

Hamilton Field Naturalists Club – President’s Report for 2024

by Diane Luhrs

12-12-2024

Dear HFNC Members,

I present the President’s Report for 2024.

The annual program

Once again Hamilton Field Naturalists Club conducted a full program of meetings, special presentations, excursions and conservation activities throughout the year. The annual program 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 all and well supported by the members of the public.

Environmental action

The Club conducted its conservation activities at our reserves of interest: Fulham SR, Wannan FR, Nigretta FR and Kanawalla Rail Flora Reserve. We remain indebted to Rod Bird 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.

Wannan FR: *Acacia paradoxa* weed removal began in late April with a club activity and was followed by three further working bees throughout the year. Ten Year 9 Baimbridge College students (supervised by Diane and their teacher Ross Hopkins) worked for one hour over six Wednesdays during May and June to hand-pick and/or lop *Acacia paradoxa* plants. Baimbridge College program leader Rhett Beattie indicated that he would be willing to include this project in their 2025 program to continue the school’s involvement with this conservation activity. Rhett also attended the November working bee with his two children.

Thank you to all HFNC members who attended the working bees and helped in this project.

Fulham SR: HFNC held two working bees to continue the weed-wiping activities (September-October). Rod and I were pleased to have George Turner and his son Albert at the first working bee and Sarah Patterson at the second. African Weed Orchid, *Gladiolus*, *Sparaxis*, Cape Tulip, Lavender and Box Thorn are the main weeds we attend to in the section we manage. The western area of the reserve looks so good with a great diversity of native plants, especially when contrasted with the rest of the reserve which has no weed-control.

Nigretta FR: Only one working bee was held this year – in October – with Rod and Diane and visitor Rachel Double and her three children (one in a bush pusher) continuing the annual program work of wiping the African Weed Orchids that emerge each spring. Interesting this year was the small number of African Weed Orchids *Disa bracteata* seen and wiped – 430 in total for 2024, where in 2023, 835 were wiped and in 2022 4,720 were wiped. Rod also treated *Galium aparine*, *Phalaris* sp. and *Acacia paradoxa*.

Kanawalla RFR: This year’s working bee in June focused on removing tree guards from trees that had outgrown their guards. Some tree guards were taken by Peter Hocking for use along the Hamilton Coleraine Rail Reserve – others remain for future use. Rod gave further time in spring to spray out the invasive *Galium*, *Fumaria*, *Oxalis*, *Phalaris* and other weeds popping up in this reserve. Rod also removed large tree limbs that had fallen across the rail track.

Fauna surveys

The February water bird surveys in the **Lake Linlithgow complex** continued this year. Lake Linlithgow was at about 90% full cover. Of particular note this year as with last year, was the lack of variety of birds. Birds seen in the greatest numbers were Grey Teal (3,135) and Blue-billed Ducks (1,100). Apart from Masked lapwings, no small waders were seen.

HFNC inspected the ten nest boxes (one of which had fallen off the tree) put up by HFNC for small mammals at five sites in the **Beear State Forest**. Reto, Yvonne, Rod, Diane and Pam were joined by Rhett Beattie and his two children Emily and Angus. Reto showed Emily how to operate the pole camera for inspecting and photographing the contents of each box. Of the nine boxes still on the trees, two had live Sugar Gliders, others had leaves and two had evidence of bees (bees and/or honeycomb).

This year, some of us participated in the second year of Greg Kerr's Western Woodlands Bush Birds survey over the weekend of 30Nov/1Dec following the 2-hectare–20 minutes method. A refresher morning on how to install and manage the Avenza maps that detailed the survey sites and how to upload bird data on the Bird Data website, was held in Dunkeld. HFNC assisted Greg in sourcing and managing the funding for the hire of the meeting hall with a grant from SEANA – being managed though our bank account.

Special Presentations

This year HFNC members enjoyed a diverse range of presentations. First up for the year, Peter and Wendy McDonald presented on the social, geological and ecological features of Christmas and Cocos Keeling Islands with an emphasis on the birds of the region. In May, Clive and Catherine Carlyle described their extended hiking expedition into south-west Tasmania and the dramatic scenery they enjoyed.

Roland Maars and Andrew Prior were our presenters for July. They gave a detailed account of their chemical geological research and findings into the ages of rocks in the Grampians. In September, Diane Luhrs and Rod Bird described their travels in 2023 and 2024 along the Canning Stock Route with the focus being on the plants, birds and landscapes along this historic track. Our final presentation for the year was given by Ross Cayley who gave an in-depth discussion of the geological processes that occurred to create our part of the world. He described the changes over geological time dating back 650 million years through to the present.

Excursions

HFNC members enjoyed a varied program of excursions this year. As mentioned above, members participated in the annual wetlands bird survey in February at Lake Linlithgow and nearby Krause Swamp. Rod also followed up this survey by surveying Lake Kennedy, Lake Bullrush, and Harnath Swamp. In March, members enjoyed a combined excursion with Portland Field Naturalists and headed to South Australia to visit interesting sites around Port MacDonnell: French Point (Golden Plovers and Double-banded Plovers), Cape Northumberland (nesting Black Cormorants and Australian Fur Seals) and Germain Reserve (Yellow Gum *Eucalyptus leucoxylon* ssp. *metacarpal* with large pendula capsules on pin-red stalks).

In April, members travelled south to the Cobboboonee National Park and the Mt Clay State Forest to visit four different sites: Heathlands Nature Trail (CNP), Fish Holes (CNP), Sawpit Picnic Area (MCSF), and Whalers Lookout (MCSF). In May, Rod and Diane led members to a section of the Grampians Peaks Trail from Cassidy's Gap to the Griffin Trail Head. Car shuttles were used to facilitate member transport on this walk. Some walked the whole 12 km distance – others turned back shortly before halfway. Two walked the little way to the Cassidy Gap camping area and spent the rest of their day in photography and art.

In June we headed south again to join our Portland Field Nats friends where Ruth Graney led us on a coastal walk along Sam's Loop through heathland. In July we offered to help Nature Glenelg Trust with its tree-planting program at Walker Swamp. However, the weather was not the best for being out-doors so the activity changed to one of being under-cover on the NGT property to examine specimens of aquatic life found in the swamp waters. The August excursion to the Fish Falls in the northern Grampians was led by Jenni Mitchell and Mervyn Hannan. While still very attractive, the dry year to-date resulted in a low water-level and fewer than expected plants in flower.

The September excursion took members to Casterton Cemetery, Baileys Rocks in the Dergholm State Park and the Poolaijelo/Mosquito Creek area (last visited by HFNC in 2000) – especially to look for spring flowering orchids with a particular focus on looking for the striking Scarlet Spider Orchid *Caledonia formosa*. We were joined by Portland Field Naturalists in Casterton. Thereafter Ruth Graney led the way to the sites visited. We were delighted that Raz Brewer of Portland was able to direct us to the Scarlet Spider Orchid and its hybrids near Mosquito Creek. The October excursion was organised by Pam Lehmann who engaged expert orchid-seekers Leonie and Wayne Clayton of Stawell to show us orchid sites on the eastern and northern sections of Gariwerd. We were shown hypochromic *Caladenia tentaculata* at Bunjill's Cave; *C. villosissima* (Hairy Spider-orchid) at Golton Gorge where there were also many *Xanthorrhoeas* in flower after the fires earlier this year; *Pterostylis planulata* (Flat Rusty-hood) at Mt Zero and *Calochilus robertsonii* (Purple Bear Orchid) on the Mt Stapylton track.

Our last excursion for the year, in November, to Giant Rock at Brim Brim was organised by Rod and led by Ross Cayley (our November speaker of previous night who presented on the geological forces that had shaped our region over the millennia). Ross described the various features of the rock and the surrounding landscape to us as we climbed to the top of the rock. Rod collected a list of native plants on and around the rock.

Involvements with other environmental groups

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

HFNC is very grateful to HIRL for the continuing support given to our Club through discounted fees for room hire for our meetings.

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 2024 remained over 40 with 15 family memberships and 11 single memberships. And this year, the Club enjoyed receiving Rod and Diane's generosity in passing, onto HFNC, their payment of \$1500 for their Botanical Essay in the art book by Jenni Mitchell and Mervyn Hannan.

New issues for HFNC

This year we faced the issue of a website with no more space for uploading any new files. At first, we paid to increase the capacity of the website from 2 GB to 5 GB for an extra cost of \$30 per year. But when Tim Fry, our website host, inspected the website he found an error file of 1 GB – this was the cause of the problem of no more space. Tim was engaged to up-date and improve the functioning and appearance of the website, and now has almost completed this job. Rod Bird and Diane Luhrs have undertaken to supervise this upgrade and will soon be able to start uploading items themselves.

A second issue was whether the Club should become an incorporated association. Steve Martinich and Wendy McDonald reviewed the material on a club such as ours becoming incorporated. The reasons for and the process of becoming an incorporated association were presented to the Club during the June meeting and again in August to ensure that members felt sufficiently informed to vote on the issue in October. After the Club resolution in October to become an incorporated association, Steve guided Rod and Diane on the processes they had to follow to put this resolution into effect. Our club is now called Hamilton Field Naturalists Club Inc.

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. We do face a shortage of volunteers for most of the listed conservation activities we like to continue – especially at Fulham,

Nigretta, Kanawalla and next year again at the Wannon Reserve. However, it was pleasing to see new people volunteering on these sites.

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, delivering presentations to the Club's Special Presentation nights, writing excursion reports, organizing HFNC events (working bees and excursions), and/or sharing data and images that can be used in HFNC reports, submissions, newsletters, and to the HFNC website and Facebook page.

I would like to thank Peter Hocking for his work in managing the HFNC website over the previous eight years. This year we are grateful to Tim Fry for his work in updating the HFNC website to make it more user-friendly and simpler for nominated HFNC members to add or delete files – it is now up-to-date.

I thank Rod for the mountain of work he completes in managing the correspondence and in organizing and managing the working bees; Wendy 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. I especially thank Wendy and Steve for the background work they did to ensure the members were sufficiently informed of the reasons for and process of becoming an incorporated association and then Steve for guiding Rod and Diane through the actuality of applying to become an incorporated association. Thank you to Janeen for taking accurate and thorough minutes and for maintaining the sightings reports at each meeting. We do have a good team of office bearers but the time is coming for some new blood to consider assisting in the administration of our club.

Thank you everyone and best wishes for 2025.