



FRIENDS OF MOUNT PAINTER NEWS

FEBRUARY 2017

For more information about anything in this newsletter: contact Sarah Hnatiuk on 6251 2228 or 0424 263 565 or at friends.of.mount.painter@gmail.com

FEBRUARY WORK PARTY

Date:	Sunday, 19 February
When:	8am – 11.00pm
Location:	NW corner of the reserve
Meet:	Inside the reserve near entrance between 46 and 48 Skinner Street, Cook. Follow signs to your right
Tasks:	Weeding
Wear:	Long pants, sun protection and sturdy footwear.
Bring:	Please bring some drinking water, a mug and some food to share for morning tea. Other drinks will be provided.

Friends of Mount Painter's monthly work parties are held on the morning of the third Sunday of the month. March's work party will be on Sunday morning, 19 March.



On the western boundary of the reserve, January 2017

EUCALYPT DIEBACK

Like many trees in other parts of Canberra, the leaves of some of the mature eucalypts on Mount Painter were severely damaged at the start of this summer, causing their canopies to appear unusually thin, even leafless, compared with their normal, much lusher appearance. While some of the trees looked as though they were close to death, they are now producing new leaves.



Yellow Box by the summit gate. Left: April 2010 after good rain. Right: February 2017

According to a report in the Canberra Times of 4 January, the damage was done by Christmas Beetles.

CSIRO Research Projects Officer Alan Landford said a milder, wetter than usual winter and spring had made perfect conditions not just for Christmas beetles but their food source of leaves. ...

Mr Landford said Christmas beetles' lifespan was a couple of months after they emerged from the ground as adults. So after their peak in mid-December, the beetles could be expected to stick around till late January, early February. "They emerge after two or three decent rains in December time, when they register the conditions are right," he said.

From unpublished reports given at a recent forum on dieback (18 November 2016), I learnt that dieback in some other eucalypt species is also associated with insects: a weevil in the case of the dying Ribbon Gums on the Monaro and psyllids in local Blakely's Red Gums (N. Taws, Greening Australia). Although dieback is often associated with insect attack, it seems that there are often other contributors. In the case of Ribbon Gums, for example, drier conditions appear to have combined with weevil attacks to kill this species on the Monaro (C. Brack and C. Ross, ANU).



Yellow Box NW of tanks, 8 February 2017

This Yellow Box near the tanks, which was leafless in early January, is now sprouting new leaves. The numerous mistletoes, which have not sustained any damage, no doubt add to the stress the tree is experiencing from losing its leaves. Interestingly, other Yellow Box nearby, which can be seen in the background, were not affected by the Christmas Beetles.

FRIENDS OF MOUNT PAINTER'S ACTIVITIES IN 2016

Each year we contribute a short report on our main activities for the previous 12 months for publication in the ACT Parks and Conservation Service's *Scribbly Gum* magazine. Here is what we said about what we did last year.

2016 saw Friends of Mount Painter (FOMP) engaged as always with a great deal of weeding. We removed woody weeds from half the hill, worked to keep African Lovegrass off the reserve, and intensively weeded our target areas of native vegetation. The Green Army's help in tackling Paterson's Curse and St John's Wort in areas we had not been able to reach thus far was much appreciated. But we are dismayed at finding many new Blackberry plants; they have been mapped for spraying.

Our PCS-FOMP plan to replace Phalaris in the Wildflower Triangle with native grasses and forbs is on hold until a planned hazard reduction burn has been carried out. Meanwhile we are providing aftercare for PCS and the Green Army's planting on the hill of 400 Drooping Sheoaks for the Glossy Black Cockatoo.

Removing pink guards and stakes from a 2011 planting has been a big task that took FOMP, the Green Army, and a team from Conservation Volunteers Australia two and a half days. Roaming over steep slopes to collect guards and stakes gave everyone a very good workout! We will reuse some of the guards on the Sheoaks, which need greater protection from kangaroo grazing than the current small guards provide.

One of the highlights this year has been engaging parts of the community not previously much involved with the reserve. In January we built on an earlier connection with Macquarie Primary School (MPS) through an evening visit to the summit with some of the teachers. This has been followed by several visits by senior students as the opportunities that Mount Painter offers are incorporated into the school's program. This spring we guided MPS families and staff on a walk to the Aboriginal scar tree. It was good to introduce them a part of the reserve which was new to them.



Macquarie Primary students learning about Sheoaks

We also made contact with a group of CIT students studying environmental management. In a win-win situation, they practised their use of GPSs in recording the location of surviving trees from a 2011 planting, and FOMP acquired information about the trees they have been monitoring that will enable recording to continue into the future with these same trees. The students also wrote a report on their findings

that included tree height, health, and genus.

Briefly, some of our other activities have been:

- *examining how a loop walk round the hill might be established by connecting existing vehicle tracks with a path up the gully running west from the water tanks. We have provided North District with five options for a route for the path. With a loop suitable for both walkers and cyclists, we hope people will explore more widely.*
- *looking at orchids with a FOMP member, identifying potential Pink-tailed Worm Lizard habitat with Dave Wong, and watching birds with Nicki Taws.*
- *proposing a bush tucker grove on a strip of unleased land beside Coulter Drive.*



Snow on Mount Painter, July 2016

Compiled by Sarah Hnatiuk