



30  
YEARS  
1994 - 2024

# BIDDIP



Newsletter of the Toodyay Friends of the River



Weatherall Reserve September 2025  
photo by Gary Payne

## This issue:

Editorial

Goodbye

Project Officer's Report

Woody Weeds

Annual Raffle

Foreign Fish in the Avon

Welcome back readers to the second issue of Biddip for 2025 all be it a month late! The winter started quite dry and there was concern that the Avon Decent would be a walking race but as often happens the rain came and it was a cracker of an event. One of the fastest on record. As you can see from the above photo Weatherall Reseve is quite different to the previous edition. TfOR is going through a transition period as our president, Jenny White and her husband have left Toodyay so we are on the hunt for a new President. Robyn Taylor has stepped up as Acting President to help keep the Organisation going.

*We gratefully acknowledge the Ballardong, Yued and Whadjuk Peoples as the traditional custodians of this land and duly respect a deep and unbroken connection to their cultural, physical and spiritual existence. We pay our respects to their Elders, both past and present, and emerging.*

# Farewell Jenny & John



Photo by Hugh Rayner

A farewell was held at St. Spevens Hall to say good bye to Jenny and John as they head east to be close to their children and grand children. Their commitment to Toodyay Friends of the River, and other groups in Toodyay will be sadly missed. They have been such great energy and commitment and a great asset to TFOR. Robyn Taylor presented Jenny and John with a delightful photo record of their time in Toodyay and their association with TFOR. If you would like a copy, contact me at [gpayne50@gmail.com](mailto:gpayne50@gmail.com) and I can send you an electronic copy.

# Project Officers Report

## **Avon Descent**

We all wondered if winter rain would ever come as by July there was still only a mere trickle in the river. The Avon Descent looked like it would be a non-event. Vicki and I were in NSW most of July but watching weather reports from WA and were encouraged that the situation would be improved by our return. It was certainly the case with an excellent flow for Avon Descent. Then, for the week after water level continued to rise. Better late than never as the saying goes. The day after Avon Descent was a scheduled TFOR working bee and a goodly number of members turned up at Millard's Pool to conduct a post event inspection there and at Extracts Weir. All was in good order with only minor littering and vehicle movement impacts. The morning showed that working bees are still alive and kicking.



Some local inhabitants enjoying the winter spoils

Photo by Gary Payne

## Pelham Outlet

The Pelham outlet project is performing well with the recent heavy rainfall resulting in fast flows exiting from the storm water pipe. The design and construction constantly demonstrates its effectiveness and environmental value for the river. Inspection however revealed one of the culverts is completely blocked by gravel and soil. This has not occurred before and I tend to think it is due to some earth works disturbance upslope. In any case we need willing workers with wheel barrows and shovels to clear the blockage. An overflow situation will erode the access track as was happening prior to installation. Bethan's revegetation plants so lovingly tended over the past 2 or 3 years are thriving there for the most part. Thank you to Kai for brush cutting and spraying around them to reduce the competition from the vigorous weed growth.



Photo by Greg Warburton.



## **Kai Shanks**

On the subject of Kai I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome him to Friends of the River as an official member and volunteer. I have had the pleasure of working with Kai over a number of years during my role with the Shire. Kai's business is "Avon Yard and Maintenance Services" and provided invaluable support for Reserve Management. I called on him to do a range of tasks from installing signage, to steel fabrication, brush cutting, weed control, walk track maintenance, rubbish collection and fire mitigation. Kai is the son of Helen Shanks who is well known and admired for her tireless work with Noongar Kaartdijin Aboriginal Corporation (NKAC). I am looking forward to continuing my association with Kai albeit in a somewhat different capacity now. Having him on board will be a great asset for our group.

## **Bilya Walk Track**

The Bilya Walk Track, which includes the Duidgee Park to Caravan Park section just seems to get more popular with walkers and indeed bike riders. Our "TRAKKER" counter is recording a large number of passes. During my stint in northern NSW, I explored river walks in Moree, Bingara and Wyallda. Although very pleasant they did not offer the same true river experience of our Bilya Track with its many features of interests, interpretive signage and installations. However, without regular maintenance the track will quickly degrade and lose its value. Even though the Shire recognises its benefits as a valuable asset and the Visitors Centre and website actively promote it, I'm doubtful they will take on any maintenance responsibility. Previously, at this time of the year the track has been sprayed to cover a 2 to 3 metre width along its length. This is then followed up in late spring/early summer with brush cutting. At the time of writing spraying has not happened and I'm under "Doctor's orders" not to use Glyphosate! However, whipper snipping is OK but that will have to wait until the grass and weeds start to die off a bit. Pruning, trimming and replacing track markers etc. can happen at any time. Kai is keen to assist with this work which is encouraging going forward. During a recent inspection of the Bilya Walk Track some sections were under water!

## Bilya Walk Track



Bilya walk track during August Photo By Greg Warburton

## Noongar Kaartdijin Aboriginal Corporation (NKAC)

I had the pleasure of joining NKAC for a cultural walking tour along the river on Saturday the 16th of August. The event was part of National Science Week hosted by the Community Resource Centre. A bus took participants from Duidgee Park to Lloyd Reserve where an introduction and welcome was conducted by Robert and Charmaine Miles. This was followed by a smoking ceremony at Red Banks Pool with Patrick on fire duties. We then walked the Bilya Track talking about the various plants, animals, bush tucker etc. along with the spiritual and cultural significance of the *Goguljar Bilya* for aboriginal people. I was invited to talk about the environmental history of the river and the work TFOR does to address current issues. It was a glorious morning with the river flowing swiftly by. The experience was a demonstration of how effectively the Bilya Walk Track connects people to the river environment and the potential to expand this benefit. I must admit feeling a sense of pride for what we have achieved over the years. After the walk Helen Shanks gave me an update on the bird hide signage project as TFOR recently agreed to an \$800 donation towards it. Helen is continuing to raise the remaining money required to complete the project. This undertaking along with the raft of other NKAC projects and activities have been submitted in the Culture and Heritage category of this year's Tidy Towns and Sustainable Community awards. We wish them luck and look forward to a winning announcement later this year.



Dudja Dreaming Tour  
Photo by Greg Warburton

## Woody Weeds

The Boyagerring project area has seen in recent weeks an environmental campaign to control woody weeds. A small band of dedicated TFOR “weed warriors” lead by Bethan Lloyd have been cutting, drilling and injecting Olive Trees *Olea europaea*. These large trees are well established along the waterway and were probably planted over century ago. Although an attractive tree they are a serious invasive weed with potential to spread and infest widely. It is easy to see where native species like Flooded Gum *Eucalyptus rudis* and Swamp Paperbark *Melaleuca raphiopylla* have been out competed by the Olive Trees and are in decline or dead. Last time we were working there Hugo Panizza joined us. He is a regular visitor from NSW and never misses a chance to connect with Toodyay environmentalists as he is a passionate conservationist. Hugo is the nephew of well-known local identity and farmer Frank Panizza. He recently completed his environmental science degree and later this year he will travel to Peru for a month of work experience on a conservation project. I look forward to hearing about his wildlife adventures.



Hugh drilling feral olive oil trees

# Busy Bees



August Working Busy Bee



September Working busy bee

# CARE

Thanks to the efforts of Amber Balfour-Cunningham from the Northam Environmental Hub a gathering of CARE (Conserving the Avon River Environment) members and representatives took place on the 6th of August. It was a packed meeting with CARE group members, Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management (WBNRM), Department of Biodiversity and Attractions (DBCA) and the Department of Water (DoW) represented. The meeting was at the WBNRM offices in Northam and was set up primarily to discuss the future of CARE. It also gave DBCA an opportunity to present their River Protection Strategy which we were assured included the Avon Catchment. At this stage no budget is associated with the strategy and it certainly appears to be focused on the Swan/Canning. The consensus regarding CARE is that it should be wound up mainly due to the logistics and time required to hold regular meetings. All agreed with John Crook of the River Conservation Society when he made the point, we could still maintain the spirit of CARE and continue to network and communicate on river/catchment issues. Indeed, it was pleasurable to meet up with familiar faces from the Friends of the Dale, Avon Valley Environment Society etc. Tim Law of the recently formed Beverley River Care Group was present and told the inspiring story of how the group formed and is now progressing. TFOR was represented by myself and Wayne with Deserae there on behalf of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club. CARE members will be notified of the upcoming meeting required to conduct the formalities for terminating the group.



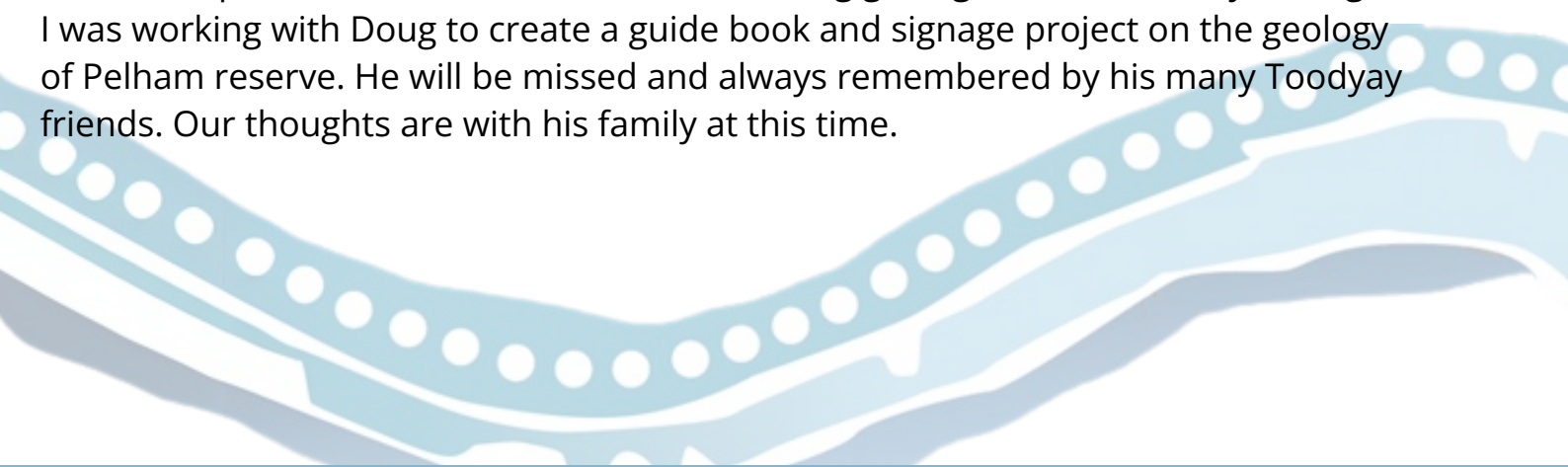


## Ag Show

With Toodyay's iconic Agricultural Show fast approaching it is time to think about how we can effectively present Toodyay Friends of the River. I'm sure we will be in good company with our other environmental friends in the Environment Matters Marquee again. If any one has any creative ideas for a display theme this year please put them forward.

### **Vale Doug Blandford**

In closing I'd like to acknowledge the substantial contribution that Doug Blandford made towards our various conservation campaigns in Toodyay over the years. He provided extensively researched and expert submissions and articles on the Chitty Road the land fill site, Helena and Aurora Range mining proposal and Main Roads environmental impacts from the Toodyay Road upgrades. More recently Doug assisted the Julimar Conservation and Forest Alliance with their campaign to protect Julimar Forest from mining. Doug's profession was geology and by any measure was a remarkable man with a prodigious knowledge of the earth sciences. His work had taken him all over the world including Antarctica. He and his wife Edwina settled at a beautiful property on Picnic Hill overlooking the Toodyay Valley. Sadly, Edwina died soon after they moved in but Doug continued to live there alone for over 20 years. He had a wry sense of humour and was an entertaining and informative person to be around. Always willing to share his knowledge and insights he never failed to captivate his audience with mind blowing geological facts. A few years ago, I was working with Doug to create a guide book and signage project on the geology of Pelham reserve. He will be missed and always remembered by his many Toodyay friends. Our thoughts are with his family at this time.



# TFOR Raffle



Photo by Beth Frayne

A very successful raffle with \$752.35 being raised. Many people were happy to just donate without buying a ticket. It also proved to be a great way for members to pay their membership. \$90 in membership fees was collected.

Kerry McNeill drew the winning tickets for the 4 prizes.

1st Prize: Rain gauge, and small kangaroo paw pot plant. (Donated by TFOR).

Winner: Green D07: Angie.

2nd Prize: Large kangaroo paw pot plant and small kangaroo paw pot plant. (Donated by TFOR).

Winner: Red D24, Naina.

3rd Prize: Gift basket of goodies (Donated by Uniquely Toodyay)

Winner: Orange D01: Pauline.

4th Prize: Entry to 'A Day at the Farm Toodyay', for 4 persons, Sandalwood Downs, 286 Bindoon-Dewars Pool Road.

(Donated by Jane Grant and Marc PITTORINO of Day on the Farm)

Winner: Green D32, Leisher.

Many thanks to volunteers: Robyn, Desrae, Gary, Mark, Hugh, Beth, Irene (Desrae's friend), Bridget.



# Foreign Fish

Foreign Fish of the Avon River by Greg Warburton

I was reading the August edition of the Northam Advertiser and came across a review of a book by fish biologist Dr. Glen Power entitled "Trout in Western Australia". The article contained some little-known facts and fascinating references about the history of game fish species introduced to the Avon and Dale Rivers.

The presence of the native Freshwater Cobbler *Tandanus bostocki* in the Avon River and its popularity with anglers is well documented and fondly recalled. But by the early 1900's anglers wanted better fishing opportunities. So, Murray-Darling River species such as Golden Perch *Macquaria ambigua*, Freshwater eels *Angilla australis* and even Murray cod *Maccullochella peelii* were introduced to the Avon River.

In that time before increased water salinity and sedimentation of the deep pools conditions obviously suited these species. There are records of 13 kg Murray cods caught in river pools near York but after about 30 years they disappeared.

Efforts then focussed on the establishment of a Rainbow and Brown trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss* and *Salmo trutta* fishery in the Dale and Avon Rivers. A hatchery at Pemberton provided the fry which was transported to the Avon for introduction to their new environment. In the 1950's there was a group called the Beverley District Trout Club who actively stocked the various pools.

There were also introductions of trout at Toodyay which was apparently successful as records of 50cm/2.3 kg fish taken from Toodyay Brook and Lloyds Pool exist. At that time the Toodyay Herald even published articles on fishing tips for local anglers.

These introduced species are no longer found in the waters of the Avon although several species of feral fish certainly thrive. Thank fully a few species of small native fish such as the Western minnow *Galaxias occidentalis*, Nightfish *Bostockia porosa* and the Western Pygmy perch *Edelia vittata* still occur in fresher parts of the river. However, the Freshwater Cobbler has not been recorded in the Avon 70 years or more.

"Trout in Western Australia" by Glen Power is available in bookshops or online order.



Department of Water staff surveying for native fish species in the  
Avon River near Beverley, 2011

## Letters to the Editor

Have your say, let us know what you are thinking, what's on your mind, suggestions for action, interesting things you have seen.

We would love to hear from you. Letters need to be in by January 16th 2026.

Don't forget to check out our web site to keep up with busy bees and the like.

Cheers

Gary Payne  
gpayne50@gmail.com  
0427 013 027