



FRIENDS OF MOUNT PAINTER NEWS

JULY 2020

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

JULY WORK PARTY

Date: Sunday, 19 July

When: 9.30am – 12 noon with a break for morning tea.

Location: North-west corner of the reserve. Enter the reserve at the end of the dirt road off Coulter Drive half way between William Hovell Drive and the big roundabout with Springvale Drive and Redfern Street

Task: Weeding Paterson's Curse. Advice for novices and appropriately sanitised tools will be available.

Wear: Sturdy footwear, warm clothes and your own work gloves

Bring: Please bring your own food and drink for morning tea. We will not be sharing as we have in the past.

CATCHING UP AFTER THE COVID BAN ON VOLUNTEERING IN CANBERRA NATURE PARKS

From late March to mid May we were banned from working on the reserve so when the ban was lifted, we sprang into action with lots of weeding and a bit of planting.

Weeding

With the good rains of recent months, there have been many weeds to control: Amaranth and Cobblers Pegs were prominent among them and Paterson's Curse still is. We decided to focus on Cobblers Pegs because it has spread rapidly to many parts of the reserve from where it originally established near the summit. It is particularly dense in the gully that runs east from the summit area and drains across the horse paddocks to the Wildflower Triangle. As the Triangle is the most environmentally diverse part of the reserve, we are keen to prevent, or at least minimise, Cobblers Pegs spreading there.



Ranger Riko and companions spent several hours slashing Cobblers Pegs, from which we have learnt that, even when cut low, slashed plants produce side branches which in some cases have gone on to flower. In addition, the green, unripe seedheads on slashed stems continue to ripen. On the positive side, slashing means the seeds are all on the ground rather than standing tall. As such

they are less likely to attach to passing animals and people and get carried elsewhere where they fall off and germinate.

In our work parties, Friends of Mount Painter (FOMP) have spent many hours weeding, either by completely pulling plants out or cutting their stems flush with the ground.

Cobblers Pegs is often described as an annual but some web sites refer to it as both annual and perennial. We see signs that at least some of the plants on Mount Painter are behaving as perennials, and have decided to test this. We have established two small plots, one where plants have been pulled out and in the other we have cut them at the base of their stems. We will return next summer to assess the outcome.



Setting up the test plots. The green grassy area in the background is where the rangers slashed.

Planting

We have planted a couple of yellow box and four red wattles in the enclosure, which was erected in 2009 to foster the germination of yellow box. In this respect we have had limited success with only one small, struggling tree establishing. We decided to provide a helping hand with a couple more yellow box. The acacias will provide some midstorey vegetation.

Last year a patch of hawthorns at the western end of the Old Road Reserve was cut down. As a means of eventually providing replacement shelter for the small birds which made good use of the hawthorns, we have planted a mixed clump of acacias and tea trees. We also put in four red box at the very end of the eucalypt strip.

AN ARTICLE ABOUT THE WILDFLOWER TRIANGLE

The current issue of Friends of Grasslands newsletter carries an article by Cath Busby and Sarah Hnatiuk about the two small patches of grassland in the Wildflower Triangle. You can see it on pages 11-12 at <http://www.fog.org.au/Newsletters/2020-07newsletter.pdf>. It recounts our observations of changes to the vegetation and the results from surveys after prescribed burns in the two grasslands. We also report Cath's sightings of some interesting small animals.



Photos from the
Wildflower Triangle
by Cath

Perunga grasshopper (left)

Shingleback (right)



THE ERODED EASTERN PATH TO THE SUMMIT

We have become increasingly concerned about the condition of the informal path to the summit that runs up the east face of Mount Painter from the horse paddocks. In the early days of COVID restrictions when activities were very limited, many, many more people than usual exercised on the reserve and many of them opted for this path rather than the hard surface one along the ridgeline. The result is serious erosion in places and grass worn away over wide distances on both sides of the original path. Thankfully, funds will be provided to repair the damage. Some Friends of Mount Painter members joined Ranger Riko's discussion with a contractor who will do the work. We hope it is soon.

MEASURING LANDSCAPE HEALTH

Landscape Functional Analysis (LFA) is a system for assessing the health of the landscape. It uses observation of the soil and vegetation to provide measures of soil stability, nutrient cycling and water infiltration. LFA data were first collected on Mount Painter in 2010 as part of a study of the reserves in Canberra Nature Park that was carried out for the Commissioner for Sustainability and Environment's investigation of the Park's management. Of the 35 reserves studied, Mount Painter was the only one found to be in a critical condition. Much work was then done to reduce kangaroo and rabbit numbers, the drought broke, and LFA data collected in 2013 showed a modest improvement in all three measures of landscape health. A third set of LFA data has been collected this year.

Friends of Mount Painter is pleased we were able to access, with the Commissioner's permission, the 2010 data collected by Sarah Sharp. We are also grateful to David Tongway, one of the authors of the LFA system, for agreeing to collect the 2013 data and to Dr David Freudenberger for the 2020 data. With these people's help with data collection, analysis and interpretation, we will be able to report on how far Mount Painter's condition is improving and share this information with the Parks and Conservation Service.



Our thanks also go to David Tongway for coming out on to the reserve in June to tell us about LFA (photo to left). He ran us through the process of collecting data along a transect in woodland on the eastern boundary of the reserve (photo below).



MEASURING VEGETATION CONDITION WITH VEGWATCH



Trouble shooting during Vegwatch data collection on Mt Painter (photo from Molonglo Conservation Group website)

Each November since 2011, FOMP has collected data for the Vegwatch project run by Sarah Sharp for Molonglo Conservation Group. Sarah has added the vegetation data from three plots on Mount Painter and one from a grassland in the Wildflower Triangle to data from 27 other plots in the ACT region and produced an exhaustive report on the results. (see <https://molonglo.org.au> for *Vegwatch Review 2020*).

The condition of the three plots on the hill remained constant over 6-7 years, while that of the grassland plot has varied over the years after a burn was carried out in 2014.

RE-ROUTING POWER SUPPLY LINES ON THE RESERVE'S BOUNDARY

High voltage power lines travel through Aranda Bushland, across the Cook horse paddocks, and south down towards the Molonglo River. This last section is to be re-routed. The Development Application for the work shows the power lines being taken underground from the pylon in the horse paddock near William Hovell Drive and through a nearby underpass below the road. They will then run underground parallel to the road as far as the next underpass to the west where they will return to the Mount Painter side of the road where the reserve boundary bends north away from the road.

The work involved in re-routing the electricity supply along the south side of William Hovell Drive, and maintaining it in future years, ensures that it will not impact on the reserve. However, while work on the power lines in the horse paddocks is being carried out, vehicles will use the dirt roads on the reserve to access the work site. Friends of Mount Painter lodged a submission in relation to the Development Application in which we pointed out the risk of weed seeds being carried into the reserve by vehicles. We are particularly concerned that African Lovegrass might be brought in as it is abundant along some other parts of the route where work is to be done. It is currently absent on the reserve where the trucks will drive, and we want it to stay that way. We have recommended that the proponents of the development monitor the tracks and their surrounds for African Lovegrass and eliminate it if found. This should be continued for five years after the project's completion as that, according to the ACT's Invasive Plants Program Leader, Steve Taylor, is the time it takes to completely eradicate ALG from a site.

We are now running small weekly (mostly weeding) work parties on Wednesday afternoons from 1.15pm – 3.15pm. If you are interested in joining us, please contact Sarah. Contact details are at top of page 1.

Compiled by Sarah Hnatiuk, Convenor, Friends of Mount Painter