



## FRIENDS OF MOUNT PAINTER NEWS

### JANUARY 2024

**This is the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, 2021-2030: to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems on every continent and in every ocean.**

### THE STORY OF BALDY AND HIS NESTING IN THE WILDFLOWER TRIANGLE

**By Cath Busby**

Although missing the typical red crest of his species, 'Baldy' is a healthy male gang-gang who lives and breeds in our area. He is easily recognisable and this gives us a great opportunity to learn more about the movements of these birds, which are notoriously difficult to mark otherwise – see <https://canberra.naturemapr.org/species/15862>. Gang-gang numbers have been declining in recent years, and despite their iconic status, particularly in Canberra, surprisingly little is known about the ecology of this endangered species.

I first encountered Baldy and his partner in October 2021 in Aranda Bushland, when I noticed them working on a hollow in an old dead tree. I reported this on Canberra Nature Map where I had seen the calls for observations of gang-gang nesting and feeding behaviours. That season they successfully raised two male chicks which fledged in late January 2022. They started work on another hollow nearby late in 2022, but abandoned it before breeding, possibly because a possum moved in.

In the spring of 2023 the Baldys were seen on several occasions in the Wildflower Triangle (WFT), and in early November I first saw them at a hollow in the top of an old tree. For the rest of that month and all through December they visited it regularly. At first, while they were incubating eggs, one always stayed in the hollow while the other went off to feed. When they started arriving and leaving together, it was a sign that chicks had hatched. On 20 December, a female chick made an appearance at the mouth of the hollow, and a couple of days later a male chick was seen. For the



next ten days, the parents were kept busy noisily feeding their growing chicks which were spending more and more time peering out. The female chick fledged on the last day of the year, and the male on the first day of 2024. Their first flights were to different parts of the WFT, but they soon moved to the same area where there were lots of stringybarks fruiting. The young chicks were already able to feed themselves.

Baldy feeding the female chick; the male chick is just visible between them.

There are many gang-gangs in our area, but it is always possible to recognise Baldy, and by extension, his family. They have been regular visitors to Wybalena Grove where they are well known by residents who feed them sunflower seeds. They have also been seen at other gardens around Cook where they have fed on pencil pine cones and pistachio fruits, as well as young wattle seeds which they are able to remove remarkably delicately from the pods with their massive beaks.

If you see Baldy, please try to get a photo and report this on Canberra Nature Map:

<https://canberra.naturemapr.org/>. He is a special bird who can tell us much about the ecology of his endangered species.

### **FIRE ON THE HILL**

In the middle of the afternoon on 8 December, the firies were called out to the north-west slope of Mount Painter where a fire was burning. It appears to have started on the uphill side of the road up from the Coulter Drive entrance (at the right-hand edge of the burnt area in the photo below). It fanned out as it spread uphill, crossed the Western Ridge and burned down to the top of ACTEW Gully which runs west from the water tanks. It started before a lightning storm later in the day, so was not started by a lightning strike, it was not part of a planned burn, and so seems to have been a case of arson.



View to the north-west from near the gate below the water tanks



Along the Western Ridge track



Unburnt patches of Weeping Grass

The fire covered about 18 hectares, principally of open country. Patches of native grasses, especially Weeping Grass (*Microlaena stipoides*), were untouched, but two large patches of Native



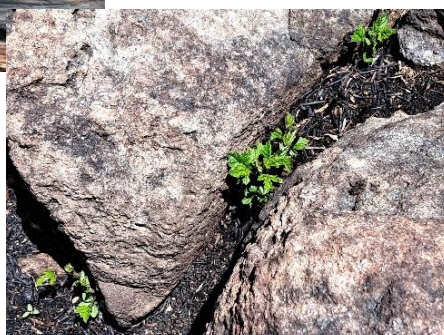
Raspberry were completely burnt. A few other shrubs as well as small trees were singed. Some appear to have been killed but others are recovering.



Burnt Native raspberry canes and shoots resprouting three weeks later



Above, a few new Yellow Box leaves



### A QR CODE FOR FRIENDS OF MOUNT PAINTER

Friends of Mount Painter now has a QR code that takes you to our web page on Ginninderra Catchment Group's website. There you can learn about our group and the reserve, including through to links to recent newsletters and lists of the reserve's birds, plants and butterflies.



### A NEW PATH FOR MOUNT PAINTER?

During his extensive roaming of the slopes of Mount Painter in search of woody weeds to spray, Tony Ashton has identified a possible route for a path to the summit on the south-west side of Mount Painter. This would provide access for the residents of the suburbs that are being established south of William Hovell Drive. He proposes the route shown below. It follows Stromlo Gully at the start and then winds up and across the slope with different views unfolding as the path spirals around the mountain slopes.

Tony discussed his proposal with the Parks and Conservation Service, and it is now documented in their system for future consideration (but probably not for while).



### RESERVE WORK, NOVEMBER 2023 – JANUARY 2024

At the time of writing the last newsletter, we had had less than half our usual rainfall during July to October 2023 and were facing a forecast of very hot, dry times over an El Nino summer. Our expectations then of needing to do less weeding than usual and lots of watering of new plantings have been turned on their heads by more than double our usual rainfall since October. Nevertheless, we as well as volunteers from the Ranger Assist team needed to water in early November. More recently there has been more time to devote to weeding, especially St John's Wort in the reserve's more florally diverse areas. We have been helped with that by Enviro Ag whose workers sprayed some of the St John's Wort. This was funded by a grant obtained by Ginninderra Catchment Group to help with weed control in local reserves. We are now urgently turning our attention to Cobblers Pegs.

Compiled by Sarah Hnatiuk