

# **Hamilton Field Naturalists Club – President’s Report for 2019**

Presented by Diane Luhrs

12<sup>th</sup> December 2019

## **Dear HFNC Members,**

I present the President’s Report for 2019. The Club, this year, maintained its role of environmental advocacy and action through its program of activities and presentations and through taking the opportunities as they came up to present its views at statewide and local meetings. Sadly, the Club also mourned the passing of one of its greatest friends in environmental advocacy – the passing of Doug Phillips of the Portland Field Naturalists Club.

## **Environmental advocacy and action**

This year, the Club’s environmental advocacy involved club members responding to calls for responses to the role-over of the State’s 20-year Regional Forestry Agreement. A special committee examined the evidence of non-compliance by forestry workers and of the environmental damage done in the State’s forests to prepare a statement from HFNC. This committee met with the State’s facilitator to argue for stronger action on protection from logging in old growth forests and for protecting habitat trees in regions subject to VicForests logging. Our secretary Rod Bird sent a comprehensive document outlining the Club’s position against logging in old growth forests to the Environment Minister and many of us completed the on-line survey through the Engage Victoria website. Yvonne Ingeme and I attended a further meeting in Beaufort where I presented the Club’s arguments against logging in old growth forests and for the protection of habitat trees both in writing and verbally to State and Federal parliamentary advisors and DELWP representatives and Yvonne attended in her own capacity to meet with government representatives. The outcome of these engagement activities was a change in the State’s policy on forestry practices to include more oversight of the forestry practices and to include the phasing out of logging in old growth forests by 2030, thus eventually bringing to an end the State’s subsidy of forestry and the enormous costs associated with tackling the problems of non-compliance from forestry practitioners. We can only hope that the State Government and its departments act on the new policy to protect the environmental values of the forests.

A second on-going issue for the club has been the State’s, Local Governments’ and local communities’ fire-prevention strategies that, with the aim of protecting private and public assets, have caused massive damage to remnant native vegetation and habitats for native animals. Rod Bird and I attended the Forest Fire Management dinner meeting in July in Pomonal to hear Kevin Tolhurst outline changes to fire prevention practices that now take into account wildfire areas when determining fire action plans for this up-coming summer season’s fire threats and which also take a finer determination of mosaic burns. We were heartened to hear this change from the basic ‘5% model’ of prescribed burns that had been in operation since the 2009 devastating fires and which in practice caused great environmental havoc (as in the Little Desert burns) or in areas which had already suffered wild fire burns and did not need further burns (as in the Grampians and the southwest forests). A follow-up meeting in September in Dunkeld allowed HFNC members to meet with other Southern Grampians Shire community members in round-table sessions to discuss environmental issues relating to fire

prevention and management in the local region. We hope this also adds to a better-informed fire operations plan for next 20 years.

### **The annual program**

As with previous years, the HFNC program of monthly excursions and bi-monthly special presentations were open to the public. The program was published at our first special meeting in March and was available on the HFNC website and the Hamilton Visitor Information Centre, and bi-monthly activities were published in the Hamilton Spectator (thanks to Dave Munro).

This year we combined our Club's March excursion with the South East Australian Naturalists Association's (SEANA) Autumn Campout to assist SEANA in providing a venue for the event and to enable HFNC members to meet SEANA participants. This involved our members meeting SEANA members in Port Fairy for an island and rock-pool walk. Other excursions for the year included the annual February Lake Linlithgow wetland complex (Lake Kennedy, Lake Linlithgow, Lake Bullrush, Krauses Swamp and Harnath Swamp) with ten people attending. Rod added this year's data to his ongoing report of the birds seen on these wetlands, of the water depth of wetlands during the survey and of the annual rainfall. Rod and Jane Hayes added more data this year to the shore bird register with their repeat visits to these wetlands and to others in the region.

In April, three members attended a weekend campout at Bill's Gully Hall in the Little Desert region with the members of the Urimbirra Society who own a large conservation property nearby. Our host, Alex English, was pleased to welcome us and to show us through and around the conservation property. The May excursion weekend was also a campout – at Millicent, SA, where eleven members enjoyed visiting the Nature Glenelg Trust restored wetland Mt Burr Swamp on the Saturday. On the Sunday the group visited the Tantanoola Cave.

The June excursion to Mt Byron in the Black Range afforded the eleven participants extensive views from the top of Mt Byron and sightings of early winter orchids (Tiny Greenhoods), the endemic Mt Byron Bush-pea (not flowering) and many other plants in flower. The excursion to the Wannon Scenic Reserve in July attracted 13 participants who were led to the western side of the falls to follow the river downstream passed the falls and down a steep slope to a bend where the river turns west. On this walk, participants enjoyed views of the falls and of the country to the south and west

Ten members attended the August excursion to Lake Fyans and the Devil's Garden, and, even in the cold, were rewarded with interesting sightings of birds, fungi and orchids. The September excursion to the Drajurk State Forest for eleven people was a delight with many spring wildflowers in bloom, including many orchid species and indications of more orchids to follow. Twenty-five Red-tailed Black-cockatoos were a welcome sighting as we turned into Long Lead Rd towards the picnic/camping ground for our lunch stop.

In October, the club was privileged to have Roger Edwards (former forest officer for the Woohlpooer region) as our guide for our joint excursion in the Woohlpooer SF with Friends of the Grampians/Gariwerd. Roger escorted us into five different sites to show displays of Chocolate and Bulbine Lilies and many different orchids including the Swan and Slender Ruddyhood Orchids and the special Large White, Plain Lip and Elegant Spider Orchids. Many other native plants were also in flower.

The final excursion for the year was a combined mammal nest-box survey, and overnight camp and a walk in the Bear State Forest. Eight members took part in the

nest box survey that revealed all 10 boxes with green leaves but only 2 with sugar glider occupants. It seems that while initially not using the smaller nest boxes, Sugar Gliders now occupy both large and small boxes. Five members stayed overnight camping at the dam and they were joined by another on Sunday for the traverse across the state forest. Brunonia (Lookout) Hill area had spectacular runs of *Brunonia australis* in flower and there was also a spectacular display of *Bracteantha viscosa* (Sticky Everlasting) in the same area. The traverse over 5.5 kms in the southern section revealed evidence of a long period without fire (and a few spots where lightning strikes had only burned a few square metres), with open forest of mostly very sparse ground cover, many old logs on the ground and *Xanthorrhoea australis* plants with complete skirts of old foliage.

HFNC was privileged to enjoy engaging and specialist accounts of ecological interest in its program of bi-monthly Special Presentations. Greg Kerr, current senior ecologist with Nature Glenelg Trust, in March, discussed the Sleepy Lizard's behavioural adaptations to living in stressful environments. In May, Rod Bird gave a presentation on the islands, wildlife and glaciers of the Inside Passage of Alaska. Ben Zeeman (of the Glenelg Hopkins CMA) was our guest speaker for June presenting on the ecology of remnant local grasslands. Max Campbell from the Field Naturalists Club, Victoria, took us into the micro-world with his videography of microscopic organisms. Our last presenter for 2019 was Liz Reed from the University of Adelaide who talked about vertebrate palaeontology, its relationship to climate change and of the Naracoorte Caves as a site of significant changes over many millennia.

### **Working bees and fauna surveys**

The five main areas HFNC concentrates on are: Fulham Streamside Reserve, Nigretta Flora Reserve, Kananwalla Rail Reserve, Bear State Forest and the Lake Linlithgow complex. Peter Hocking and Roger Thompson also contributed to working to remove weeds from the Four Posts Streamside Reserve and the Nigretta Falls Scenic Reserve, respectively. Finally, this year, after much delay, we were granted permission from the Shire and DELWP to begin the much-needed weeding works on the 18-Acre Reserve – the Wannan Falls Flora Reserve – to remove the infestation of *Acacia paradoxa* and *Acacia longifolia* that is the major issue in this reserve.

We are 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. The working bees at Fulham SR and Nigretta FR are directed at removing environmental weeds – Cape Tulip, Sparaxis, Gladiolus and African Weed Orchid at Fulham SR, and African Weed Orchid, Galium, Gladiolus and Phalaris at Nigretta FR. Rod Bird, Peter Hocking, Diane Luhrs, Roger Thompson, Janeen Samuel, Yvonne Ingeme, Reto Zollinger, Peter and Wendy MacDonald, Steve Martinich and Sarah Patterson all contributed time to weeding this year. Rod also kept up a program to rid Kanawalla Railway Flora Reserve of *Phalaris*, *Oxalis purpurea*, *Galium* and *Fumaria*.

The club conducted two tree-planting days at Kanawalla (in June and July) of trees (*Banksia marginata*, *Bursaria spinosa* and *Allocasuarina verticillata*) that were part of the 2018 production grown by Rod. Rod Bird, Glenys Cayley, Peter Hocking, Yvonne Ingeme, Reto Zollinger, Sarah Patterson and Diane Luhrs planted 130 trees and erected plastic guards around the young trees. Rod Bird, Peter Hocking and Reto Zollinger followed up on this day with planting another 150 trees. Behind the scenes Rod prepared the sites for planting, followed up planting another 35 trees and weeded around

all the trees planted. To ensure the success of this project, Rod and Peter erected wire mesh guards around the new plantings, to protect them from kangaroos and wallabies. Rod was successful in applying on the Club's behalf for funds from the Southern Grampians Shire Council (SGSC) Greater Grants Program to supply stakes and mesh for tree guards for the Kanawalla plantings. The Club is grateful to the SGSC for its grant of \$2057 to enable the purchase of items to protect the new plantings at Kanawalla. Overall, Rod calculates that 213 volunteer hours were spent on this project this year.

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. Significantly, this year 3 Pacific Golden Plovers were seen – only the second record for the Lake (first recorded in 2002 by Steve Clark) – and there were record numbers of Blue-billed Ducks. Few Freckled Ducks were seen at Lake Linlithgow this year.

As mentioned above, HFNC continues to monitor the 10 nest boxes in the Bear State Forest. This year using the pole camera, sugar gliders were found in two of the ten boxes at two different sites. The uninhabited boxes had signs of animal presence in the shape of swirled leaves. Fortunately, no bees were seen in any of the boxes this year.

### **Submissions and involvements with other groups**

Members continue to invest time in supporting and promoting other environmental groups and in making submissions in response to environmental issues as they arise. The formal submission work this year focused on the renewal of the State Government's Regional Forest Agreement for the next 20 years. I thank all members who provided material, reviewed material and contributed to the drafting of the Club's submission to the State Government.

Over the weekend of 22<sup>nd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> March, Glenys Cayley, Dave and Lyn Munro, Rod Bird, and Diane Luhrs attended the SEANA autumn camp at Port Fairy. As no-one club had volunteered to host the 2019 autumn campout, the SEANA committee decided to adopt my proposal that it be a non-hosted campout – loosely organized but with an AGM and a formal dinner to occur on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2019 at Charlie's on East, Port Fairy. Jodie Honan was the guest speaker at the Saturday dinner.

On Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> September, Rod Bird and I attended the Gunditjmara celebrations in Heywood for the UNESCO World Heritage listing of the Budj Bim cultural landscape that was inscribed on 6<sup>th</sup> July in Baku Azerbaijan. HFNC has a long relationship with Gunditjmara and Budj Bim and congratulate the Gunditjmara community for its work in achieving this recognition.

On Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September, Dave and Lyn Munro, Peter Hocking, Rod Bird, Diane Luhrs, Jane Hayes, Yvonne Ingeme and Reto Zollinger and Glenys Cayley attended the Walkers Swamp Open Day to help celebrate its first birthday celebrations and the achievements of Glenelg Nature Trust in this restoration project.

Diane Luhrs, Rod Bird, Glenys Cayley, Yvonne Ingeme and Reto Zollinger attended the SEANA spring camp at Campbell's Creek, Castlemaine over the weekend of 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> October. At the camp, we were able to alert SEANA participants of what we can offer for the SEANA campout in Autumn 2020 and we gained seeding funding for to help with organizing this camp.

HFNC members were invited to attend the Yatmerone 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> October. HFNC is very impressed with the success of this wetland

restoration and congratulate all involved in this project. Rod presented an address 'Major wetlands of the volcanic plain in SW Victoria' at the celebration.

After HFNC members attended the initial Wannon meeting between Wannon residents and HFNC members on April 13<sup>th</sup>, Rod Bird, Diane Luhrs, Yvonne Ingeme and Jane Hayes attended the joint meeting of Wannon residents and HFNC members with Andy Govanstone on Nov 4<sup>th</sup> at the Wannon Scenic Reserve to examine and discuss Andy's proposal to DELWP and the Shire of Southern Grampians regarding fire prevention and management strategies for this reserve. Thankfully, Andy was able to manage the group so that the discussion between people of often divergent views was respectful and allowed for HFNC to demonstrate the importance of working for biodiversity aims in achieving workable fire prevention plans.

Dave and Lyn Munro and Reto Zollinger and Yvonne Ingeme attended the Wimmera Biodiversity Conference – and again reported on how good it was.

Finally, following the sad passing of Doug Phillips earlier in the year, Hamilton members joined with our Portland Field Naturalists friends in celebrating the 10-year anniversary of the declaration of the Cobboboonee NP in which Doug had played an enormous role and in using the occasion to commemorate Doug's environmental advocacy. Rod represented HFNC in speaking of the Doug's admirable qualities and successes in achieving desirable environmental outcomes. RIP Doug.

## **Successes**

HFNC has enjoyed good patronage at most of its excursions and special presentations. As for last year, this appears to be in part through combining some excursions with other groups. And we have welcomed some new members to the Club this year. However, as always, our membership remains in the 30s.

HFNC has been accepted as the host club for the SEANA Autumn Camp 2020. We are well on the way to creating a successful weekend with a tentative program worked out, seeding funds provided by SEANA, a specific bank account set up to handle SEANA transactions, HIRL booked for the whole weekend of 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> April, catering for Friday night and Saturday night organized, guest speaker for Saturday night organized and people offering to assist with excursions. The first registrations and payments have already been received, and thanks to Peter Hocking, we have a web page on our website where visitors to the site may download any communication/circulars as they are produced.

Hosting this Autumn SEANA event has prompted us to consider revising our Hamilton Region Nature Guide. We have an attractive quote from Ivory Print for the printing of a revised guide – now all we need to do is revise it – something Diane and Rod and any other willing contributors will need to work on during January. Grants will be sought from the Shire of Southern Grampians and from SEANA to cover the cost of the printing.

## **Ongoing Issues for the HFNC**

Two main issues are significant for the Club:

The first is engaging sufficient people to undertake the onerous and ongoing work needed to maintain weed-free places in our floristically rich reserves. Again, Rod Bird, Peter Hocking and Roger Thompson have been the stalwarts in this project – without their time and effort many of the reserves would revert to weed-infested areas that would

compromise the biodiversity that their efforts seek to protect. This remains a real challenge for our club.

The other issue, mentioned last year, is that as the Club now receives no payment for its works on public lands, our financial reserve combined with an annual Landcare Administration Support Grant from the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority, annual membership fees and donations at our special meetings, are all we have to cover ongoing financial commitments. We need to be mindful of what future costs may be and how much we need in reserve to cover these costs.

The issue of recruiting new members has been voiced in our general meetings and is something we need to consider and perhaps to make more of an effort on in the upcoming year.

### **Acknowledgments**

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, making presentations at our special meetings and/or helping to set up these presentations, hosting special guests, organizing HFNC events (working bees and excursions), publishing details of our events in the local newspaper and 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 managing the correspondence, preparing reports for our web site and in organizing and managing the working bees; Dave for preparing news releases and advertisements for our special meetings and for running meetings in my absence; Glenys as treasurer who provides bi-monthly reports on the Club's financial activity and status and for preparing the annual Treasurer's report; Janeen for taking accurate and thorough minutes and for maintaining the sightings reports at each meeting; and Peter for assisting presenters to set up their presentations, taking over the role of Quartermaster to maintain an accurate inventory of HFNC items and intellectual property, and for managing the website. Peter's installation of a SEARCH function on the banner makes the information on website more easily accessible for users. I also thank our newer members Steve and Debra, Peter and Jenny and Sarah for participating in the forestry agreement responses, SEANA planning sessions and/or the working bees.

Thank you everyone

Diane Luhrs (HFNC President)

12-12-2019