

Friends of Mt Majura (FOMM)

Friends of Mount Majura celebrated its first birthday in November 2004. We were born with a weeding party, and we celebrated with another. As befits our mature age, we have realised the need for an agreed basic objective. The wording is to be finalised, but the ideas for the wording are: to promote the well-being of Mount Majura; and to encourage people's enjoyment of the nature park.

Group organization

All 'Friends' receive monthly email information about events and activities. An Action Committee meets bimonthly to plan and discuss activities and directions for the group. Recently we decided to become a member of the Molonglo Catchment Group. This solves insurance and public liability issues, and gives us access to a web page and funds.

Weeding

[pictures: working bee trailer, drain ditch]

We hold weeding parties on the third Sunday of each month.

Until April 2004 we removed woody weeds in an area above Mackenzie Street that contains Yellow box/Blakely's Red gum grassy woodland, targeting fruiting Briar roses and firethorns. Our valiant efforts also cleared the area of most of the privets, cotoneasters, hawthorns, ornamental olives, service and nettle trees as well.

We are now monitoring this area, and a follow-up working bee is planned for autumn.

Our current ambitious project is weed control at a drain ditch adjacent to the lower Hackett reservoir. The site harbours the whole range of woody weeds, some of which, in particular the firethorns, have grown to an enormous size. Box Elders and even a willow were found. Logs and piles of rubbish are entangled in blackberries, ivy and a myriad honey suckles.

Every working bee there is accompanied by the sound of frogs croaking and the sight of birds drinking and bathing in the places where water shows through the weeds. Some reeds and rushes have emerged where we have worked.

Beginning 2005, we envisage revegetation with native plants.

In addition to our regular weeding days, a few people from our group are working on the rehabilitation of a former sheep camp. Last year they removed Paterson's Curse, some thistles and horehound along the Casuarina trail where it passes through a sheep camp on the ridge of Mt Majura. Hand weeding was followed by direct seeding of two local species, *Vittadinia gracilis* and *Austrastipa scabra*, which proved to be excellent pioneer plants.

The result is very encouraging. One and a half years after the treatment the area has good stands of both native species, no Paterson's Curse and only a few horehound seedlings. This year, members of our group, assisted by Vernon Bailey from the Mt Painter Park Care group, continued with manual weeding and direct seeding using

seeds from a larger range of locally growing native plants. With a strategic “top down” and “along the trail” approach, we hope native plants will slowly replace the weeds.

We have begun to identify plants and collect seeds for revegetation projects.

Data Collection

[picture: Cootamundra Wattle map]

Cootamundra wattles have invaded the lower slopes of Mt Majura and Mt Ainslie. Denser thickets are found mainly at disturbed sites along fire trails and along cleared sites below the power lines. However, some plants have made their way into fairly intact bushland. Many are large trees and their eradication will require felling by chainsaw.

Using GPS, we have started to record the location of Cootamundra wattles. Their locations are then collated on maps. The recording is part of a work programme agreed with Parks and Conservation. Mapping of the wattles is to allow us to allocate resources efficiently and to replant the sites with local species.

As we recorded, we came across trees which we were not able to clearly identify as either the indigenous Silver wattle (*A. dealbata*) or Cootamundra wattle. We assume that these plants are hybrids of the two species.

Mountain bike riders and track erosion

[pictures: eroded track, mountain bike riders]

The pine plantation on the eastern slopes of Mt Majura became a prime location for mountain bike riders after the popular recreation sites at Mt Stromlo were destroyed by the 2003 bushfires.

Rather than using a permitted maintenance road to access the plantation, many mountain bike riders ride along informal tracks. This has caused conflicts with other park users, damaged plants, and led to erosion.

Our group interviewed park users, including mountain bike riders, and surveyed track erosion. We collated the results in reports and wrote proposals aimed at ameliorating environmental damage. The reports and proposals were presented to ACT Environment and Parks and Conservation.

Rangers met with us for a site inspection in May. The mountain bike riders' impact on the environment and the severe track erosion were acknowledged. Several actions and time frames were agreed on: to conduct critical erosion control on the most severely eroded parts of the track; to consider at least temporary closure for rehabilitation; and to erect clear signage at strategic points.

Our group then identified possible locations for the signs. We are pleased that some signs have been erected. These are effective to some extent, but we are a little puzzled about priority of their location. The most severely eroded track is still being

used by mountain bike riders and is eroding further. Erosion control work has not yet commenced.

New skills

Two members of our group were pleased to be able to participate in a chemical training session and a Chilean Needle Grass field day, both provided delivered by Parks and Conservation Service.

We increasingly make use of GPS and a Geographic Information System (GIS) to collect data in the field and collate the information on maps. Parks and Conservation provided us with basic spatial data such as a satellite image of the Mt Majura area. We have found these tools to be excellent for visualizing the location and the spread of target species, such as weeds or rare species; for monitoring the extension of eroded tracks or of a weed infested sheep camp; for recording the sites where we have conducted fire fuel assessments.

Some obvious advantages of these tools are the power of visualization, the ease of information exchange - within the group, between different park care groups and with government agencies - and the storage of data.

Encouraging people's enjoyment

[pictures: Wildflower walk, Tiger orchid, Tea by the dam, Tiger Orchid, Scribbly gum recovery]

A highlight of the past year was the large number of people who turned up for special walks, talks and a Tea-by-the-dam gathering. Clearly this demonstrates people's interest in and appreciation of Mt Majura, its wildlife and the inner-city bush environment. Bird and wildflower walks guided by local specialists proved to be very popular. An interesting and entertaining talk on orchids of Mt Majura and Mt Ainslie was delivered by the ANU scientist Dean Rouse and Peter Milbourne and Peter Mills of Parks and Conservation gave a presentation on the cultural heritage of Mt Majura and North Canberra.

We were involved in Frog Watch during National Water Week.

Another highlight for us was to notice how Australia's plants cope with the harsh climate conditions. After prolonged drought, the beautiful Scribbly gums on the western slopes of Mt Majura looked quite dead and the Hackett Community noticed these signs of hardship with great concern. However, it took only a few weeks following the first spring rains for beautiful red leaves to appear. The gums had begun to re-sprout from epicormic buds. Tough, clever plants!

Waltraud Pix

Coordinator Friends of Mt Majura,

phone 6247 7515, email: jzeil@bigpond.net.au