

April 2014



Biddip

Newsletter of the Toodyay Friends of the River

Volume 8, Issue 1



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The Toodyay Friends of the River is indebted to the Wheatbelt NRM for their support in producing the April 2014 newsletter



wheatbelt
natural resource
management

Presidents Report by Robyn Taylor



WE CERTAINLY had a good start to the year with the successful nomination of TFOR member Desraé Clarke for the Premier's Australian Day Active Citizenship Award. Desraé shared the award with Baptist Church Youth Group leader Cameron Wallis. After the celebrations in Duidgee Park we held our annual planning meeting at Secretary Laraine's home. Some of our planned busy-bees may need to be delayed due to factors such as rainfall, or the lack of it! The thorny caltrop is just waiting for those first showers.

The February working bee was a great success with a good turn up of members helping to clean out the big regrowth of castor oil plants around the north end of Newcastle Bridge. Rubbish was also collected along the river and with many hands making light work we completed the morning's tasks in record time.

In March, to mark the Clean-up Australia Day, we worked along the Bilya Walk Track and were pleased to note the track was largely clear of rubbish. However fallen trees and debris across the track were reported. A big thank-you to our industrious Project Officer Greg who went back in his own time and made the track safer and more user-friendly.

Our April meeting was cancelled due to Easter and replaced with an alternative event to take place on Sunday 27th April. This will be a trip down the Avon River to Bells Rapids. The idea is to check out the movement of silt downstream while the river bed is exposed due to the prolonged lack of rain. This promises to be a great event and of course there will be a BYO picnic. A full report with photos will appear in the next issue of *Biddip*.

This year marks TFOR's 20th anniversary and we will be celebrating the event on Sunday 20 July. We plan to unveil a memorial to our dear Friend of the River Gaven Donegan, and have a party at one of our member's homes near Millard's Pool. Details will be circulated closer to the event.

Please make a note in your diary that we will be having a fund-raiser on 6th and 7th June (Friday 8am – 5pm) and Saturday (8.30am-12 noon) outside the new IGA. We will be drawing up a roster and need willing helpers.

Please contact Secretary Laraine at: labrin@westnet.com.au and/or myself at rdtaylor@inet.net.au or on 9574 2578.



Left: The lower Avon River, photographed during a trip down river - organized by Peter Robinson - during the record dry of 2014.

This is what is found under the river during the Avon Descent. It makes one wonder if the entrants would be so keen to tackle the event if they knew what lay below.

Full story on Page 9

Photograph: Greg Warburton

Cover Photo: Max Howard, local member of Birdlife Australia, quietly observing the birdlife at Glen Avon Pool

Photograph: Wayne Clarke

THE WOES OF GROWING SANDALWOOD

by Maurie Jackson

WE DID not set out to live in Toodyay. When visiting from working in the Pilbara a thoughtful daughter said “why don’t you buy a property here”? It seemed a good idea and when we later came here to work we started to look for something.

While the bridge on Goomalling Road and the Northam Bypass were being constructed we lived in the Caravan Park on Railway Road, [Toodyay]. When riding my push bike in the evenings I noticed a ‘for sale’ sign on the gate of our present property. We were still not convinced and on weekends drove in an arc from Gingin around to Beverley still not finding anything to surpass the land in Railway Road.

After making enquiries we were told the vendor would not take offers. We could see the advantages in owning this particular property and put our offer of acceptance in on 11 September, 2001. The world was in turmoil at the time and it frightened us, but all worked out and we took possession of our present home block.

After working in the Kimberleys 2002/03 we returned to our home block. We had 7½ acres with a few trees, a brick building, with no roof, and plenty of Paterson’s Curse! What to do with our home block? A neighbour asked us what sort of horses we were going to have. Horses, no way! Olives, grapes, citrus – no – too much work involved and insufficient water. I read the history of Toodyay and found that this land had grown grapes and citrus many years before but this history also said the colony’s first major export was *Santalum spicatum* [Sandalwood] some of which comes from this district. That was it! When I saw an invitation in a local paper to anyone interested in growing it, I went along.

The first host trees were *Acacia acuminata* (Jam [Wattle]) and *Acacia aneura* (Mulga) which were planted in May 2004 then followed with Sandalwood seed obtained from Greening Australia in May 2005. These germinated in five months with a high percentage of seeds germinating. The major error in this first patch was fertilising with meat meal and blood and bone which the neighbour’s dog took a liking to. Don’t do that again!!

More ground was prepared in May 2005 and hosted with mostly Jam and Rock Sheoak. Sandalwood was planted here in May/June 2006 and a poor result followed. I didn’t know whether it was poor seed or planting method as it was planted like the others. Another patch was prepared in 2007 and planted mostly with Jam and this was planted with poor Sandalwood seed in 2008 and 2009 with very poor results putting my program further back. The one outstanding feature of the 2009 planting was, I noticed, a neat little hole left where seeds were planted with a cracked shell at the bottom and no seed. Later I caught the culprits – **magpies!!! Plant some more seed!**

(Continued on page 4)



Left: Maurie’s property when they moved into it in 2002.

To get a comparison after all of Maurie’s hard work, see the continuation of this article on Page 4

THE WOES OF GROWING SANDALWOOD

by Maurie Jackson (cont)

The last patch was prepared in May 2009 and planted immediately with more Jam. I wasn't going to be caught with poor seed again and bought some from a reputable grower with good results. Over all this time I have gone over and replaced 'host' trees, tried two Sandalwood on every host and transplanted one where two appeared and found this was not a great success, thinned out the thicker and overhanging host limbs and kept the weeds controlled as a fire protection.

The woes of growing Sandalwood!



Top and above :
Photographs of the Jackson property taken in 2014.
The sandalwood have grown, but the despair in their management is obvious when you talk to Maurie.

COMBINING WILDLIFE WITH FARMING

by Desraé Clarke

RECENTLY a publication, The State Wildlife Authority News Service (SWANS) Wildlife Journal Vol. 13 No 3 1983, was found hidden among the books belonging to the Toodyay Naturalists' Club and containing an article on the building of wildlife refuges on farms.

The late Mr Jim Masters OAM, an inaugural member of the Toodyay Friends of the River, was featured in the publication as a farmer of note but also as an ardent birdwatcher. The property of 'Glen Avon', still in family ownership, had been run efficiently and economically but also provided areas suitable for birdlife, particularly waterfowl.

A pair of diversion dams was built for stock water and became havens for water birds; land birds enjoy the vegetation on the perimeter of the dams. The dams needed to have areas of shallow water for birds, such as the Banded Stilt, to feed. Light and warmth can penetrate shallow water encouraging the growth of aquatic plants and insects which in turn are taken as food by the birds. Shallow water also supports the growth of rushes and reeds which are well-used by waterfowl for nesting material, nesting sites and insect food.

Small islands can be built, with deep water between the shore and the island, to give nesting sites for the birds and providing a safe refuge from predators such as cats and foxes. Gradual slopes on the island shore provide easy access for ducks. The islands provide shelter to waterbirds and their young on windy days when they can keep close to the protective edges.

Much of the smaller tree vegetation around the dams is Melaleuca which provides a haven for the small birds that enjoy dense foliage close to water. The larger river gums (*Eucalyptus rudis*) provide nesting hollows and vantage points for observation— what more could our avian friends wish for?

Continued on Page 6



Above: An avian playground with plenty of shelter

COMBINING WILDLIFE WITH FARMING

by Desraé Clarke (cont)

Duck species observed on the 'Glen Avon' waters and nearby river are Teal, Black, White-eyed, Maned Geese, Blue-bill, Pink-eared, Mountain, Musk and the Blue-winged Shoveller. Other waterbirds that utilise the dams are the Yellow Spoonbill, Coot, Little Grebe, Egret, White-faced Heron, White-necked Heron and various migratory waders. Some of the smaller birds that enjoy the edging brush are the Willie Wagtail, Splendid Fairy Wren, Reed Warbler, Rufous Whistler, Silvereye and the White-winged Triller. With the past dry years the dams have not been filled so the birds are also using the river that runs alongside Glen



Photographs: Top and above right - the Pink-eared Duck , beautifully marked. Bottom left is a waterbird next on the Glen Avon dams (Photographed by Wayne Clarke)

Members Gallery



Above: Bilya Walk Track signage



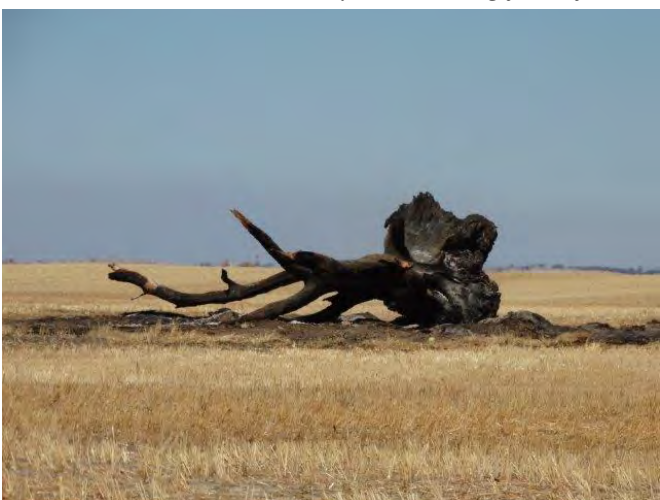
Above: Heads or tails? Discussion mid-channel



Above: Paruna Sanctuary recovering from fire



Above: A natural gnama in the rocks of the Avon.



Above: New land clearing regulations have given farmers carte blanche to clear up to 5ha annually without a permit. Imagine the sediment our waterways will be contending with - and the dust storms - in the near future.



Above Right: Sheep seeking shade under a tree - bottom up!.

All photographs by Greg Warburton

TOODYAY TIDY TOWNS UPDATE

by Beth Frayne

TOODYAY has entered the Tidy Towns Sustainable Communities competition again, registering as a 2014 participant on 9 February. A total of 71 communities have registered, 11 in our Central Wheatbelt and Goldfields Region. Jo Gray (TTSC's most senior judge) and Gail Dodd are our Regional Judges this year. We have started work on updating the TTT Action Plan and will be drafting our Submission over the next few weeks.

Walpole, last year's overall TT winner in W.A., was successful in the Australian Tidy Towns titles, winning the Dame Phyllis Frost Litter Prevention and the Environmental Innovation and Protection awards. The TTTC has met twice this year already, and has streamlined its ways of working to 'avoid burnout' as recommended by the TTSC Judges last year. The *Toodyay Tidy Talk* newsletter and the Herald will still keep the TT message to the fore. Our Supporters are still on board, and we even have a new one:



Avon Valley Railway, training young women as miniature train drivers! Have you noticed the new street trees (planted by the Shire)? And two more stainless steel cigarette butt bins (supplied by our local Bendigo Bank Branch) will soon be installed near the IGA.

On Clean Up Australia Day, 2 March, TFOR members assisted the Toodyay Nats at the Nats' Morangup Nature Reserve Registered Site, with support from TTTC and other groups and private individuals. The 17 vollies collected 56 bags of litter and other large items along a 4 km section of the Toodyay Road near the Reserve. A declared noxious weed, the Narrow-leaved Cotton Bush, was identified in the Reserve. Afterwards, the group then enjoyed morning tea at the Clarkes' residence. The Toodyay District High School did its bit on Clean Up Schools Day on Friday, 28 February.

Above left: TFOR's Laraine and Vicki with some of the litter haul. (Photo: Greg Warburton, 2014)

TTTC Chairman Greg Warburton is still spearheading the 'new signage of all types' campaign, with the help from TTT Committee members. TTTC has asked the Shire to remove any old Shire and Town boundary signs that are still in place and suggested that one of each type of sign should be given to the Toodyay Historical Society, as an archival record. See Greg's Entry Statement model, featuring the Avon River near Toodyay, on view in the Toodyay Community Bank Branch. Comments are welcome.

Above right: Greg holding his model Entry Statement (Photo: Vicki Warburton, 2014)

Talking about Adopt a Spot, Toodyay Bendigo Bank Branch Board Executive Officer Shelley Kingston spoke on Toodyay's Adopt a Spot programme to an attentive audience of over 200 people at the recent Bendigo Bank State Conference, 20 March. The Power Point presentation was a wonderful representation of this unique community collaborative initiative. Most of the Adopt-a-Spot signs are now in place, acknowledging which community group has a particular Spot. Watch out in the Herald and around town for news of another brilliant new idea from our Toodyay Community Bank Branch re a one-off community clean up of the Northam-Toodyay Road, to the Shire boundary.

DOWN RIVER AFTER THE DRY

by Greg Warburton

FOLLOWING a record period without rain an opportunity arose to inspect some of the pools downstream from Toodyay. On Sunday the 27th April, with the much appreciated 2 inches of rain falling the night before putting all in high spirits, we headed along the railway line following the river.

With Peter Robinson behind the wheel of the Community bus and Lee Francis following in her 4x4, an enthusiastic group of members made their first stop at Long Pool. Here, Dixie McKenzie was able to describe the changes she has seen over the past 30 years or so since living near the Pool. Sadly, the once permanent, deep water hole that was a kilometre long is now completely full of sand and sediment with the dredging of 2009 almost un-noticeable.

We then entered the locked railway reserve under the guidance of Mark, the Brookfield Rail Safety Officer. There were further stops to inspect the river and time to enjoy morning tea at the spectacular (even without water) Emu Falls with its unique water worn rock formations.

Following on to Moondyne Rapids evidence of feral pig activity was found to be all too common with their diggings causing damage to the river bank.

The lack of water gave an appreciation of the treacherous nature of the river with massive exposed boulders and eroded, jagged rocks forming much of the river bed.

Further downstream some of the pools appeared to be in good condition with deep water still remaining. A number of water bird species were observed, including Pelicans, all faithfully recorded by Jennifer Donegan.

We passed Australian Wildlife Conservancy's Paruna Sanctuary and marvelled at the expansive views over the valley. The fire ravaged landscape appeared to be gradually regenerating but, unfortunately, severely weed infested. On past the famous Walyunga National Park then a careful crossing of the narrow bridge over Wooroloo Brook took us to the final boom gate whereupon we emerged at Bells Rapids. Here, we enjoyed lunch and did an impromptu litter pick up. It was then on through the vineyards of the Swan Valley and back to Toodyay via Lovers Lane - in the rain!

Thank you to the organisers Peter, Robyn, Greg and to Brookfield Rail but especially, to the lively group of participants that made for an enjoyable, entertaining and educational trip along our world class and spectacular lower Avon River.



Left: Dixie making a point while standing in the sediments of Long Pool, while other TFOR members look on.

The sediment dredging of 2009 is no longer evident.

More photographs on Page 7

SWAN-AVON RIVER

SAME RIVER - DIFFERENT VALUE

PART ONE

by Wayne Clarke

IN 2004, the *Swan River* was declared Western Australia's first official *heritage icon*. It has since enjoyed millions of dollars in funding to ensure that icon is managed in a sustainable manner, to be treasured and enjoyed by all. But, not so with its upper reaches, the *Avon River* - younger in name (by maybe five years) but very much more mature (by maybe hundreds of millions of years).

Both the Swan and Avon Rivers are quite distinctly the same river. Exploration during the founding of our colony had barely begun when the different names were applied. It is now evident that different management practices are also being applied, simply because of the name.

Why should anyone be concerned with the Avon River? After all, it's only a mere tributary of the Swan. Is that not someone else's problem?

Training or Travesty

The anguish of the Avon River began when towns were built along its banks. Toodyay was the first to realise this mistake when, in 1860, a new town (Newcastle, later re-named Toodyay) was gazetted upstream, further back from the river. This town, like all the others built along the Avon, still experienced flooding, so the local authorities, as far back as 1937, sought assistance from the government to find a solution.

A report by R.W. Edwards, Irrigation and Drainage Engineer, Public Works Department – (PWD), suggested: “*if the training is done in the Brookton and Beverley Road Districts, it will in all probability mean treating the river as far as a few miles below Toodyay, a distance in all of approximately 123 miles [198km]. The cost of treating this river spread over a period of four years would be, say, £28,500...*”. The letter breaks up the costings in each Road Board District, with the distances and cost per mile. This ranged from £150/mile in Brookton to £300/mile in Toodyay.

Further, “*The following remarks should be borne in mind when considering carrying out the work:-*

The de-snagging will release a considerable amount of silt now held up in the river by thick scrub and debris in the river bed. Portion of this silt will travel down-stream, but a considerable portion will also be deposited in amongst the scrub and debris which it is intended to leave on the banks of the river and on scrub-covered flats adjoining the river.

WATER HOLES [POOLS]:

The travelling silt mentioned above will, in all probability, fill up the water holes [natural pools] in the river bed and render it necessary for the farmers using these water holes for stock water supplies to sink spears in the sand and erect windmills and troughing for their stock.

Silting troubles in all probability will occur in Northam above the existing weir unless the weir is remodelled so that a clear run may be given to the river during the flood periods. At some future date, when the river is properly trained, it will be possible to hold up the water at any desired spot and thus form an artificial frame by the construction of removable weirs as suggested at Northam.”

1st July, 1947.

RWE/G

ACTG. PWD HYDRAULICS

As can be seen by the above report, written by the PWD, the engineers were well aware that the River Training Scheme (RTS) would release a considerable amount of sediment into the river.

Almost two decades later, after the 1955 floods, the Avon River Training Scheme (RTS) - a government initiated and funded project and supervised by the Public Works Department, commenced.

A report by J.W. Young, Director of Works, to the meeting of the Avon Valley Development Committee, dated 8th March 1956, suggested the cost of the RTS on the Toodyay-Northam section of the river was £24,000. From a legal aspect, “*Authority can be given to the Department by the proclamation of the catchment area of the Avon River under part III of the Rights in Water and Irrigation Act.*

“Necessary agreement by the Irrigation Commission to this proposed step has already been given.

SAME RIVER - DIFFERENT VALUE

PART ONE (continued)

by Wayne Clarke

“Broadly, the Department’s proposal involves the construction of a gullet, where necessary, in the flat stream of the river by clearing out all trees and debris over a width of approximately 3 chains [60m]. In some places silt movement by bulldozer will be necessary.”

Work was commenced in 1958 and was continued until 1961 when it was stopped for the effects of the Scheme to be evaluated. It was resumed in 1966.

In the 1970s, moves to halt the RTS were afoot. The damage impact on the riverine environment was quite noticeable. Local authorities were no longer prepared to contribute to the maintenance of the Scheme, and were requesting it ceases.

In a letter to the Director of the PWD from Mrs Judy Hamersley, of the WA Country Party, one of the questions asked was:

Question: *“What effect is this cleaning likely to have on the Swan River apart from that already apparent viz. more rapid and frequent flooding in the upper reaches?”*

Answer: *“I am advised that the Irrigation and Drainage Branch PWD have estimated that most of the material moved by the river water will be held in the bed of the river between Toodyay and the coastal plain.*

“Should this not be so, some saltation in the upper stretches of the [Swan] river can be expected which can cause flooding problems in the upper reaches of the river. The Harbours and Rivers Branch has for many years operated a dredge in the upper waters of the river on programmes involving flood abatement.”

Dr O’Brien goes on to say:

“Dead trees, logs and debris, which would impede the flow of water, should be removed from the water-course if required for flood abatement but riverbeds should not be ripped.”

This virtually sealed the fate of the RTS, undoubtedly the worst engineering disaster in Western Australia during the twentieth century.

This article will continue in the next edition of Biddip, Volue 8 Issue 2

FALLEN GIANTS OF THE WHEATBELT

by Greg Warburton

THE AVON RIVER CATCHMENT covers over 100,000 sq kilometres of cleared agricultural land. The effects of clearing and the impacts caused by it are well known. However, rather than halting further clearing the opposite is now occurring. The majestic Salmon Gums and other unique woodland trees that remain in the paddocks of our Wheatbelt are now all but doomed.

Recent changes in the State Government clearing regulations allows for the clearing of 5 hectares of native vegetation a financial year without a permit instead of the previous 1 hectare. This may not seem like a large area but 5 hectares of paddock trees can represent 100’s of trees. With the ever increasing size of farm machinery and the adoption of GPS technology these trees are now seen as “obstacles” to be removed. With over 95% of the Wheatbelt already cleared of native vegetation paddock trees play an essential role as “stepping stones” for wildlife to move across the landscape. Livestock also need the shade and protection provided by these trees.

To Natural Resource Management (NRM) groups and community volunteers working to revegetate and create connections for wildlife and arrest salinity the new regulations are big backward step for conservation. Take a drive through the Wheatbelt or the Great Southern and you will see a heartbreaking scene of bulldozed and burning trees. Some of these magnificent botanical giants are hundreds of years old! Many conservationists believe Department of Environmental Regulation (DER) will not be able to effectively monitor the amount of hectares being cleared and the new regulations will lead to further relaxing of clearing laws.

See photographs Page 7

**Newsletter of the
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*"Make Friends with
our Avon River"*



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.*

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

The Back Page

***FERAL PIG CONTROL WORKSHOP* by Desrae Clarke**

PERTH NRM and Chittering Landcare Group ran a workshop on the management/control of feral pigs in the Swan Region with representation from State and Local government, Murdoch University and community. Feral pig annual damage in Australia is \$240m from soil erosion, natural waterways soiling, Phytophthora spread, destruction of native trees and food crops, preying on young livestock, ground-nesting birds and small animals.

Funded feral pig control began in 2000 but 'programme funding' is short-lived on reserve land; landholders are responsible for feral animal control and are given education and support as able.

Optimising use of Chittering Landcare resources for feral pig eradication was the aim of the workshop; a local farmer stated feral pigs had steadily increased.

A sow, sexually mature at six months, produces two litters annually with a mature animal, producing litters of sixteen.

Dr Peter Adams, Murdoch, researched the northern Jarrah Forest to form a 'baseline' following a 3 year study of increase or decrease or numbers remaining static.

'**Pigout**', containing 72mgms of 1080, was trialled over Canning and Conjurunup catchments, with 5 and 7 bait stations respectively, resulting in a 79% knockdown.

'**Secondary poisoning**'. 1080 remains in the stomach contents for three days after which it loses its toxicity.

Conclusions:

Current practices are not reducing feral pig numbers.

Digging activity is significantly widespread.

Secondary poisoning risk is low.

Feral pig numbers remain at sustainable levels.

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