011 planting - and all the planning that would have preceded it - WELL DONE!

Photo below: Rebecca Meegan-Lowe



2016

NATIONAL TIDY TOWNS AWARD



Above: A walk along the Bilya Track

Below: Triabunna delegates at Pelham Lookout with Greg Warburton . (Photo: S. Kingston)



BURNS BROOK—ACTIVELY ERODING



Above: Burns Brook, connecting to remnant vegetation. (Photo: Greg Warburton)

Below: Banks along the brook are slumping (Photo: Wayne Clarke)



MEMBERS GALLERY



Left: Rufous Night-heron: Rebecca Meegan-Lowe

Right: Two turtles sunning near the Bird Hide: Wayne Clarke



MEMBERS GALLERY



Photo: Greg Warburton

River Water Testing Project

By Ric Lowe and Rebecca Meegan-Lowe

We are developing a water testing regime to monitor some important characteristics of Avon River flows through Toodyay.

Within the limited resources available to TFOR, the regime will be as consistent as possible with a previous far more comprehensive program of testing that was carried out by the Department of Water (DOW) for the years 2006, 2007, and 2008. In line with that former testing program, samples are being taken only when the river is flowing.

Four key tests (a subset of those used by DOW) have been chosen for the TFOR project: Total Nitrogen (TN), Total Phosphorus (TP), Total Dissolved Solids (TDS), and pH. These tests were selected because they provide useful indicators of the river's condition but do not require samples to be sent away for laboratory analysis and are not prohibitively expensive. TN and TP are being tested using dedicated colorimeter-based kits for which a standard volume of the sampled water is reacted with a test-specific chemical reagent. TDS and pH are being tested using a meter and appropriate electrodes.

At present, we are conducting a series of preliminary trials to evaluate and refine the testing approach. Samples are being taken from DOW site 615026 (Stirling Terrace). To date, four samples have been taken and tested (November 2015; January, February and April 2016). Two of these samples were obtained after somewhat atypical high rainfall events and the resultant flushing effect appears to be reflected in the test results. Further longer term sampling and testing will be required before considering any trends that may emerge from the data.

The resolution of the colorimeter tests being used for TFOR is necessarily lower than that of the laboratory testing employed in the former Department of Water program. Further, it is not possible for us to sample as widely or frequently as was done formerly. These considerations together with the range of variables that can affect the results mean that caution is needed in making comparisons between the two testing programs and in interpreting the results obtained. Nevertheless, preliminary indications are that the TFOR program will be capable of providing useful snapshots about the state of the river's water at the Toodyay site and allow broad monitoring of how it changes over time.

**Newsletter of the
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**WORKING FOR THE HEALTH OF THE
AVON RIVER**



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Photo: Greg Warburton

Above: Burns Brook Project. Running through an area ravaged by the 2009 bushfire, Burns Brook has become severely eroded. Large amounts of top soil - up to a metre in depth in some places - has become mobilised, and making its way to the Avon River.

In association with the landowners and Wheatbelt NRM, the Friends of the River will be revegetating the banks of the brook, and placing 'riffles' strategically to reduce water velocity (see also Page 9).