

## **Friends of Mt Majura (FoMM) – 2007 at a glance.**

Highlights of a busy year for Friends of Mt Majura (FoMM) were yet again our expert guided walks, community planting events and the receipt of the Sustainable Cities 2007 Award and the Community Landcare 2007 Award in recognition for “Dragonfly”, FoMM’s project to rehabilitate two degraded dams and surrounding land on Mt Majura.

In March more than sixty people of all age groups were “Walking with Ants” led by specialist Adjay Narendra of the Australian National University (ANU). The walk was so popular that we regrettably had to turn people away and decided to conduct a second walk. A week later we started late afternoon to explore some of the night active bulldog ant species that live on the ridge of Mt Majura. The children were incredible skilful picking up and handling ants. Watching the kids’ curiosity and interest in exploring the miniature world of ants, with magnifying glasses ready at hand has been one of the most touching experiences in my “career” as FoMM co-ordinator.

A list of plant species and a commented list of trees growing on Mt Majura, compiled by group members last year and available on our website, proved to be an invaluable resource for our guided walks on wildflowers and trees led by local plant ecologist Michael Doherty.

In conjunction with the Hackett community initiative “Sustainable Hackett” we organised a talk on “Suburban Stewardship for Biodiversity” presented by Beth Mitchell, the Biodiversity Project Manager at the ANU. The talk attracted a large audience and took place in Blue Gum School Friends’ Lounge at the Hackett shops that opened its doors in early 2007 for the use of community groups. The interest that people show in issues surrounding conservation has motivated us to plan a series of biodiversity and conservation talks for 2008. We hope that presentations spanning from “How lizards talk to each other” to “The impact of the Common Myna birds on biodiversity” will foster the understanding and appreciation of wildlife and ecosystems and a wider engagement of community in conservation activities.

Over forty enthusiastic volunteers showed up on National Tree Day on the 29 July. Many children helped their parents and had buckets, mattocks or trowels at the ready, to plant eucalypt seedlings in a cleared area on the lower slopes of Mt Majura. In addition a range of ground cover plants such as *Lomandra* and prostrate *Hardenbergia* were planted along the banks of a nearby drain line where we had removed a massive swathe of woody weeds in previous years. Planting holes were dug, water crystals added, weed suppression pads and mulch placed and each seedling was given a protective guard and watered thoroughly. We propagated some of the seedlings from seeds that we collected in previous years. The bulk of seedlings, however, were raised by Greening Australia in exchange for seeds collected by FoMM members.

At a spring working bee in September we revegetated the drain line edges with more ground cover plants such as *Themeda* and other native grass species, which have been propagated by FoMM members. Each grass seedling was equipped with a guard since experience has taught us that unprotected seedlings are in great danger of being ripped out by grazing kangaroos. Hopefully these plants will establish and protect the drain edges from erosion, keep the weeds at bay and add to the biodiversity of the site.

We continued work to improve the habitat at the two Majura dams for which we received a government grant in 2005. The extended drought, a high level of soil compaction and erosion, and an overabundance of kangaroos have impacted on our plantings. Subsequently we have dropped our plans for another major planting event and instead focused on soil preparation and stabilisation.

Following a successful trial conducted in 2006, we tackled a degraded area on the uphill side of the lower dam. First we loosened the compacted soil to allow water to penetrate and seedlings to grow roots. We covered the ground with local seeds of grasses and forbs and placed coir erosion matting on top, which is kept in place by steel pegs and logs.

We looked into ways to diversify rehabilitation methods, provide additional habitat structure and an environment protected from kangaroo grazing. A small floating island with wetland plants on top and submerged pots attached to the sides was lounged at the upper dam in autumn. The project is promising; plants have survived winter and we will consider the construction of a second island for the lower dam.

We installed interpretative displays at the two dams explaining Project Dragonfly. They look great and we are grateful to local designer and FoMM member Fiona Edge for her contribution of the design and to Screen Makers for donating the frames. Monitoring to assess habitat quality continues with biannual water bug surveys and an annual frog census in conjunction with the Canberra-wide Frog Watch program. The results of the surveys and reports on other Dragonfly activities are published on our website ([www.majura.au](http://www.majura.au)) and featured in local media.

Work to rehabilitate the 5 ha sheep camp at Majura ridge has progressed. In June we replanted last year's vandalised tree seedlings and extended the planting to a bigger area and with additional species. We hope that the carefully prepared miniature catchments for each seedling, plenty of mulch and recent rain will help the young trees to establish. As predicted a year ago, thistles were thriving and we spent many of hours controlling them as well as Paterson's Curse that popped up on previously graded sites around the pine plantation. A couple of years ago grading in the pine plantation resulted in a massive uncontrolled thistle growth. Seeds were blown onto sites that had been hand weeded by volunteers. I hope there will be a time when government provides the resources to implement its own policies of monitoring and controlling weeds after conducting earthwork in or next to nature reserves.

In October we worked together with the Ainslie Weeders to remove woody weeds in an area between the Mt Ainslie and Mt Majura reserves. At this working bee the idea was born to join forces at next years National Tree Day to revegetate and clean up of the old tip site located on the lower slope between the two reserves.

We held woody weeding parties on the third Sunday of each month during the warmer part of the year. Noel Birchall, our weed officer, started a crusade on St John's Wort, Paterson's Curse and Serrated Tussock. Some members of our group volunteered their time in January to remove massive stands of privet, firethorn, hawthorn and Japanese honeysuckle from the lower part of a drainage line that starts high up at the hill, crosses through the horse paddocks and ends up at the drain ditch close to the Hackett reservoir at Rivett Street. The rehabilitation of the drainage line within the horse paddocks is a partnership project involving the government, Greening Australia and FoMM.

We collected seeds following the guidelines by Greening Australia and it was an entirely pleasant and satisfying activity to propagate seedlings, which we used for various revegetation projects on Mt Majura. Most of the seeds, however, we gave to Greening Australia for the "Seeds of Survival" program.

World Environment Day 2007 in June was again an opportunity for us to showcase FoMM projects to the public. We enjoyed tea and coffee, generously donated cakes and the splendid views up at the

sheep camp on a perfect winter day and planted a Bundy seedling as a growing acknowledgement to the many people who care about the mountain.

We are fortunate in having a very active and supportive community in Hackett. FoMM writes columns and regularly advertises events in the monthly Hackett Neighbourhood Watch newsletter, both our local supermarket and individuals donate cakes and muffins, which are positively impacting on our working bee participation rate and the Hackett Community Association sponsored our membership of the Molonglo Catchment Group.

Looking back over the four years since FoMM was established, I think we have achieved remarkable improvements in our local bushland reserve. This has been possible only through the significant contribution of many. Thank you to all our volunteers, the Mitchell mob, Greening Australia, the Molonglo Catchment Group president Lynton Bond and coordinator Zoe Wood, our previous and current ACT ParkCare Coordinators Rebecca Blundell and Jenny Conolly, the Hackett Community Association and Hackett Neighbourhood Watch for your commitment, support and encouragement over the years.

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