

Hamilton Field Naturalists Club – President’s Report for 2022

Diane Luhrs

Dear HFNC Members,

HFNC was back in business as usual this year with little interference from any Covid-19 lockdowns or cancellations. Happily, the presenters who were unable to attend last year because of the lock downs were able to be part of our program this year, and there were no cancellations of excursions because of State imposed restrictions on numbers of participants. However, as Covid-19 was (and is) still a present factor in our community, members have been cautious with many continuing to wear face masks at indoor functions and to be mindful of social distancing at our events.

The annual program

The program, devised from member input, was published at our first special meeting in March and was available on the HFNC website and at the Hamilton Visitor Information Centre. In keeping with previous years, the HFNC program of monthly excursions and bi-monthly special presentations was open to the public. The program also included the Club’s annual working bees.

Environmental action

We remain indebted to Rod for maintaining our commitment to the environmental works program for the Club, for organizing the materials for the works and for keeping thorough ongoing records of the outcomes of the works.

This year we continued our work in the Fulham Streamside Reserve, Kanawalla Rail Flora Reserve, Wannan Flora Reserve, Nigretta Flora Reserve.

Wannan FR: Members helped in the removal of more mature *A. paradoxa* as well as emergent seedlings from the interior of the Wannan Flora Reserve over a number of days in late autumn and winter. Thank you to all who helped in this project. It was hoped that Baimbridge College Yr 9 students would have been able to help remove the seedlings as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Award program – however, it proved too difficult to set suitable times for this to happen.

Kanawalla RFR: A working bee in June and another in July were devoted to removing grasses from around the trees planted in recent years to ensure the trees are not out-competed. Rod gave further time in late winter and over spring to spray out the invasive *Galium*, *Fumaria*, *Oxalis* and *Phalaris* weeds in this reserve.

Fulham SR: HFNC held three working bees weed to continue the weed-wiping activities (September-October). Weeds – African Weed Orchid, *Gladiolus*, *Sparaxis*, Cape Tulip – still occur in the section we manage, but this area of the reserve looks so good with a great diversity of native plants when contrasted with the rest of the reserve which has no weed-control.

Nigretta FR: Three working bees over October and November continued the annual program work of wiping the African Weed Orchids that emerge each spring.

Thanks also to Peter Hocking (for his weed-control at Hewett Park and the Four Posts Streamside Reserve) and to Roger Thompson (for his ongoing weed-control at Nigretta Falls Reserve and Wannan FR).

Fauna surveys

The February water bird surveys in the **Lake Linlithgow complex** contribute to national data on the occurrence of water birds and also contribute data to argue for the cessation of duck hunting on particular water reserves. Lake Linlithgow was at about 65% full cover – lower than the previous year following the generally dry year. Of particular note this year was the lack of birds – notably few ducks or Black Swan and no Hoary-headed Grebes, or Eurasian Coots or Sharp-tailed Sandpipers or even the Pacific Golden Plovers seen here only 3 weeks before this survey.

HFNC continues to monitor the 10 nest boxes at five sites in the **Bear State Forest** set up by HFNC. Reto Zollinger and Yvonne led this year’s survey with Janeen Samuel helping. Although all boxes except one had leaves, none contained any arboreal mammals. One box had fallen off and required repair and bees that were found in another box in 2021 are still present.

Special Presentations

We started in March with Russell Robinson’s presentation (held over from the previous 2 years of lock-downs) on Scuba Diving in the central and south Pacific Ocean and in Papua New Guinea: Truk Lagoon (with lots of WW2 relics/debris), Tawalli Resort (PNG) and Niue (Rock of the Pacific). The photography of marine life and structures and human relics was fantastic.

Dr Andrew Levings returned to HFNC in May to present on his PhD research into the Tasmanian Giant Crab biology and ecology. This was a fascinating presentation covering the processes of research and Andrew's development of his special crab identity tag. We were treated to a wide-ranging and thorough discussion of the conditions necessary to support these giant crabs.

In July, geologist Paul Callander provided an interesting 'compare and contrast' of the volcanics of our region (5000 years or older and in a wetter climate) with those of other places in the USA (much younger than ours and in desert environments) as well as discussing other American volcanic systems.

Dr Birgita Hansen was another presenter who was finally able to present for us this year on her research into Latham's Snipe movement/migration and habitat requirements. Of concern for her is the lack of formal protection for many of the sites supporting large numbers of Latham's Snipe, thereby creating a high conservation risk for these birds.

Our final presentation for the year in November was made by Yvonne Ingeme (filling in for our scheduled speaker who was no longer able to attend). Yvonne gave a detailed description of the characteristics, life-cycle and habitat requirements of and threats to the Southern Bent-wing Bats. She also described the differences between megabats and microbats.

These presentations (advertised in the Spectator and on Facebook) brought many visitors to the Club.

Excursions

Our excursions for the year started with the annual February Lake Linlithgow wetland complex (Lake Kennedy, Lake Linlithgow, Lake Bulrush, Krauses Swamp and Harnath Swamp). Rod added this year's data to his ongoing surveys of the numbers of birds seen on these wetlands in summer and winter.

In March, Yvonne Ingeme and Reto Zollinger organised a very successful four-day weekend canoeing/walking campout along the Glenelg River starting at Moleside and finishing at Sapling Creek. Some came for a day, others for a night and still others for the whole weekend.

Rod led the April excursion to Cobboboonee NP to explore the area in more depth than on previous excursions. Walks at each of our stops (Surry Ridge, Jackass Fern Gully, the Cobboboonee Nature Trail and H Stringy's Tree) brought birds, fungi and autumn flowers to view as well as an appreciation of the forest and the not-so-good legacies of forestry practices and, more recently, prescribed burns. Encounters with some leeches had us on the lookout for these pesky animals.

May's excursion to Mullinger Swamp, led by Glenys Cayley, was a delight. After a morning drive through white-out fog, the sun emerged for a lovely day on our arrival. The Giant Red Gum and many forest and water-birds were our reward.

June's excursion on a sunny winter's day to the Great Barrier at Byaduk Caves was led by Reto Zollinger, Yvonne Ingeme and Janeen Samuel. Exploring the lava flow, lunch at the Great Barrier, following a dry-stone wall, visiting the Church Arch and looking into the openings and at small cave features made for a good day.

Ross Simpson and Cathryn Carlyle (Friends of the Grampians) led the July excursion from Troopers Ck carpark to Gar Falls (our lunch spot) in the Northern Grampians. Some returned to the car park from there while others ventured to the Beehive Falls before returning. The sandstone rocks and the falls looked superb.

Our August excursion was the only one to be changed. Thanks to Wendy and Peter McDonald for checking out the roads before our excursion date. Instead of going to Wild Man's Cave in Burrunj (Black Range), we kept our excursion local – first meeting Dave Munro in Penshurst at Yatmerone Wildlife Swamp to look at how much the Swamp has changed since the plantings and management over ten years. Dave also showed us the special memorial seat made in honour of Lyn Munro. From Yatmerone we travelled via the GHCMA roadside grassland restoration site (not very successful yet) to Dunkeld for lunch. After lunch Ross Simpson led us on a delightful walk along Salt Creek, through farmland and into the Grampians NP on the eastern flank of Mt Sturgeon to the Mt Sturgeon carpark – the end point of the excursion. Some also visited the Dunkeld Rifle Range to look for Blue Fairy Orchids on our way home. We didn't find them on this day, but Rod, Diane and Dave found them in full bloom later in the week.

A September campout at Lorne with visits to the Angair orchid show and Anglesea orchid sites on the Saturday and then on Sunday visits to the Erskine Falls, Sheoak Picnic Ground (walking track and lunch) and Stoney Creek Nature Reserve (with Camel Lily Pond walk) made for a very interesting and enjoyable weekend. Many thanks to Yvonne Ingeme for planning the weekend, organising our share-house accommodation and for arranging to have a local DELWP colleague Yani show the orchid sites on Saturday.

Rod led our October excursion to the southern section of the Dundas Range Scenic Reserve via Huf and Shultzs Rds. Although it was overcast and at times wet, we enjoyed seeing many orchids in flower and seeing a different part of the range. Climbing the sandstone outcrop brought views of a thornless Sweet Bursaria and a Hairy Correa amongst many other native plants.

Ross Simpson led the November excursion along the Loop Track up to Wurgarri (Mt Sturgeon). The day started out cold wet and windy. However, that did not deter members from undertaking the walk and enjoying the flowers and superb views along the way.

Involvements with other groups

Members continue to be supportive of Nature Glenelg Trust (NGT) and attend many of the workshops and programs this organization hosts.

The Forgotten Woodlands group is another conservation group that some members assist. And Peter Hocking has been a member of the Hamilton Coleraine Rail Reserve Committee of Management serving to uphold the stipulated aims of conservation of remnant native species along this reserve.

HFNC is very grateful to HIRL for the continuing support given to our Club through discounted fees for room hire for our meetings. We are also grateful to the HIRL Committee of Management for granting our wish to erect small plaques near the three memorial trees planted at HIRL to commemorate the lives of Club members John Cayley, Ken Grimes and Lyn Munro. The signs will be made and installed in 2023.

Successes

HFNC enjoyed good patronage at most of its excursions and special presentations with a number of visitors to the activities and new members swelling our numbers. Our membership in 2022 reached the high thirties.

HFNC was successful in applying for and obtaining grants for purchase of items to support us in our environmental works. The bulk of the first grant of \$2480 was spent in purchasing electric chain saws and protective items for the continued work at Wannan Flora Reserve. The second grant of \$18,266 was received shortly after the first was awarded and will be directed toward purchasing more items and paying for works of contractors to control the invasive *Acacia paradoxa*. Thanks to Reto Zollinger for all ground work done regarding supply and costings of items and to Rod Bird and Reto for writing the grant submissions.

Ongoing Issues for the HFNC

As in recent years, the issue of engaging sufficient people to undertake the ongoing work needed to maintain weed-free places in our floristically rich reserves remains.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank all members who in many and various ways have contributed to the successful functioning of the HFNC this year whether by way of attending meetings and excursions, writing excursion reports, organizing HFNC events (working bees and excursions), publishing details of our events in the local newspaper, and/or sharing data and images that can be used in HFNC reports, submissions, newsletters and the HFNC website.

In particular, I thank Rod for the mountain of work he completes in dealing with the correspondence, adding excursion reports, survey reports and other information to the HFNC website and in organizing and managing the working bees; Reto for stepping in when required as President; Steve for providing bi-monthly reports on the Club's financial activity and status and for preparing the annual Treasurer's report (forthcoming), and for providing background material on a number of issues that have arisen as part of the Club's business through the year. Thank you to Janeen for taking accurate and thorough minutes and for maintaining the sightings reports at each meeting. Thank you to Peter in his role of Quartermaster for maintaining an accurate inventory of HFNC items and intellectual property, and for managing the website so that it remains up-to-date with annual and monthly reports.

Thank you everyone and best wishes for 2023.
Diane Luhrs (HFNC President), 19-11-2022