

December 2013



Biddip

Newsletter of the Toodyay Friends of the River

Volume 7, Issue 3



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The Toodyay Friends of the River are indebted to our sponsor, Wheatbelt NRM, for their support in producing our December newsletter



wheatbelt
natural resource
management

From the President

by Robyn Taylor



2013 has been a memorable year for the Friends. The Bilya Walk Track, which was officially launched on 10 August, together with the Toodyay Naturalists' Club's John Masters Bird Hide, was a significant achievement that we all should feel very proud of. It showed what community groups can do when there is a will to create something of lasting benefit for everyone. Our job now is to continue to improve the track and plan for its eventual extension.

The year hasn't all been all sunshine. We deeply miss our dearest 'Friend' and former President Gaven Donegan who passed away in August. Gaven was the River's true champion, and to acknowledge this we plan to make the picnic shelter at Millard's Pool a memorial to him and what he stood for. Certainly Gaven's passion for the Avon River has left a huge legacy for us to honour and continue.

As your new President, and on behalf of members, I would like to thank former President Greg Warburton for his outstanding work over the past three years. Greg's committed enthusiasm, as well as his energy and muscle power, have been instrumental in what the Friends have been able to achieve over these years. Two others who stand out and deserve our thanks are Desrae Clarke, former Vice President, and Publicity officer and producer of this newsletter, and Wayne Clarke, our Treasurer. Their untiring efforts on behalf of the Friends are beyond estimation.

2014 is the Friends' 40th anniversary year. Let us make it a fantastic year by bringing your suggestions to our annual 26 January Australia Day planning meeting. In particular let us know what you like doing, or would like to do, as a Friend of our Avon River.

Best wishes for the festive season.

Robyn Taylor

President



LEFT: A bench on the Bilya Walk Track dedicated to the Memory of Doctor Richard Walkey.

It is in a place of solitude, where one can relax and savour memories from the past while looking at the future.

It is a fine memorial to a wonderful Doctor who gave so much to the people of Toodyay in the time he was with us

Cover photo: Avon River, downstream from the John Masters Bird Hide, 2013

Photo: Rebecca Megan-Lowe

Conserving the Avon River Environment



The following community groups have united under the banner of CARE, an organisation incorporated in 2012. The aim of the organisation is to work for the betterment of the Avon River and its tributaries.

Toodyay Friends of the River (TFOR)

This group had its beginnings in 1994 and its first get-together in February 1998; it was incorporated 18 September 1998. From those humble beginnings the group has expanded to become involved in extensive revegetation projects, control of floodplain and river environ feral plants, dredging of river pools, has built a 6km walk track, built a picnic shelter and added strength to many community initiatives such as litter collection, Tidy Town support, and the list goes on. The Department of Water acknowledged the TFOR in 2009 with the 'Living Streams Award'.

Talbot Brook Land Management Association (TBLMA)

Established in 1995 this community group has specialised in the revegetation of salt affected land in the catchment areas south west of York. Thousands of trees have been planted and many kilometres of fencing installed for the protection of the revegetated areas and remnant vegetation. The group has pioneered work to revegetate acid sulphate soils and halt erosion of waterways. The Department of Water acknowledged the group in 2011 with the 'Living Streams Award'.

Avon Valley Environment Society (AVES)

AVES is based in Northam and its many projects include water quality monitoring, construction and installation of floating, vegetated islands in the river area through the town to assist in aerating the water and for bird nesting sites, 70kms of marked walking tracks, river bank stabilisation and revegetation and the development of Burlong Park, transforming the area from a waste dump to a place of cultural significance and environmental value.

River Conservation Society (RCS)

This group of conservationists has long been established in the York area and has been driven by a strong research ethos resulting in the production of a number of significant scientific papers. Extensive ecological work has been conducted at Gwambygine Pool, situated on the Avon River, 10kms upstream from the town of York.

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TOODYAY TIDY TOWNS a WINNER



Above (L to R). Ms. Debbie Rice (Department of Regional Development), Stan Scott (Shire of Toodyay CEO), Greg Warburton (TTT Chair), Cr Bethan Lloyd Deputy Shire President, Desrae Clarke (TNC President), Kim Angus (Shire of Toodyay Community Development), Shelley Kingston (Toodyay and Districts Community Bank), Beth Frayne (TTT Secretary, TNC Treasurer), Bob Frayne (TNC), Wayne Clarke (TNC Secretary), Mel Hay (Keep Australia Beautiful Campaign WA Chairman). Photo: Shane Love MLA

Toodyay has been very well rewarded for the Tidy Towns efforts of its community members in 2012-2013. Not only did Toodyay win the combined Central Wheatbelt and Goldfields Regional Award, presented at York on 20 September, but also, the Community Action and Partnerships Category at the Tidy Towns State Awards luncheon on 22 November at the Royal Perth Yacht Club.

Firstly, the Regional Awards! Toodyay won the Community Action and Partnerships Category, being described as a highly proactive community, strongly involved in many elements of sustainability. Then Toodyay was awarded a **Special Commendation for our strong community commitment to natural environment conservation**. Kalgoorlie-Boulder was the Category winner. Then, at the end of the function, in recognition of our overall performance in all Categories, Toodyay was judged as the combined **Central Wheatbelt and Goldfields Regional Winner for 2013. So, congratulations are due to all TTTers!**

Below is an extract from the Tidy Towns Judges' Report for our Natural Environment Conservation Regional Category performance:

“Toodyay is blessed with several groups and partnerships focused on the natural environment in the region such as CARE (Conservation of Avon River Environments), Toodyay Friends of the River (TFOR), Northam Friends of the River, River Conservation Society (York), Friends of the Dale River (Beverley), Friends of Malkup Brook, Toodyay Community Resource Centre and the Shire. Their work is strongly promoted in the Toodyay Herald – with pages and pages of reports and information. Some activities for the year are summarized below but this does not do them justice. It is a highly proactive community effort, doing wonderful things and their actions have contributed strongly to Toodyay's success.”

Continued Page 5

TOODYAY TIDY TOWNS a WINNER

The work of TFOR was then singled out, along with that of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club, the Community Resource Centre and the Shire: "Toodyay Friends of the River: Promotes conservation, protection and restoration of the Avon River environment via monthly activity column in Toodyay Herald, quarterly newsletter, Environment Matters tent at the Toodyay Show, and website; Major weed war – 8km of river, 160ha under action including bridal creeper – a massive effort! Caltrop program; Waterway restoration project in bushfire zone to fence, re-vegetate and control erosion; Supported Friends of Malkup Brook; Run nursery for low-cost, local provenance native plants for private and public revegetation work; Removed plastic tree guards and canes from developer's revegetation project planting; Supported Wheatbelt NRM with Weeds of National Significance project along the Avon River; Bilya Walk Track funded (\$12K). Signage, furniture and track markers now in place (terrific job); and helped remove bulk garbage from the river at Northam to prevent hazardous downstream effects."

To top the Regional Awards, Toodyay won the **Community Action and Partnerships** Category at the State Awards luncheon on 22 November, as an acknowledgement of our 500 plus volunteers and more than 40 groups and partnerships which are focussed on litter prevention and **conservation of the natural environment**. TTTC Chairman Greg Warburton gave a short speech of thanks, acknowledging the cooperation between the Toodyay & Districts Community Bank Branch, the Shire of Toodyay and TTTC that achieved such a fantastic result with the Toodyay Adopt-a-Spot program. Shane Love MP joined us at our table for the lunch, and even took some photos. Walpole won the overall State Title, and Bremer Bay won the State Natural Environment Conservation Category.

TTT Chairman Greg was invited to give a TT presentation at the AGM of the Toodyay and Districts Community Financial Services Ltd. on 29 October. Greg, Kim Angus (Shire of Toodyay) and I were honoured to have been presented with gifts in recognition of our assistance to the Bank in getting the Adopt-A-Spot program up and running.

The TTT Committee will meet in the New Year to plan its 2014 TT Challenge! TFOR's Bilya Walk Track project completion will still be a major component of the 2014 Campaign!

Beth Frayne, Secretary, Toodyay Tidy Towns Committee and TFOR Committee member.



Photo at left is of the Toodyay table at the Royal Perth Yacht Club (minus their supporter, the photographer)

They are (left to right) Desraé and Wayne Clarke (TFOR & TNC, TTT Committee) Stan Scott (CEO Shire of Toodyay), Beth Frayne (TTT Secretary, TFOR & TNC), Bob Frayne (TFOR and TNC), Kim Angus (Shire of Toodyay Community Development and TTT Committee), Greg Warburton (TTT Chair, TFOR and TNC), Cr. Bethan Lloyd (Shire of Toodyay Deputy Shire President, TTT Committee, TFOR and TNC), and Shelley Kingston (Toodyay and Districts Community Bank)

Photo Shane Love MLA

Mosselbank River, Fisantekraal

by Viv Street

For the last five weeks Dave and I have been in South Africa on a property, near Durbanville, bordered by the Mosselbank River. In the first part of the last century it was a Divisional Council Road Station with an experimental planting of Australian eucalypts and a plantation of Sydney Blue Gums established across the river. The blue gums were used for bridge building and still thrive today though, over the years and many flood events, the species may have changed. The timber is still being used for building work on the property and gives shelter to many birds, including owls. The huge old trees have mostly fallen as the ground has become wetter but new thickets have grown up over the years.

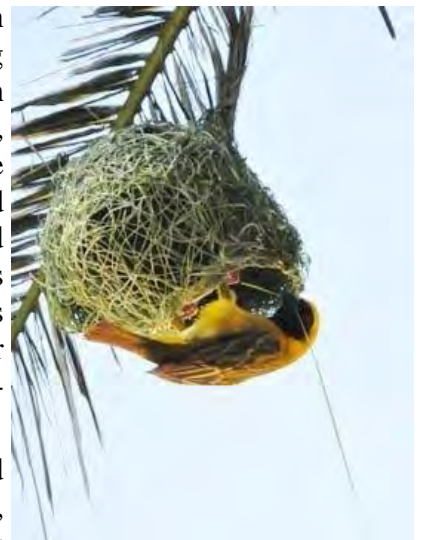


The river is narrow and is fringed by bamboo and gum trees. It is still flowing but earlier in the year swamping occurred over the whole property in the biggest flood remembered in the area. The river, when we were there, was being cleared by the Council workers of an infestation of water hyacinth which must be one of the most rapidly growing water weeds ever. Workers in boats and on the banks worked with grappling hooks dragging the weed onto the banks where it is carted away to rot down for mulch. However, it can grow from any fragment left behind, developing roots and floating to form a solid green mass of bright green leaves and swollen bulb like stalks. Within a week and after a heavy downpour the river was clogged again, no doubt enhanced by nutrient run off from upstream chicken processing plants who have been known to release effluent into the river. The problem and the flooding will continue until the whole river is cleared, not just our little stretch - a massive and expensive job!

Bird life was amazing and the bamboo, especially, was a riot of action and colour with bright red or yellow weaver birds flying back and forth with building material for their nests. These are made from strips pulled from the bamboo and other leaves then woven and sewn into a round nest with a downward hanging entrance and room inside for the whole family. From start to finish the nests took 2 to 3 days to complete.



Youngsters, with their gaping mouths, were in some of the nests, other nests were just being built and others were old and empty - hundreds of them. There was a constant chatter of sound and darting colour.



Flocks of ibis and their close cousins, hadadas, flew over at dawn and dusk. The hadadas roosted in the trees shouting their distinctive calls when disturbed. Moorhens silently appeared through the thickets and groups of herons passed by every day with their stately flight.

Continued Page 7

Mosselbank River, Fisantekraal (cont)



Above and Right: Ibis in flight

Above: The hadada is a close relative of the ibis

Kingfishers quietly landed to stare down at the river then disappeared in a flash.

Otters, Mongeese and crabs live in the river. Mysterious wakes could often be seen, but we only spotted the crabs foraging on the banks. There were too many mosquitoes and midges to fight off to be able to watch from the banks of the river at night when the otters and mongeese come looking for chickens- if they can get past all the dogs.

On the property we had African and European sparrows in profusion and amongst them the Muisvoel, commonly called the mouse bird from its habit of creeping along branches, but we mainly saw them harassing the sparrows on the ground and in the trees or flying fast with their distinctive tails trailing behind them. Starlings were nesting under the gutters and were seen everywhere we went. Sunbirds came to the nectar trees, hard to see despite their iridescent colours. Crows, big black and white birds with a harsh cry, were always about as were brown hawks, scanning every day for a stray chick to snatch. Plovers and guinea fowl grazed on the sides of the road, very appropriate for Fisanttekraal, which means Guinea fowl Kraal (or corral) and flocks of bright red and black



Above: Starling, protecting its nest from predators, like the one on the 'Back Page'

weaver birds were in wheat fields and olive groves or lining the fences.

We were thrilled to see Blue Cranes in the area, too. They are magnificent birds, usually in pairs and sometimes seen doing their courting dance.



Above: A sunbird

We couldn't identify lots of the birds because the bird books were lost somewhere in the flood clear-up but, all I can say is that, despite a large cat, dog and human population the bird life was thriving and wonderfully varied on the banks of the Mosselbank River.

These are just some of the sightings with photos of the wonderful birds we were fortunate enough to see.



Above: The blue crane

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The 160th Toodyay Agricultural Show

The 'Environment Matters' groups enjoyed yet another year of excellent attendance to their marquee where there was much to see and learn from the variety of displays. Representation included Wildcare, Toodyay Friends of the River, Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management (NRM), Toodyay Naturalists' Club, a weeds display and data, Birdlife Australia and Karaakin Rehabilitation Centre.

Prior to the formal opening of the 160th Toodyay Agricultural Show the exhibitors in the 'Environment Matters' marquee were honoured to have the Governor of Western Australia, His Excellency, Malcolm McCusker, AC CVO QC, bring his wife and his young daughter, Mary, to visit and to show interest in the displays. Of course, Mary was attracted to the Wildcare babies which included a Brushtail Possum, joeys, a very young Frogmouth, and a Brushtail Phascogale. Also present was Harmony, a White-tailed Black Cockatoo, brought to Toodyay by volunteer carers from Karaakin, a wildlife rehabilitation centre for both the Red-tailed and the White-tailed Black Cockatoos. It was unfortunate that the reptile display, 'Miss Hiss', was not present but it is hoped the group will be in the 'Environment Matters' marquee again in 2014.

The Toodyay Friends of the River had a large, recently completed display that had been made by Wheatbelt NRM staff and had its first showing, the previous week, at the Royal Perth Show. It highlighted the watershed of the Avon catchment.

The 'Environment Matters' marquee contributors were grateful to the TAS Committee for the use of the large and safe venue for the displays. They also congratulate the Show Committee celebrating this amazing milestone – **160 years of community participation.**



Top: The Show marquee.

Above left: Greg Setting up the TFOR display

Above right: The Sunday clean-up crew

Loves of an Aquarian

by Laraine Brindle

In response to being asked the reason for my interest in joining the Toodyay Friends of the River, I found the question, at first, a little difficult to answer. As I thought more about it, I looked back on my life and it now seems quite a natural step and should be no surprise as I have had a life-time association with the aquatic world

Firstly, I am an Aquarian, if that has any influence at all! My mother grew up in Claremont overlooking the river and she, and most of her seven siblings were, at the least, state champions in swimming and diving activities. Their leisure time was spent usually at the beaches close by. My father hailed from Herne Hill and spent much of his youth swimming in and exploring the upper Swan and lower Avon Rivers.

Growing up in Rivervale, I learned to swim in the Swan River at a location called 'The Springs' and throughout the summers this is where we spent our after school and, sometimes, truancy hours. Throughout my childhood and into my teens our family holidays were always to the seaside in the South West, Lancelin or Moore River and, through summer weekends, we were frequently taken to what seemed then the long trip to beaches of Perth, coming home after sunset.

My father developed a love of skin diving and spear fishing and I remember snorkelling along with him observing, with wonder, the underwater world.

Water activities have dominated my leisure life until today with swimming, body surfing, boogie boarding, skiing, sailing, scuba diving and wind surfing. About twenty years ago, together with my son when he was in his early teens, we started kayaking at the Ascot Kayak Club. With members of the kayaking world we both became involved in white water and down river kayaking. This placed me in environments that were wondrous, to say the least, and I guess, by a process of osmosis, one develops a lasting respect and love of the natural world.

At this time we were living on a rural property in Gidgegannup. I registered it with 'Land for Wildlife' close to twenty years ago and, after fencing off a central bush area, watched the slow but progressive recovery of that area after a 'no grazing animal' access was established.

I can't say that there was ever a 'light bulb' moment that switched on my love and respect for nature, and I certainly do not claim to have any great knowledge of environmental issues, but I am aware I have always been curious about the natural world around me and increasingly conscious of the impact the activities of man has had upon it. My private policy has deepened to doing 'what I can, when I can' and *not* to add to the mess if at all possible.

In recent years my holidays have been volunteering assistance to scientists on expeditions sponsored by Landscape or Australian Geographic. These have been, without exception, wonderful experiences and experiences I hope to be able to repeat.

With approaching retirement, I started thinking about leaving the farm and an advertisement for a property for sale on the Avon River in Toodyay caught my eye. It was probably during the conversation around the purchase that I learned about the Toodyay Friends of the River - I joined immediately.

Now that I am semi retired and living in Toodyay I am pleased to have the time to devote to working to improve our environment, most particularly the Avon River, and look forward to a long, and hopefully, a significant association with the Friends.



Conserving the Avon River Environment ...cont

(From page 3)

Friends of the Dale

The youngest member group is the Friends of the Dale, incorporated in 2012. This strong group of community members had the desire to protect and restore the beautiful Reserve Pool. With that aim over 20,000 trees have been planted, 2kms of fencing completed, interpretation signage is in place and bird nesting boxes have been erected.

Toodyay Naturalists' Club (TNC)

Established in 1968, this strong environmental group has been pivotal in the establishment of Wongamine, Morangup and the Dawn Atwell Reserves and the establishment of the John Masters Bird Hide along the Avon River at Red Banks Pool. The Club members are involved in biological surveys, presentations, revegetation projects, field excursions and environmental education.

Birdlife Australia-Wheatbelt/Avon Branch (WABA)

Bird counts are undertaken along the Avon River and its tributaries and areas throughout the catchment which includes the Great Western Woodlands. Sightings are recorded on a nationwide database of the Australian Bird Atlas.

Mosselbank River, Fisantekraal ...cont



Above: The highly invasive **water hyacinth** is a declared plant in most countries around the world. It chokes and destroys river systems.

Sandy Lloyd from DAFWA said **water hyacinth** was serious weed which had been offered for sale at a weekend market in Melville.

A woman who bought water hyacinth at the market later reported it to the department when a friend told her it was banned.

“Water hyacinth is one of the world’s worst weeds, choking up rivers, lakes and other waterways,” she said.

It is a declared plant in WA, prohibited from sale and must be destroyed when found. Anyone with **suspect aquatic weeds** should be reported to the Department’s Pest and Disease Information Service on 1800 084 881



Above: The river clear of Water Hyacinth.

Project Officer's Report by Greg Warburton

As the Toodyay Friend of the River's current Project Officer I look back on 2013 with much satisfaction as it has been a year of progress for not only TFOR and but for the whole the environmental community of Toodyay. The opening of the Bilya Walk Track and the John Masters Bird Hide along with Toodyay's Tidy Town's achievements have been real highlights for me. The continued strengthening of CARE, (Conserving the Avon River Environment Inc.) now fully incorporated and branded holds promise for good environmental out comes in the Avon. As we know government cutbacks and pressure from development continues to pose real threats to our natural heritage. A strong voice from the community has proven to be an effective way to ensure a balance in the conservation debate.

An opportunity was presented to the Conservationists of the Avon by the Northam Visitor's Centre whereby a large display area was allocated for an environmental display. Considerable work went into designing and constructing the display which was ready just in time for the opening event of the re-developed Visitor Centre on the 6th of December. I was encouraged when I saw politicians and other members of the community taking time to study the information. The display includes a three dimensional model of the Avon Catchment, biographies of local environmental campaigners and information on all seven of the CARE groups.

We will continue to augment and develop the display as it promises be an effective tool for environmental awareness raising and showcasing of achievements in the catchment.

One of the best things about 2013 I think, is that the year has positioned us well to continue the momentum into 2014 and beyond but, hopefully at a more relaxed pace. The pressure of work, family and community commitments I know is something many volunteers grapple with constantly. Looking after ourselves and each other is essential if we are to continue the good work without and avoid "burn out".

Greg Warburton



Above: The opening of the re-developed Northam Visitor Centre.

A prominent display, even in this photograph, were CARE and their associated groups, including the Toodyay Friends of the River.

The opening was performed by Shire of Northam President, Steve Pollard and Ms. Mia Davies (now Hon. Mia Davies) MLA, Minister for Water; Forestry; Deputy Leader of the National Party of Australia (WA).

Photo: Greg Warburton

A TIBETAN SAYING

We only preserve what we love
We only love what we understand
We only understand what we study

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

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The objects of the *Toodyay Friends of the River* are to *work towards the conservation and rehabilitation of the Avon River and its environs. In the bigger picture of natural resource management, we are committed to implementing the Avon River Management Program and its associated River Recovery Plans for each of the four sections of river that pass through Toodyay.*

Contact us at: info@toodyayfor.org.au

*"Make Friends with
our Avon River"*



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**Visit our website at
www.toodyayfor.org.au**

The Back Page



CAPTION

COMPETITION

The photo at left was taken by Viv Street in Fisantek-raal, South Africa.

TFOR members are invited to provide a caption to go with the photo at left.

The prize is - wait for it - having your caption printed in the next Biddip. Isn't that a great prize? Isn't that a great photo!

What was the cat after?

Read Viv's article on Pages 6 and 7 for the answer.

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Members of the Toodyay Friends of the River would like to acknowledge the continuous support of our sponsors:

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