

April 2015



Biddip



Newsletter of the Toodyay Friends of the River

Volume 9, Issue 1



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The Toodyay Friends of the River are grateful to the Wheatbelt NRM for their support in producing the April 2015 newsletter



wheatbelt
natural resource
management

Presidents Message by Robyn Taylor



WELCOME TO our first newsletter for 2015. And what a busy year it has been so far for Toodyay. In particular for our Friends Greg and Beth and others who led the Toodyay Tidy Towners to their ultimate victory - the National Tidy Town Award! We were thrilled to learn that we won the 'Environment Protection and Innovation' category which helped to put Toodyay well out in front. Congratulations to everyone involved – you have done us proud!

TFOR had a very productive Planning Meeting in January with the decision to concentrate on rehabilitating the former Seed Orchard at Lloyd Reserve as our major project for the year. This Reserve will add to the enjoyment of walking along the Bilya Walk Track.

Some years ago TFOR undertook a formal commitment to manage this Reserve and a Strategic Management Plan was drawn up with the assistance of member Brian Shepherd. It is now time to put this Plan into action.

Our first working bee for the year was tackling the regrowth of Castor Oil plants around Newcastle Bridge before they started to seed. It seems we will need to do this each year until the plants finally die out – is this wishful thinking? We also removed as much Caltrop as we could from around the Duidgee Park area near the bridge and river. This thorny pest is out of control after the rains. It has spread along the river track behind the town and just about everywhere else. To alert the public to this menace, a major article was published in the March edition of the *Toodyay Herald*.

In March we began work on Lloyd Reserve marking out pathways through the area, and selecting shrubs and saplings to be removed to allow space for others to grow. We also cut down saplings that had grown under the power lines and poisoned the stumps to prevent regrowth. Work was also undertaken along the Bilya Walk Track clearing fallen branches and general maintenance.

Thanks to the efforts of members Ric and Rebecca we now have state of the art water quality testing equipment. Monitoring our waterways will be a useful method of learning more about our river system.

Over the June long weekend we are looking forward to joining the Toodyay Naturalist Club on their excursion to the Talbot area south-west of York. We are particularly interested to see the Talbot Brook Land Management Association's work on waterway restoration. Make sure you make a note in your diary so you don't miss out!



Photograph shows a joint effort with the Toodyay Naturalists' Club on 'Clean Up Australia Day', from left: Eva & Don Smith, Robyn Taylor, Laraine Brindle, Lyn Johnson, Wayne Clarke (weighing the bags), Bridget Leggett, Sharon Richards and Desraé Clarke with some of the litter collected.

Photo: Lance Bennett

Correction: Photo caption on Page 11 of Issue 8 Number 3, December 2014 issue stating 'taken on Phillip Island' was actually 'taken in the Strzelecki Mountains'. Editor.

CALTROP - A WEED TO WATCH

THE RECENT SUMMER rains has caused the weed, Caltrop - (*Tribulus terrestris*) Cat-head, Bindii or Puncture Vine, to rear its ugly head. The seed can remain in the soil for four to five years and will heavily germinate following summer rains but will also readily germinate at any time following rain.

With the recent Friends busy-bee attack on the weed in the vicinity of the Newcastle Bridge there were many large adult plants but the stored seed had obviously made a good beginning with growth as there were also hundreds of tiny plants present. This annual plant grows rapidly with flowering and the formation of burrs within three to five weeks.

The leaves are grey-green in colour and fern-like in appearance. The tiny, yellow flowers of five petals are less than one centimetre in diameter. The small wedge-shaped burrs are formed in clusters of five with each burr consisting of four to five long, sharp spines.

It is a plant from the Mediterranean region and is a curse for our farmers. It is toxic to stock causing photo sensitisation of the skin around the lips, ears and eyes and contaminates wool and dried fruit injuring shearers and wool, fruit and vegetable handlers. It causes chronic staggers in sheep, mainly the British breeds, and the spiny burr can cause injury in the intestines of stock. It will also form pustules injuring animal feet especially when the frog of a horse's hoof is penetrated.

Seed is dispersed by vehicle tyres, machinery, footwear, clothing, animals, soil movement, lawn mowers and water movement in streams and rivers.

The long, trailing, wiry stems are covered with fine hairs and lie prostrate on the ground with an extensive root system radiating from a central taproot which may be a metre or more in depth. This root system enables the plant to compete effectively for moisture and nutrients dominating other ground plants by smothering. It has an 'allelopathic' property which means it can produce chemicals inhibiting the germination of other seeds resulting in poor crop return. However, it is frost sensitive and water-logging intolerant and grows best in open areas of light.

In summary the weed, Caltrop, has become a severe problem in some areas of Toodyay. It is recommended to hand remove as much as possible before the setting of seed and to check footwear, tyres, etc, before leaving an infected area. Farmers are advised to contact the Department of Food and Agriculture's website: www.agric.wa.gov.au for further information on this nasty weed's control.

The drawing is from DAFWA factsheet



Above key: A - habit, B - Leaf, C - Flower, D - Upper surface of burr, E - Lateral surface of burr, F - Separate carpel (lateral view), G The same in longitudinal section, showing seeds

Tribulus terrestris

Photos: S.M. Armstrong, J. Dodd & R. Knox

'An angel was watching over this little possum'

by Robyn Taylor

THERE MUST have been a guiding spirit that interfered with my task of photographing flats in the Crawley area near the University of WA. I had a list of specific buildings to research and somehow missed a block of flats in Cook Street. That was in January. On a return trip in February for an evening meeting, I had to stay overnight with friends. So the following morning I went to look for the flats before returning home to Toodyay.

I had to drive along Fairway to get to Cook Street, and in the process I negotiated a round-about at Caporn Street. A block of flats down that street caught my eye, so I decided to check them out. I took a photo, and on a whim walked down to look at the back of the property. On the way I heard a rustling sound amongst the dead leaves in the native garden. Probably a wattle-bird, I thought, feeding on the flowering grevilleas or a bobtail after snails. I will have a look on my way back.

The rustling was still going on. Surprisingly it didn't go still and quiet when I searched through the leaves. And there it was, a strange little creature, totally hairless and so young its eyes hadn't opened. It had ragged ears. I had never seen such a thing before. So I scooped it up in my hands and then a long thin tail tried to wind itself around my finger. A baby possum! I was thrilled to find it, and alarmed at the large number of ants attacking its tiny body.

I sat on a low brick wall and with the wriggling possum in my lap I started to pick off the ants. No

wonder he was stressed and struggling amongst the leaves. His cool body responded to the warmth of my hands and soon he was trying to climb inside my blouse. The sunlight must have worried him. Now what should I do!

I knew there was a veterinary clinic only five minutes away on Stirling Highway, and I needed to put him into something safe and secure, but what? Its occasions like this when a Bendigo Bank insulated lunch bag with a zippered top proves handy. So out went the biscuits and water bottle. But he also needed to be placed on something soft. My pyjamas made a perfect nest. He curled up happily, ant free, while I tackled the ants inside my blouse, all the time hoping I didn't make skin contact with those grevilleas. On the way to the

vets he started to make small 'chittering' noises. He wanted his mum...

Possum was soon safe and warm on a heated mat, and a call made to Native Animal Rescue. After a fortnight I rang NAR and heard the good news that he was with a carer and doing well.

There had to be an angel looking after that baby ring-tailed possum. So many chance events led to his timely discovery. And now when I go to Perth I will make sure I have that BB lunch bag and a soft towel - just in case.



TOODYAY TIDY TOWNS by Beth Frayne



Above: Young Legends, Josie (Queensland) and Hannah (WA) beneath Mt Roland, Tasmania

Photo: Beth Frayne

Young Legend Hannah Morrison's letter (pages 6-8) will tell you about our marvelous wins - **four!** at the National Tidy Towns Awards in Sheffield, Tasmania on 26-27 February. So, what are we doing now? Still catching our breath and amazed at our good fortune!

While some were swanning around Sheffield, Toodyay TT'ers were working on the Clean Up Australia Day (CUAD). For the first time in my memory, Toodyay registered for all three CUAD events this year: Community, School and Business. Supporter, Toodyay Chamber of Commerce and Industry, was Site Supervisor for Stirling Terrace on Business CUAD, February 24, with help from Somerville Gallery and our Community Bank. Bev Ellis had the & and Toodyay Friends of the River did a massive clean up on Toodyay Road, Morangup, March 1. Well, done all.

A **Community Celebration** was held on Saturday 9 May 2015 in the Memorial Hall, with certificates presented to supporters, and story presentations at 12.30pm. And cake after!

Our annual Sustainability Audit has been rolled out, with community members asked to complete a questionnaire and return it before the end of May to see if Toodyay's statistics have changed for the better.

Toodyay has entered the State TT competition again so, in the merry month of May, another submission will be drafted! It gets easier with practice, and a lot of information researched for last December's winning National Submission can be used. The judging methodology has changed from 2015 - there are no regional awards, just straight into short lists of 5 towns for the 8 state categories, with judges' visits following. We have been told we are allowed to win again! So, let's do it!

TIDY TOWNS NATIONAL TITLES, SHEFFIELD TASMANIA 2015 by Hanna Morrison

Dear Keep Australia Beautiful and Tidy Towns Committee,

Thank you for supporting me with the opportunity to go to the National Tidy Town Awards. I thought this was a great experience and traveling to Sheffield was wonderful. It was brilliant hearing about other towns from different states and learning about how they make a difference to their environment. I heard about a small town called Titjikala from the Northern Territory with a population of around 300 people. I especially liked when they talked about how the children in the community would re-use rubbish as entertainment and then dispose of the rubbish after.

I really enjoyed being there in Sheffield with other towns but especially my town, I'm very proud of what we've accomplished as a community. We've had people help gather litter, including our school and many groups with both younger and older people working together. It also made me appreciate how lucky we are to live in Toodyay, with our river track, bird hide, tip shop, and also activities like the Youth holiday program and the Christmas street party.

It was great to be there with a bunch of people that are just as passionate about Keeping Australia Beautiful, so I'd also like to thank them. It was nice to have other youth members there, with 4 others attending some older teenagers and Josie from Cooktown who was 10. Josie won a competition run by the school to see who could collect the most bottles, she collected 5000, also the school donated a prize of an iPad to the winner.

TIDY TOWNS NATIONAL TITLES

(continued)

I really loved visiting Tazmazia, I found it very exciting seeing Lower Crackpot with it's statues, my favourite and highlight would have been standing near the Eiffel Tower Statue. The mazes were outstanding and were hard to find our way out of, but in the end we did. Each turn in the maze had a different saying or joke and there were eight different mazes with different themes and buildings in each one.

Sheffield had lots of Murals that were creative and such beautiful art, I remember Mum and I reading about all the murals each one had an inspirational story. My favourite story was about a mural called stillness and Warmth. It has the man who was responsible for Cradle Mountain being declared a National Park in the painting and the theme has come from his diary. When the ground is covered in snow, he would build a big fire, open the door, and sit very, very quietly in front of the blazing logs and one by one, the wild animals, without their usual fear of him or of one another, would come and share the warmth.

The award night was brilliant I especially took great pride representing my town and going up as they announced the winner. US! I was also very happy for the other towns, seeing them get up for certain awards just reminds me that there is still things we can improve on.

After we left Sheffield the main highlight would have been Cataract Gorge at Launceston. It was an amazing view and so green, Mum and I went on a chair lift around the gorge. I videoed it and Mum was so scared I was going to drop my iPad. Luckily I didn't drop my iPad

TIDY TOWNS NATIONAL TITLES (continued)

because I caught so many great time and I'll love to look back at these wonderful memories.

So I'd just like to say thank you again it was such a great opportunity and I had a wonderful time.

Gratefully,
Hannah Morrison

Rakali (Australian Water Rat)

By Desraé Clarke

In 2011 Professor Peter Speldewinde kindly gave me permission to use the following article in the 'Biddip', in the search of this elusive native rodent.

Mention the word RAT and it summons up images of a 1950's cartoon with a housewife standing on a chair with a broom screaming and trying to whack a rat or mouse running around the table. Well it may surprise you to know that the common old rat and the house mouse are in the minority and are a late arrival to Australia. Before these pests arrived Australia has a thriving rodent fauna ranging from the tiny Pebble Mound Mouse through to the water rat. These are not marsupials but dinky die 100% Australian rodents which are found nowhere else in the world. Australia is thought of as the land of marsupials but we have about 50 species of native rodent. And, the one which is of particular interest to me, is the Australian water rat.

The Australian water rat (or Rakali), is a native rodent that lives a semi-aquatic lifestyle. The water rat is ideally suited for living around rivers and streams, it has waterproof fur and hind feet which are partially webbed. Water rats are about the size of a medium sized bandicoot, with small ears, long whiskers and a tail approximately the same length of its body. In Western Australia they are usually black with a white tipped tail. Specimens in the eastern states can be black to grey on their backs while their bellies can be white to orange-hence the scientific name *Hydromys chrysogaster* which very roughly translates as water (hydo) mouse (mys) orange (chryso) belly (gaster). It's worth noting that although they have a waterproof fur, water rats' fur is a very poor insulator so they will leave the water to try and warm up. As they are not completely nocturnal this is a great opportunity to see them when they come out to sun themselves on a rock. While sightings of water rats are uncommon it is possible to see traces of them along rivers and creeks. They tend to bring their prey back onto dry land to feed and subsequently they will form feeding middens where old carapaces and shells from previous meals can be seen. Water rats also have very distinctive hind feet and the partial webbing can sometimes be seen in tracks left in the mud.

Water rats live in suitable areas across Australia and occur on many offshore islands. Although the species lives mainly in creeks and wetlands it is also commonly found on beaches where it forages along the strand line. Water rats are opportunistic predators and will take a wide range of prey, including marco invertebrates (critters like yabbies and mussels), fish, frogs and even bird nestlings. Because they are foraging along the bottom of

Rakali (continued from page 8)

creeks where visibility is poor, they have large sensitive whiskers to assist in locating prey, they also have very dexterous front paws for handling food. Their teeth are extremely sharp and their jaws are strong (as a few biologists have found out when their fingers have got in the wrong spot), this enables them to crack the shells of yabbies and other invertebrates.

In Western Australia water rats are an understudied species although this is changing. In the past two years two short term studies have been undertaken in Perth and Albany looking at the impacts of water quality on the species and also habitat requirements. These studies basically found that water rats are more abundant in areas with nice thick riparian zones (the vegetation along rivers and creeks). This is probably due to predator avoidance. Feral predators, such as foxes and cats, are thought to be a major threat to water rats. Habitat destruction is also a concern. The removal or degradation of the riparian zones not only exposes the rats to predation, it also can also have impacts in the stream such as reducing the amount of stream fauna that the rats rely on for food.

Water rats do have a bit of a bad reputation in some circles. They have been known to raid marron farms which can make them a little unpopular with marron farmers. But, on the whole these critters do no one any harm and can possibly tell you how healthy your creek is. These animals are the top of the food chain in aquatic systems; they are the ones who are eating everyone else. So if they are thriving then the rest of the system is probably thriving.



Drawing by Desraé Clarke

So next time you are wandering along a creek and see a rat, rather than run home to get a chair and a broom, stop and take a closer look - you may be looking at an animal which is only found in our part of the world.

There has recently been a further request for observations by Dr Sabrina Trocini from WWF to the Toodyay Friends of the River to join other 'friends' groups in the Wheatbelt region to assist in the Rakali search and survey.

The survey can be by observing tracks and feeding middens for signs of Rakali presence. The transects can be of variable length (minimum 100-150m), so volunteers can decide how much time and effort they want invest

in the survey.

The Rakali (Moyt, Ngurji - southwest Noongar Aboriginal names) weighs between 300g and 1.3kg and can be distinguished from the introduced Black Rat by its broad face, larger body, white or golden belly, thick tail with a distinctive white tip.

It is a semi-nocturnal Australian native rodent observed at sunrise and sunset but may forage during the day.

If a small pile of crustacean shells or carapaces are found on the shores of waterways it may well be the feeding midden of the elusive Rakali.

Data and photographs of the suspected presence of this native rodent would be gratefully received by Dr Sabrina Trocini at the address below.

Dr Sabrina Trocini, Rakali Community Survey Project Officer, WWF-Australia
PO Box 4010, Wembley WA 6913

T 6231 0223 Email: strocini@wwf.org.au Website: www.wwf.org.au

In the office Tues, Wed and Thursday. www.wwf.org.au/rakali

CONSERVING THE AVON RIVER ENVIRONMENT
by Greg Warburton



CONSERVING THE Avon River Environment (CARE) was formed in 2012 by a small group of Avon River Conservation groups in response to the closing of the Department of Water Office in Northam and the subsequent dis-banding of the Avon Waterways Committee.

Currently, CARE acts as an advocacy and advisory umbrella organization for an ever-expanding number of Avon Valley environmental groups.

The most recent meeting of CARE took place in York on the 24th of April at the new Community Resource Centre. With the help of Colin Cable of the Talbot Brook Management Association the meeting convened with no less than 12 different environmental groups represented.

It was a dynamic gathering with important reports and input from all attendees which provided an environmental “snapshot” of the river and catchment.

Below is a brief summary of the reports from the various group representatives present.

Greg Atwell- Friends of the Dale River- Reserve Pool Project, revegetation success, fencing, signage etc.

Tom Kerkmeer - Avon Valley Environment Society-Northam river walk tracks.

Wayne Clarke- Toodyay Friends of the River- Bilya Walk Track and water quality monitoring.

Desrae Clarke -Toodyay Naturalists’ Club –John Masters Bird Hide, Avon Water Bird survey and June long weekend excursion to Talbot.

John Masters - Birdlife Australia – Monthly bird surveys from Yenyening Lakes to Millards Pool and the proposed Mortlock River bird hide.

Julia Murphy - Greening Australia – Living Mortlock Project (fencing, native fodder shrubs, revegetation), Enright Park development, direct seeding for Whole of Paddock Restoration (WOPR).

Trevor Moffat and Dr.Dimity Boggs - River Conservation Society (York) – Water Rat survey (Rakali) and camera trap success, refurbishment of work trailer and new look newsletter with 80 on the mailing list.

Colin Cable, Kay Davies, Robyn Davies -Talbot Brook Land Management Association – Allawuna Farm land fill proposal, Qualen Reserve revegetation and rubbish removal. Roadside vegetation clearing with Alan Rourke of the York Shire present to answer questions.

Dr Liz` Kington - Wheatbelt NRM – Mortlock Connections Program, Red Card for Red Fox, Ranger Program, Healthy Soils-Healthy Rivers project with Perth NRM , “Activate the Wheatbelt”, a youth engagement project. Don Woodcock provided an update on WBNRM’s Storm Water re-use project.

CONSERVING THE AVON RIVER ENVIRONMENT

Don Woodcock - Australian Farmland Conservancy – A proposal to purchase farm land in the wheatbelt and introduce diverse, regenerative agricultural and environmental activities.

Brian Dale - Avon & Hills Mining Awareness Group – A presentation on the Bauxite mining proposal by Bauxite Alumina Joint Ventures to establish operations in the Northam, Mundaring and most extensively in the Toodyay Shire. Environmental and social impacts were highlighted. The mine would be only 1.5 kms from the Avon River. Special thanks to Brian for re-scheduling, at very short notice, to present to the group.

Avon River Management pioneer and author Fred Bremner was unable to attend due to a recent bout of ill-health but copies of his latest book, “Bulldozing the Avon” were available.

Fred’s extensive research has chronicled the decisions and events that lead to this regrettable program, the legacy of which has contributed so much to the environmental degradation of the River.

After the meeting we all enjoyed a delicious lunch at York’s legendary Jules Cafe before wending our way back to our various Avon Valley homes.

Judging by the feedback all gained much from the meeting and felt encouraged by the desire of the group to communicate and co-operate to conserve and protect the catchment.

There is no doubt that Bauxite Mining and Landfill loom large as major concerns both environmentally and socially.

The minutes of the meeting provide much more detail and are available on request.

The next meeting of CARE will be an annual general meeting at a date and time yet to be finalized.



Above: Members of CARE and visitors in the York Community Resource Centre during deliberations over agenda items

Newsletter of the Toodyay Friends of the River Inc.

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Established 1994

*"Make Friends
with our Avon
River"*

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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.*

Visit our website at
www.toodyayfor.org.au

The Back Page



For Sale - Toodyay Friends of the River Mugs and Logos

The Toodyay Friends of the River have purchased high quality stoneware mugs, complete with the frog emblem, for sale to members. The mugs are made by the Sandalwood Company, Hope Valley, Western Australia, a family concern which has been in operation for many years. The gift boxed mugs are priced at \$10.00 each, an excellent price for a very sturdy mug. TFOR logos are also for sale at \$12.00 each. These can either be sewn on to a top or attached per a small piece of Velcro, whichever you prefer. Contact President, Robyn, or Treasurer, Wayne, to make a purchase. TFOR make a small profit on each sale.

OUR SPONSORS

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

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