

2019-07-HFNC-activities-events

Hello friends & members of HFNC – here are our activities/reports for July 2019

Special presentation evening Friday 19 July, 7.30 pm at HIRL (333 Nth Boundary Rd) – Dr Ben Zeeman (GHCMA) will be presenting a talk on the status, ecology and management of remnant native grasslands.

Native grasslands were once the dominant vegetation type of SW Victoria, covering an area of 2.3 million hectares. However, since European settlement 99% of the ecosystem has been modified or cleared for agriculture. In recent decades, urbanization has emerged as the next major threat.

Ben has been studying the ecology of native grasslands on the Victorian Volcanic Plain (VVP) since 2013. His research on the VVP began while employed at the Australian Research Centre for Urban Ecology (a division of Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria), where he designed and implemented a large-scale ecological monitoring program for Melbourne's native grasslands. This then led onto Ben's PhD research at La Trobe University, examining how remnant native grasslands on the VVP have changed over the past 30 years. Ben's research has highlighted the stability of frequently burnt roadside grasslands across the western plains, and the rapid changes that have occurred in remnants with an interrupted fire history. The key mechanisms driving vegetation change were examined, as well as the use of fire as a restoration tool.

Since completing his PhD in 2017, Ben has been employed at the GHCMA, working on the Volcanic Plains Stewardship Program. Ben works with landholders to conserve critically endangered grasslands and seasonal herbaceous wetlands on the VVP. The work also has a research component challenging some of the established principles of habitat fragmentation.

Ben's presentation will examine the ecology and conservation of native grasslands on the VVP, with a focus on vegetation composition and dynamics, geological history, microbial relationships and island biogeography. Visitors are most welcome to this presentation.

HFNC Excursion Sat 20 July to the Western block of Wannon Falls Scenic Reserve – we will leave the Hamilton Visitor Centre at 9.30 am and meet at others at the Wannon Falls Parking Area at 10 am. We will then decide the best way to access the western block (the water level at the crossing may determine if we have to drive around to the western side). Once across the river we will walk along the ridge to the downstream end of the reserve and then return nearer the river, conducting an informal flora and fungi survey. Back on the Eastern Block, depending on the weather, some may like to have a picnic lunch at the oval and then take a walk in the reserve beyond the oval. The Wannon Falls Scenic Reserve is an important refugia for native plants in an otherwise largely cleared Dundas Tableland landscape. The HFNC list of native flora for this reserve is currently 222 species.

Tree-planting at Kanawalla Rail Flora Reserve (Sun 28 July, 9.30 am) – meet at the parking area on Hensley Park Rd/Forts Rd intersection. This is the last major planting session to help restore this area that we started in 2005 to clear pines, cypress and pasture weeds from, and began planting trees from local indigenous sources. Now, in June, we planted and guarded 187 Silver Banksia, Drooping Sheoak and Sweet Bursaria. Of that total, 17 were replacements for losses from the 166 trees planted in 2018. We aim to plant and guard a further 150 seedlings in July. (A few resident Black Wallabies and a mob of at least 40 Eastern Grey Kangaroos that live in the adjacent Blue Gum plantation are the reason why we have to put wire guards on the trees). If you can spare some time to help on Sunday morning or afternoon that would be appreciated.

Excursion Report – attached is a report of our excursion to Mt Byron in the Black Range (Burrunj)

Assistance to Bush Heritage Australia project – 8 members recently volunteered their time over 3 days (19-21 June) at Arborline to tag and sort about 9,000 Yellow Box and Grey Box seedlings for a climate-change project at Nardoo Hills. The aim of that project is to test the adaptability of 4 provenances of each of these species from drier climates. Currently there are widespread deaths of the old existing trees in northern Vic. We all want to know what has to be done to cope with a drying climate and this may help.

Regional Forest Agreement renewal process – HFNC has made a detailed submission objecting to the terms of the last 20-year agreement, which look like being rolled over into the new term, that saw little protection and interest in the biodiversity of our forests and survival of threatened species. The main problem was the lack independent scrutiny of the process and actions, particularly since the government exempted the forestry organisations from scrutiny under the Federal EPBC Act that all other bodies must abide by. The submissions period has been extended to the end of this week.

Rod Bird

**Secretary,
Hamilton Field Naturalists Club**