

Hamilton Field Naturalists Club – President’s Report for 2020

Presented by Diane Luhrs

10th December 2020

Dear HFNC Members,

I present the President’s Report for 2020. The Club’s program this year, as with most other organisations, was greatly affected by the restrictions imposed by the State Government in its response to the outbreak of Covid-19 cases within our State. Our Club could not run its full program because of limits to travel and limits to participant numbers at meetings and other events. In particular, the SEANA weekend scheduled for April 17-19th had to be rescheduled to next year as were our special meeting presentations, and the August excursion to the Grampians Harrop track was cancelled.

HFNC did continue its role of environmental advocacy and action through its program of environmental activities (albeit a little reduced) and through taking the opportunities as they came up to present its views either at face-to-face meetings, email submissions or via Zoom (on-line) meetings. And it did run most of the planned monthly excursions.

Sadly, the Club learned of the passing this year of people who had been supportive of the Club: Margaret Corrick, John Fenton, Amy Gunn, Kate Kennedy and Robert (Bob) Korlowski. Margaret, in particular, was a very active member during the 1960s – including Secretary (1965-1967) and Committee Member (1968-1969) – and did much to further the Club’s knowledge and understanding of local native vegetation. Margaret, with Bruce Fuhrer, later published two comprehensive books: *Wildflowers of South Western Australia* and *Wildflowers of Victoria and adjoining areas*.

On a happy note, our club welcomed new members this year and enjoyed their company on the excursions and at working bees.

Major activities for 2020

As 2020 rolled in, two major projects were underway. The first – to devise and coordinate a program to host the Autumn SEANA camp in Hamilton. This took much time over the first three months to advertise the event, formalize the program of activities, engage activity leaders and specialist speakers, accept registrants and their payments and sort out venues, catering and local community leaders to welcome participants to the region. We were ready to host, but then could not proceed. Fortunately, we were in a position to roll the event over to April 16-18th, 2021 with most people still registered and paid up and our caterers, guides and speakers agreeing to be involved on this 2021 weekend. I would particularly like to thank Glenys Cayley for her work in maintaining the list of registrants, recording all payments, managing the SEANA bank account and then refunding the few who decided to withdraw from the event.

The second major project was to update our Hamilton Region Nature Guide to produce a Second Edition. Again, this was to be ready for our SEANA weekend and necessitated much work up-dating original information, adding material and increasing the number of sites described, correcting a few errors, selecting more images, producing revised maps and designing a new cover. Thank you to the team of people involved in helping me on this project: Rod Bird, Greg Kerr, Yvonne Ingeme, Reto Zollinger (particularly for the maps and cover design), Janeen Samuel, Dave Munro and Peter Hocking. Ross Cayley added significant material to the notes on the Grampians.

We were fortunate to receive two grants to cover all but \$42 of the cost of printing for 300 copies and are most grateful for this support – from SEANA (\$1,000) and from SGSC (\$1800). Although we didn’t have the SEANA event to sell this new Nature Guide, we have sold quite a few to members, to participants on our excursions and to others interested in the region’s natural history. We will have copies for sale at SEANA 2021.

Environmental advocacy and action

This year, the Club's environmental advocacy involved club members focusing on the removal of *Acacia paradoxa* from the Wannon Flora Reserve, responding to the invitations to participate in webinars for DELWP on prioritizing reserves for allocating its resources (**BRP1920 - Options and Future Focus workshop – Gunditj Mirring Country**), participating in discussions on the development of a Tourist Volcanic Trail for SGS, alerting responsible authorities to issues of pest plants and adverse human activities in conservation areas (for example, human activities detrimental to Nigretta Falls Reserve), and responding to the Greater Gariwerd Landscape Draft Management Plan (due Jan 24, 2021)

After finally gaining permission last year from DELWP and the Shire of Southern Grampians (SGS) to attend to the Club's long-held desires to remove the invasive *Acacia paradoxa* from the Wannon Flora Reserve, members of the club – led by Rod Bird – met with Sherie Bain (SGS), Andy Govanstone (CFA) and Andrew Levings (environmental works contractor) to discuss and plan to remove the weed species from sections of the Wannon Scenic and the Wannon Flora Reserves. *A. paradoxa* was cut from the eastern half of the Wannon Flora Reserve over a number of days from late autumn through winter. Thank you to all who helped Rod in this project (Peter Hocking, Roger Thompson, Reto Zollinger, Yvonne Ingeme, Janeen Samuel, Greg and Nicole Kerr, Diane Luhrs and Sarah Patterson) and especially thank you to Rod who coordinated our Club's efforts that supplemented the work of Andrew Levings and his team who removed *A. paradoxa* from around the boundary of the Wannon Flora Reserve.

Two working bees in July and August were undertaken for the planting of trees at Kanawalla Flora Reserve. We have probably completed the tree-planting project there. Now we just have to ensure that the saplings are kept weed-free and protected from herbivores and that other invasive weeds are removed from this reserve. Peter Hocking, Janeen Samuel, Yvonne Ingeme, Greg Hartigan, Reto Zollinger, Peter McDonald, Roger Thompson and Diane Luhrs all helped Rod Bird in this activity.

Other time-consuming projects for the year included environmental weed removal at Fulham Streamside Reserve (September-October) and at Nigretta Flora Reserve (October-December) – Rod Bird, Peter Hocking, Roger Thompson, Wendy and Peter MacDonald, Janeen Samuel and Diane Luhrs attended these working bees. As in previous years, we remain indebted to Rod for maintaining our commitment to the environmental works program for the club, for organizing the materials for the various works, growing, weeding and guarding trees, and for keeping thorough ongoing records of the outcomes of the projects.

Club members again assisted Arborline in its work for a **Bush Heritage** project. i.e. to label plants for their Climate Ready Re-vegetation Project at Nardoo Hills.

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.

Except for the first of our bi-monthly activities published in the Hamilton Spectator (thanks to Dave Munro), all others were cancelled because of the Covid restrictions on numbers and not being able to hold large special meetings in HIRL. Our first special meeting also did not occur as planned because we could not link successively via Zoom with Marta Ferenczi who was not able to attend in person. Fortunately, Dave, Reto and Rod brought along slides so that the evening still managed to have an environmental focus.

Our 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. In March, Janeen led us to the Bridgewater Lakes for some birding, walking over the sand-dunes to the beach and to view the limestone caves near the lakes.

Our April SEANA weekend was cancelled/postponed. The May excursion to the Piccaninny in the Southern Grampians was conducted under Covid-safe social distancing rules. We were allowed a party of ten – eight attended.

The relaxation of the state's Covid group numbers at the time of the June excursion allowed for a larger group. Fifteen members and visitors visited Budj Bim to view Lake Surprise, the Natural Bridge and Foote's Cave. We had good views and access to the Natural Bridge and Foote's Cave as most of the vegetation had been burnt in the 2019 fires – the geology was not covered by vegetation!

The excursion to the northern Grampians/Gariwerd rock climbing sites of Hollow Mountain and Taipan Wall in July with Ross Simpson as leader attracted 18 participants. On this walk, participants enjoyed views of the enormous rock walls and could appreciate the recent remediation work in some areas to protect the ground flora and geology previously damaged through visitor activity and were also made aware of the effects of the rock climbing on the walls and the effects of bouldering in the areas close to and beneath overhangs used for bouldering.

The August excursion was cancelled due to the introduction of harsher Covid restrictions. Seventeen members and visitors attended the September excursion to the Dundas Scenic Reserve led by Rod Bird. As we were back in restricted Covid-safe practice – our group split into two to ensure that no more than 10 people were in a group. We thank Jo Tully for assisting us with our planning for this excursion. Many native plants – including orchids – were in flower at this time. The October excursion to the Roseneath State Forest for ten people was a delight with many spring wildflowers in bloom, including many orchid species, and indications of more orchids to follow. We enjoyed seeing the variety of habitats in the four sites that Reto Zollinger and Yvonne Ingeme led us to – including recently burned and other unburnt areas.

In November, Reto Zollinger and Yvonne Ingeme led us to the Cobra Killuc Grassland Reserve where once again we delighted in display of native spring flowers, and we were shown the most recent addition to this reserve – a mostly intact floristically-rich grassland reserve. From here Liz Fenton showed us grassland restoration works on a roadside reserve near Woorndoo – again with many species in flower. This work undertaken by John Delpratt and others demonstrates the successful restoration process of first removing the top layer of weed-infested soil before reseeding with native species.

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. Of particular note this year were the sightings of 1060 Avocet on Lake Linlithgow (LL), overhead at LL a Hobby and several Whistling Kites, a Brown Falcon, Nankeen Kestrel, a Wedge-tailed Eagle and a juvenile White-bellied Sea-eagle carrying something that it had picked off the shore, and we observed 32 Blue-winged Parrots and 10 Rainbow Lorikeets along with Crested Pigeon, White-plumed Honeyeaters, Red Wattlebird, New Holland Honeyeater and other birds at the north end of the 1975 tree block planted by HFNC.

HFNC continues to monitor the 10 nest boxes at five sites in the Beear State Forest set up by HFNC. Peter Hocking, Rod Bird and Diane Luhrs took part in nest box survey that bought to view 4 of 10 boxes at four of the five sites with sugar glider occupants. The uninhabited boxes had signs of animal presence in the form of swirled leaves. Fortunately, no bees were seen in any of the boxes this year. We did find out that without Reto Zollinger and Yvonne Ingeme to operate the pole camera we were a little unprepared for its use and recommend an instruction session on how best to use this equipment. Fortunately, we did have a ladder and a pole to lift the lids so that Peter could view into the boxes and take good photos with his phone. The large box at site 15 will need some repair in the near future. This year the whole reserve had beautiful patches of *Brunonia australis* in flower, and once again there was also a spectacular display of *Bracteantha viscosa* (Sticky Everlasting) just north of this Lookout/Brunonia Hill.

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. However, this year's group activities were curtailed with no autumn or spring SEANA to attend and limited access to other activities. 2021 is looking brighter with Victoria now out of the severe social lock-down and group gathering numbers raised such that most of our usual activities can recommence.

Successes

HFNC enjoyed good patronage at its excursions with a number of visitors and new members swelling our numbers. However, as always, our membership remains in the 30s.

Ongoing Issues for the HFNC

Two main ongoing issues are significant for the Club (as noted in the President's Report for 2019):

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 receives little or no payment for its works on public lands, our financial reserve combined with an annual Direct Grant from the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority, annual membership fees and donations at our special meetings are usually all we have to cover ongoing financial commitments. This year we did hope to add to our funds through hosting the SEANA campout – we will have to wait until next year to see what, if any, funds are raised by hosting this event. We have realized around \$200 from sales of our Nature Guide that we sell for \$15 per copy, and we organised sales of 5 copies to Slades Newsagency at \$10 per copy – the actual printing cost – so that they could sell them at \$15 per copy too. Any funds raised from these sales go directly to our reserves.

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 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, reporting on excursions and in organizing and managing the working bees; Dave for preparing the news release and advertisement for our special meeting in March; Dave and Yvonne for nominating and contacting potential speakers – who have now agreed to be part of the 2021 special presentation program; Glenys as treasurer who provided bi-monthly reports on the Club's financial activity and status and for preparing the annual Treasurer's report (forthcoming), and her for her mammoth effort in keeping track of the SEANA finances; Janeen (and Greg in Janeen's absence) for taking accurate and thorough minutes and for maintaining the sightings reports at each meeting; and Peter in his role of Quartermaster to maintain 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. Peter's installation last year of a SEARCH function on the banner makes the information on website more easily accessible for users.

I also wish to give special thanks to our out-going office bearers Dave Munro as Vice President and Publication Officer and Glenys Cayley as Treasurer who have given years of service to the Club in these and other roles – thank you. And I thank soon-to-be-elected incoming office bearers for taking on these roles.

Thank you everyone and best wishes for 2021.