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Biddip

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Newsletter of the Toodyay Friends of the River

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The Toodyay Friends of the River are grateful to the Wheatbelt NRM for their support in producing the Biddip newsletter



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Presidents reflections by Sarah Dudley

AS 2018 draws to a close and the planning required to make Christmas memorable confronts us, we reflect on the fact that at this time of year our energy flow levels are usually at their lowest ebb. Children are weary at school, adults bravely do their best to remember everyone in the festive season, local shops state their closures over the holiday period - and TFOR has a well-earned rest from ten months of volunteering. Even the River Avon with its drying, still, muddy pools reflects this energy-sapping time.

However, December is also a time of reflection in relation to what has been achieved in 2018 and a sharing of hope as to what might be achieved in the future. A heartfelt 'thank you' to each and every TFOR volunteer, each of whom contributes in his/her unique way to the enrichment of the whole, for your contribution to the environment in 2018. We are a varied group with diverse talents, time availability and passions. There is room for us all.

The river needs us more than ever to advocate for it as TFOR strives to rectify its environmental decline. Let me highlight just a few of these perhaps lesser known detrimental contributing factors:

- thousands of tonnes of nutrient-rich farm fertilisers are known to be the main culprit, the excess dissolving in groundwater and ultimately being carried into the river - with well-publicised deleterious effects.
- effluent from sewerage systems reaching the river water adds to the problem. There are reports of NSW platypus populations containing 50% of a human dose of anti-depressants (Radio National 6/18) as well as fish changing their behaviour as a result of imbibing contraceptive hormones (Lund Univ. 2016).
- the use of non-selective insecticides, coupled with the challenges of climate change, have led to a global crash of Arthropod populations. Inevitably this affects our insectivorous bird life as they experience a loss of their food source. Flora also suffer deprivation as they lose their main plant pollination mechanism (Nature 2018).

Yet, despite all the challenges, Toodyay Friends of the River is a small, active group which is characterised by hope and optimism. Hope for an improved future. Optimism that an improvement to our river is possible and that change for the better is a realistic goal. There is only one person we can change - ourselves.

With this belief in our ability to promote change we venture into yet another new year. This is what unites us as a group of volunteers.

So, in conclusion, I wish you all, on behalf of all the hard working, behind-the-scenes Management Committee and Seed Orchard team, a hope-filled 2019 and a joyous refuelling, reflective festive season.

Seasons Greetings

A cautionary tale about a bobtails rescue *by Robyn Taylor*

AS everyone is aware the bobtails are coming out of hibernation and are on the move.

It was a recent Friday afternoon and the sun was getting low. I had completed some long overdue gardening jobs and debated whether to do one last chore and remove the build-up of duck weed on top of the garden pond. I could do it tomorrow, but I might as well do it now.

While scooping away the weed I disturbed the fountain pump, which made it lean over. Rolling up a sleeve and reaching down into depths to move some of the rocks that held the pump in place, a pale creamy object turned over on the bottom amongst the decaying debris.

As I brought it to the surface I realised it was a drowned bobtail. Only the light now reaching the bottom of the pond and the movement of water turning it over had revealed its creamy underbelly.

This was distressing. I held its body while thinking how to avoid such a tragedy in the future as this was the second time a bobby had ended up in the pond. The first one only had its nostrils above the water as it floated, probably too tired to paddle any more, and there was no way it could climb out.

Then a small toe moved. There was still a flicker of life, so I gently forced the mouth open and hung bobby upside down while massaging its sides. This was in the hope of expelling any water in the lungs. I am unfamiliar with bobtail anatomy, and it seemed a reasonable thing to do.

No water, but warming hands must have done the trick. An eye half opened and a bit more toe movement, but the body was totally rigid and cold. Meanwhile there were shouts to Richard to come and look but he more wisely decided to ring the Vets. It was late, and the clinic was due to close. Fortunately, we only live a few minutes away by car and off we went with bobby in a bucket.

‘Hmm, he doesn’t look good. The vets gone home but we can put him on a heat mat in the hope he survives. She can check him in the morning.’

The good news came with breakfast. Bobby was returned to his familiar surroundings, but in the fenced off area at the top of our block, well away from the pond and our curious bobtail sniffing kelpie. He certainly enjoyed his handful of breakfast strawberries.

We are still working on how to create a bobtail-friendly pond.



Left: A reward for nearly drowning? What can I do to ensure this first aid continues?

Photo: Robyn Taylor

Toodyay Recycled Regatta - 2018

by Jenny and Rev Peggy

FROM the (wobbly) deck of the good ship 'St Stephen's Sink or Swim' (SSSS) on the occasion of the 2018 Recycled Regatta.

The river was running well, the sky was blue, the air was crisp, the sun was shining, and the water was bloomin' cold - all fine conditions for hardy competitors and onlookers for the race down river.

The Fleet's participants were blessed before the launch. Unfortunately, with the same effect as last year; one vessel immediately sank!

All the competitors slid onto our highly varied craft. Peggy and I on S.S.S.S. - in pole position, floated off first. Sadly, the second boat was the one that didn't actually manage a floating start because, true to its name, Titanic 2, foundered in the first few seconds. Not deterred, its tenacious young crew of 2 managed to float the bow (the pointy end) and one of the two acted as human outboard cum rudder. They eventually crossed the finish line to hearty cheers from the gallery.

We on the S.S.S.S. made a good start but were soon pressed from behind by the more experienced crew on the sleek, well appointed, foam-bottomed TFOR boat, and the 'party boat' with cycle-powered paddle-wheel.

Our sturdily-built, buoyant boat moved fine in deeper waters but, with its hull of recycled water containers, it unfortunately bottomed out on the rapids, allowing shallow-draught craft to zoom past.

But, with a brief and elegant pirouette, we continued on our way, cheered on by our first officer Peggy's daughter Joy, who had flown in from the UK especially for the event - well, not really, but it was her good fortune to be here for the race.

Truth be told, the scenic beauty of the river banks attracted our gaze and made us both desire the ability to gently paddle and slowly glide downstream, whilst taking in the views. However, the roar of the crowd eventually recalled our competitive spirit. Frenzied paddling ensued.

We were not alone in having problems with our craft: the party boat's paddle-wheel had to be hand-operated after the cycle power failed, and Peggy and I were content to find some boats well behind us. The winning TFOR boat was already in dry-dock and the crew starting on congratulatory cordials, when we were still halfway home. Their poly-styrene boat drew about 2 inches, I reckon, so they floated over every obstacle and the crew, in their comfortable, recycled stacker chairs, seemed hardly to have raised a sweat in effortlessly bringing the boat across the line in style.

In more sweaty style, and with gratefully accepted assistance under the bridge, the SSSS glided gracefully to the bank; two totally dry - un-dunked - sailors stepped ashore to the tumultuous praise of their supporters. Triumphant in third place!

At this late stage we declare authors' conflict of interest, for both Peggy and Jenny are members both of TFOR as well as St Stephen's Church.

2019 participants beware! In the best 'Arnie' style - WE WILL BE BACK!

Signed,

Jenny and Peggy

Toodyay Recycled Regatta - 2018



Above: And they're off! Competitors scramble for pole (or paddle) position in the 2018 Recycled Regatta. The winning entry (powered by Grahame and Meg Malone) from the Toodyay Friends of the River can be seen paddling into the stronger current of the mighty Avon River.

Photo by Greg Warburton

FROM THE PAST - BIDDIP VOLUME 1 NUMBER - 1 February 1999

The Toodyay *Friends of the River* have been lucky in securing the support of a major sponsor in their first year.

Vernice Earthmoving Equipment has given us a huge start to our existence with a most generous donation. This has enabled the *Friends* to become incorporated, allowed us to purchase some equipment, and to procure trees for revegetation work. Our organisation is most grateful for that donation, which has put us 'on our feet'. Earth Craft Nursery have donated many trees, and community sponsorship from people like the Brennan Family and Jim Masters has made the *Friends* even more independent.

To all our sponsors we wish to express our sincere gratitude, and wish them a belated Happy and Prosperous New Year.

CONFUSED MOTHERING - OR LUCKY DUCKY?

by Sarah Dudley

On a windy day in November, three of us set out for a beach walk in north Guilderton. The spray from the waves formed a hazy mist along the high tide level. Silhouetted in the grey distance was the outline of a duck. A duck in the sea? Instinct said that wasn't normal.....

Ducks usually find their food in freshwater habitats or the nearby surrounding vegetation. The Avon River is home to a number of duck species which fly up and down the river dependent on water flow and food availability. The grey teal is perhaps the more common, but Pacific black duck are also regular visitors as are wood ducks and handsome Australian shelducks.

On closer inspection, a cloud of swooping seagulls was evident, at exactly the position the duck found herself. She appeared to be a Pacific Black duck and was frantically swimming close to where the waves broke.

Once we were really close the reality of the scenario was unveiled. Nine newly hatched ducklings were being buffeted by the big waves, hurled on to the beach and the Silver Gulls thought breakfast was theirs for the taking – hence the swooping on to the hapless, washed-up, traumatised ducklings. I managed to get one gull to drop a duckling – from a height of three metres! It survived.... was collected by myself and posted down the front of my sleeveless Polartec vest and began to recover from hypothermia. Four other wet and bedraggled ducklings were also scooped up and place down my front. Four to go!

Mother duck had other ideas. She took off up the sand dune with the remaining four. Try climbing a steep sand dune with no arms! The latter were busy restraining the soggy ducklings from burrowing out from my armholes or dropping out of the bottom.... However, fortune was on my side. Close to the top of the sand dune there was a vertical cliff the babies couldn't surmount. I captured the remaining four, who by this time were quite dry. Mother duck was close by, frantically doing her broken wing act to try and lure me away from her babies.

Decision time. All gulls gone. If I reunited the babies with their mum she would presumably take them back to the sea as there was no freshwater for miles around (I checked!) and the gulls would be back in business. Or rescue them - resulting in a deprived mother. After an agonising few moments weighing up the pros and cons, I chose the latter. Another stolen generation.

My Kanyana years stood me in good stead. I taught them to drink, weighed them (30gm), put them under an infra-red lamp with plenty of duckling crumble and shredded lettuce. All nine survived. They were never allowed to immerse themselves in water (hence the lemon squeezer in the photo) as they didn't have a mum to waterproof them with her oils and could have become hypothermic once again.

Three weeks later they went to Darling Range Wildlife Shelter in Martin where they were contained in a larger mobile tractor than I possessed. Each healthy duckling now weighed approximately 178gm.

The Shelter has a large water-filled quarry nearby which is full of ducks. They can be released here once they have grown their flight feathers, developed their musculature and learnt to fly. Even though we try and release wildlife species where they were found, Guilderton would not be an ideal release site for obvious reasons. The newly-hatched ducklings were a long way south from the Moore River and this could not have been their first home.

Hopefully the confused mother will hatch her next brood closer to freshwater. Or has such a scenario been repeating itself year after year and nature has been taking its course?

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CONFUSED MOTHERING - OR LUCKY DUCKY? (cont)



Above: The 'Lucky Duckies'

Photo: Sarah Dudley

TACKLING THE WATER EROSION PROBLEM NEAR THE SCHOOL FOOTBRIDGE

by Robyn Taylor

SOME of the causes of siltation of the Avon, apart from flooding, are loose soil carried by run-off into the brooks that feed into the river, and direct drainage from cleared ground. TFOR is committed to the restoration of the Avon, but some due diligence by others can go a long way towards helping us and the river.

I became aware of these problems during my morning walks with our dog Jesse. We leave home on Mt Anderson and head towards the school via Boyagerring Brook and the school car park. We then continue across the school footbridge where I like to check how the river is flowing.

During heavy rains there was always a problem with loose soil being carried down a dirt road on the school property that led into Drummond Street (east) and the public car park. With gravity, the water and soil went along the lower section of the car park eventually flowing down into the Boyagerring taking more soil with it. From the footbridge the plume of silt could be seen discharging straight into the river.

Eventually the dirt road was sealed, and a drainage channel of rocks constructed next to it to carry water channelled down from the surrounds of an upper car park and drop off area near the kindergarten. The water finally entered a pipe that went under Drummond Street and discharged directly into the earth embankment and fire break next to the footbridge.

While the upper car park is sealed, the extensive ground behind it going up to the back access road has been cleared of vegetation. A wide earth channel was constructed around the sides of the car-park to capture water flow with some of this flowing into the rock drainage channel. During heavy rains this large catchment area resulted in large volume of water and soil being carried downhill towards and under Drummond Road.

There were heavy rains in January this year and that's when I noticed the erosion of the embankment next to the footbridge. This became worse with the heavy winter rains. A deep chasm was created, and a thick river of silt was being dragged downhill. Fortunately, the ground level of the firebreak must be raised at one point as the silt stopped moving down into the river while the water made a right turn under the bridge. The water then exits at what has become an established outlet at the bottom of the firebreak on the downstream side of the footbridge.

Given the proximity of the ever-widening chasm to children and walkers using the footbridge this was becoming a major safety hazard. Eventually warning tape fenced off the area followed by what appears to be an excellent solution to capture the silt and break the flow of water coming through the pipe.

A work request for repairs to the embankment had been submitted by TFOR member Greg Warburton with his Shire hat on, but apparently the school's maintenance officer took the initiative and organised for the work to be done. Presumably the Education Department paid for it!

Greg, with both his Shire and TFOR hats on, feels the school should be complimented for being pro-active in addressing both safety and environmental issues.

TACKLING THE WATER EROSION PROBLEM NEAR THE SCHOOL



Left: Large volume of silt moving towards the Avon. Photo: Robyn Taylor, July 2018)

Below centre: Erosion from the water outlet near the footbridge.
Photo: Greg Warburton, Sept 2018



Rockwork to manage erosion.
Photo: Greg Warburton, December 2018

LLOYD RESERVE 2004



RECYCLED REGATTA VICTORY WAVE



2018 Publications for the Home Library

IT IS ALWAYS exciting to hear of recent publications of 'up-to-date' data in the ever changing area of natural history.

The Toodyay Naturalists' Club (TNC) members are celebrating a 50 year club birthday with the publishing of an A5-sized '***A Guide to exploring Toodyay... naturally***' dedicated to the Ballardong people.

It is 176 pages in length of interesting historical information of Shire of Toodyay reserves, of which there are 166 known at this point in time, flora and fauna, 'what to do if you hit a roo', care of injured, orphaned or sick wildlife, Noongar fire practices, waterway management and invasive species of plants and animals.

There is also information on safety practices to be followed when in the bush or when coming upon injured wildlife and comprehensive data on natural history photography.

The book was compiled using text and over 170 photographs from club members. It is priced at **\$27.00**, plus p&p, through the Toodyay Naturalists' Club. Enquiries T 9574 5574 or email info@toodyaynats.org.au

The Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management (NRM) has recently launched the '***Ballardong Noongar Waangkany***' ***Ballardong Noongar Dictionary***, collated by Sandra Harben on behalf of the Wheatbelt NRM Ballardong Noongar Elders Advisory Group.

It is a beautifully presented A4-sized 50 page book commencing with the History of Noongar Language and Identity followed by the Nature of Aboriginal Languages by Oral McGuire.

There are Noongar stories, beautiful photography, and a comprehensive Ballardong Noongar Wordlist with English explanations. Also included is where words may be found in the writings in the Badjaling Story Book, A Glossary of the Bibbulman (i.e. Bibbulman) Language, and other mentioned sources.

This publication is available from the office of Wheatbelt NRM, 269 Fitzgerald Street, Northam, T 9670 3100 or info@wheatbeltnrm.org.au at a cost of **\$22.00**.

A third publication of '***Birds of the Avon River Basin***' has again been published by Wheatbelt NRM and available from the above address at **\$44.50**. The photography is excellent with clear markings and individual features to assist with bird identification.

It has 227 pages and presented in a 'general public' style to assist in bird identification; icons depicting preferred habitat, feeding and ecology, nesting sites and conservation status are included.

All three books are wonderful additions to the home library.



**Newsletter of the
Toodyay Fiends of the River (Inc.)**

**Post Office Box 1266
Toodyay 6566
Western Australia**

**President: Sarah Dudley 0428 129 477
Secretary: Robyn Taylor (08) 9574 2578
Treasurer: Wayne Clarke (08) 9574 5574
Editor: Desraé Clarke (08) 9574 5574
Editorial to : editor@toodyayfor.org.au**

Contact us at: info@toodyayfor.org.au

**WORKING FOR THE HEALTH OF THE
AVON RIVER**



**Toodyay & Districts
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- Toodyay Op Shop
- Toodyay Garden Centre
- Toodyay Hardware & Farm - Makit Hardware
- Wheatbelt NRM



Left: It's that time of the year, and St John Ambulance are prepared. A new 'Snake Bite' bandage is available from them at a low \$10 Contact Carolynne at St John on 9574 2390 or 0428 957 600 Hours are: Monday - Thursday 9am - 2pm