

# Hamilton Field Naturalists Club – President’s Report for 2021

Presented by Diane Luhrs  
9<sup>th</sup> December 2021

## Dear HFNC Members,

The Club’s program this year, again as with most other organizations, was affected by the restrictions re-imposed by the State Government in its response to continuing outbreaks of Covid-19 cases across our State. Although our Club could not run its full program of special meetings because of limits to travel and limits to participant numbers at meetings, it did manage to host the SEANA weekend re-scheduled from April last year to the weekend of 16-18<sup>th</sup> April this year. We were very fortunate in being able to do this, to fit in the weekend between the lockdowns (more about this further on).

HFNC continued its role of environmental advocacy and action through its program of environmental activities and through taking the opportunities as they came up to present its views either at face-to-face meetings, email submissions or via phone hook-up meetings. We ran most of the planned monthly excursions: our spring excursions, in particular, were very popular and attracted many visitors – some from Hamilton and others from further afield.

Sadly, the Club lost two very special people - Hilary Turner in March and Lyn Munro in July. Both Hilary and Lyn were keen, supportive members of the Club for many years and whose knowledges of native plants helped many a new member identify grasses and flowering native plants in the field. We miss them greatly and extend our sympathies to Hilary’s son George and Lyn’s husband Dave.

## Major activities for 2021

As 2021 rolled in, we were hopeful that we would be able to run the postponed SEANA camp. And we did! Although most of the preliminary work had been done in 2020, we still needed to formalize our excursions program, finalize the catering and venues for Friday and Saturday nights, arrange key-note speakers for the dinner nights as well as the myriad of small things that need to be attended to when hosting 130 participants to a full weekend event. This took much time over the first three months of the year, and I thank all club members who helped in refining the planning and who took on various roles throughout the weekend to ensure that our guests had a valuable and enjoyable time in our region.

We were also very fortunate to enjoy sponsorship for the event from Wannon Water, Southern Grampians Shire Council and the Glenelg Hopkins CMA. We were thankful for the help from Portland FNC and Warrnambool FNC for leaders on some of our excursions – without their help we would not have been able to host all the excursions on our program.

In particular, I thank Glenys Cayley for accepting the onerous task of acting as treasurer for the SEANA finances and keeping tabs on the exchanges of money from December 2019 from the first registrations to June 2021 when the SEANA final funds transfer was paid. HFNC is financially considerably better off for the effort of hosting the weekend.

## Environmental advocacy and action

This year, the Club’s environmental advocacy involved the Club alerting responsible authorities to issues of adverse human activities in conservation areas (for example, human activities detrimental to Dundas Range – northern section) and seeking funds (not successful) for its conservation works or representation at workshops (e.g. DELWP SW Biodiversity Forum, also not successful).

Rod has been the mainstay of organizing the Club’s working bees, as he has been for many years. Members helped in the removal of more mature *A. paradoxa* as well as emergent seedlings from the interior of the Wannon Flora Reserve over a number of days from late autumn and through winter. Thank you to all who helped in this project (Peter Hocking, Reto Zollinger, Yvonne Ingeme, Janeen Samuel, Peter McDonald, Roger Thompson and Diane Luhrs). It was hoped that Baimbridge College Yr 9 students would have been able to help remove the seedlings but the Covid-19 restrictions put paid to that program. Perhaps, next year.

One working bee in June at Kanawalla Flora Reserve was devoted to removing grasses from around the trees planted in recent years. Thanks to Fiona Robertson, Janeen Samuel, Yvonne Ingeme, Reto Zollinger, Rod Bird and Diane Luhrs for helping in this activity. And Rod gave further time in late winter and over spring to spray out the invasive *Gallium*, *Fumaria*, *Oxalis* and *Phalaris* weeds in this reserve.

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, Janeen Samuel, Reto Zollinger, Yvonne Ingeme, Steve Martinich and Diane Luhrs attended these working bees. 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.

## **The annual program**

In keeping with previous years, the HFNC program of monthly excursions and bi-monthly special presentations was open to the public. The program was published at our first special meeting in March and was available on the HFNC website and at the Hamilton Visitor Information Centre.

We were able to enjoy our first two of the five bi-monthly special presentations but the others were cancelled because of the Covid restrictions on numbers and not being able to hold large Special Meetings in HIRL. In March, Steve Martinich's presentation on the volcanoes, general landscapes and some views of the social settings within Chile provided an excellent start to our year. In May, Andrew Levings gave an intriguing and fascinating presentation on the seabed geology, flora and fauna of the local coastal regions to the south of Hamilton. Our other listed presenters who were unable to attend this year have all indicated that they are willing to be part of the program for 2022.

Our excursions for the year included the annual February Lake Linlithgow wetland complex (Lake Kennedy, Jenawarra (Lake Linlithgow), Lake Bulrush, Krause Swamp and Harnath Swamp) survey with seven 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, Ross Simpson led us on part of the new Peaks Trail from the Piccaninny carpark towards Mt Abrupt. Most of us were content to stop near the waterfall before returning along the same path but Ross, Reto and Peter made it to the top. This walk was done as part of a reconnaissance trip in preparation for the SEANA Grampians walk.

In April, many of us led our SEANA participants to a variety of local places showcasing Aboriginal heritage sites, volcanic landscapes, wetlands, grasslands, waterfalls, the Wannon River, the Southern Grampians and birding places. During this weekend, participants also thoroughly enjoyed the Friday and Saturday night presentations. Reto and Yvonne presented on the life-cycle of the Eastern Barred Bandicoot and then, after the presentation, led people into the bandicoot enclosure to spot these animals during their active period. Many exclaimed delight at seeing these animals for the first time. Mark Bachmann's presentation on his philosophy underpinning the restoration of wetlands across western Victoria and eastern South Australia following Saturday night's dinner was very well received.

In May, six of us ventured to the northeastern section of the Kanawinka volcanic plain to visit the Black Lake Wildlife Reserve caldera (a new place for us) – a lake reserve but no water. The lack of water enabled us to appreciate the structure of this caldera. On our June excursion, seven of us spent the whole day walking in the northern section of the Dundas Range. While we enjoyed much of the natural environment, we were very concerned about the destruction to the remnant bushland occupied by the Coleraine Shooting Club. A letter was sent to Parks Victoria to express this concern over the destruction of vegetation along the range, of the pollution from lead pellets in a pool on the range, and of other material littering the place. We asking for better oversight of this Scenic Reserve to ensure no further damage is caused.

Our July and August excursions, to Mullinger Swamp and Harrop Tk respectively, were cancelled because of the newly imposed State restrictions on travel (a Delta strain of Covid-19 was being recorded in increasing numbers). We hoped to fit in the Harrop Tk excursion early in September. Fortunately, the relaxation of the State's Covid group numbers and travel distances for rural residents allowed us to undertake this excursion on the second weekend of September. We had to organize our sixteen participants into two groups in order to comply with the State's restrictions of the time. Rod led us to a number of sites along Harrop Tk with spectacular displays of spring flowers and then to the Manja Rock Shelter carpark for lunch. After a walk to the shelter to see the Aboriginal rock art some departed and others went on to Buandik for a walk to the Buandik Falls and up to the Glenisla Shelter for more views of rock art.

Our October excursion to the Black-Range/Rocklands woodlands attracted 23 participants, both members and visitors. Reto and Yvonne led us to a number of sites of different woodlands to enjoy a day of birding and inspecting the variety of plants and spring flowers in this region.

Rod led our last excursion for the year to Tower Hill in Bundaleer, off the Rosea Tk (a new place for us) with ten participants. Again, visitors joined our party. And once again we enjoyed the birding and the spring flowers along the way as well as the views to the Western Wall in this section of the Gariwerd NP.

As an interesting aside, none of our excursions had to be cancelled because of inclement weather even when the forecast on some occasions did mention the likelihood of rain.

## **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 85% full cover. Of note this year were the sightings of 3 Freckled Duck amongst the teal, 80 Red-necked Stint, 90 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and over 1000 Straw-necked Ibis wheeling overhead above Lake Linlithgow.

HFNC continues to monitor the 10 nest boxes at five sites in the Bear State Forest set up by HFNC. Reto Zollinger, Yvonne Ingeme, Rod Bird and Diane Luhrs took part in nest box survey that brought to view 2 of 10 boxes at two of the five sites with sugar glider occupants. Reto had repaired the pole camera so that we didn't have to climb the ladder to view inside the nest boxes. The second nest box with the glider had a lot of honey comb attached to the lid. It seems that the sugar gliders had moved in after bees have left and have made good work of the remaining waxy comb. Some uninhabited boxes had signs of animal presence in the form of swirled leaves while others had leaves from previous occupations but no current activity was evident. Bees were seen in one box this year. Rod and Reto repaired and rehung the large box at site 15 after inspecting it for animal occupation and finding none. The whole reserve, as for last year, had beautiful patches of *Brunonia australis* in flower, and once again there was also a spectacular display of *Bracteantha viscosa* (Shiny Everlasting) just north of the Lookout/Brunonia Hill.

### **Involvements with other groups**

Members continue to invest time in supporting and promoting other environmental groups. This year Portland FNC asked HFNC to help them learn to identify native grass species of our region. Reto and Yvonne, with assistance from Rod, conducted a great workshop for Portland naturalists. They led us to native grassland road reserves near Dunkeld to indicate the variety of native grasses and to discuss the features of each genus of grass. With the aid of handouts provided by Reto and Yvonne, all present were able to note the characteristic features that distinguish genera from each other and to identify species within particular genera – particularly of *Austrostipa* (Spear), *Rytidosperma* (Wallaby), *Poa* (Tussock) and *Dichelachne* (Plume) grasses. With lunch at the old mill at the Dunkeld Arboretum and picnic dinner at Lake Hamilton – the event made for a very productive and social day.

Members continue to be supportive of Nature Glenelg Trust (NGT) and attend many of the workshops and programs this organization hosts. At the start of the year many members attended the informative and helpful 10-week bird identification program run by NGT's senior ecologist Greg Kerr to upgrade our skills in this activity. In July, members attended the introduction to the NGT citizen science project at Walker Swamp in the hope that many of us would be able to contribute to the analysis of data collected on audiomoths and cameras relating to frog and bird activity on NGT wetlands – at Green, Bradys and Walker Swamps. While many of us expressed interest in helping out, the time needed to attend to this activity was more than many of us had to spare.

The Forgotten Woodlands (FW) group is a conservation group that Rod Bird and Peter Hocking assist. It raises seedlings of Silver Banksia, Drooping Sheoak and Sweet Bursaria from remnant sites and replants in areas that were once covered by trees but have lost out to the clearing practices of previous generations of land-holders. A major project in 2020 and 2021 was our planting of 150 seedlings from the Yatchaw and Pierrepoint rail line at the major remnant stand on the Yatchaw Rail reserve – another 720 trees from different sources were planted further along the reserve to increase genetic diversity. And for the past three years, Peter 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 plant three memorial trees to commemorate the lives and work done for the Club by John Cayley, Ken Grimes and Lyn Munro over the many years of their memberships. Jerry Chin ensured the ground was prepared and ready for the trees to be planted and planted the trees for us: *Grevillea robusta* for John Cayley, an *Angophora* for Ken Grimes and *Corymbia ficifolia* for Lyn Munro. I presented Jerry with a 'thank you' gift on behalf of the Club.

### **Successes**

HFNC enjoyed good patronage at most of its spring excursions with a number of visitors to the activities and new members swelling our numbers. We welcomed two new members Sam and Sonia Duke this year, and Jenni Mitchell and Mervyn Hannan have indicated that they will become members in 2022. Our membership remains in the thirties.

### **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. While nine members have helped variously during the year, Rod Bird, Peter Hocking and Roger Thompson have been the stalwarts on these projects – 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 issue of having sufficient funds to operate the Club, mentioned last year, is no longer pressing as the Club raised nearly \$3000 from hosting the SEANA weekend. It also earned funds from selling copies of its *Hamilton Region Nature Guide*, and it was the recipient of an annual Landcare grant from the Glenelg Hopkins CMA to help offset its administrative costs for the year.

### **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. I especially thank everyone for helping make SEANA the successful weekend it was.

In particular, I thank Rod for the mountain of work he completes in managing the correspondence and in organizing and managing the working bees; Reto for stepping in when required and for helping keep us compliant on excursions during Covid-19 restrictions; Dave and Yvonne for nominating and contacting potential speakers – who have now agreed to be part of the 2022 special presentation program; Glenys who remained as treasurer until after SEANA had been run and then helped Steve take over the role in May. Thank you to 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. This year the web-manager's role has demanded a lot of Peter's time, especially in managing the upgrades indicated for this year.

Thank you everyone and best wishes for 2022.

Diane Luhrs

HFNC President