

Friends of Mount Majura – 2013 Annual Report

2013 is the 10th anniversary of Friends of Mount Majura (FoMM), which was founded in 2003 as an initiative of Waltraud Pix, who has since then coordinated FoMM's activities and major projects. Waltraud resigned this year for a number of reasons. The group is now in the process of implementing a significant change in organisation, with the aim of carrying FoMM's many tasks and activities on more shoulders. At FoMM's first Annual General Meeting on October 9, 2013 we have established a committee with a convener, a coordinator, a secretary, a treasurer and committee members with responsibilities, such as organizing walks. Waltraud will continue to serve on the committee as an advisor.

Throughout this restructure, FoMM has continued on-ground work with on average 4000 volunteer hours per year over the last 5 years, including consolidating old projects and starting work on the improvement of a large, degraded area abutting The Fair development in North Watson. A big effort was made there by over 200 people during the 2013 National Tree Day planting event (see below and www.majura.org), with seedlings and the general area requiring continuing care.

We would be very interested in sharing our experience with The Fair development, where FoMM together with the North Canberra Community Council, the Watson Woodland Working Group, the Watson Community Association and the Conservation Council have worked hard over a three year period to mitigate the impacts of urban-edge developments on the conservation values of Mount Majura Nature Reserve. Some of the positive outcomes are the production by the Conservation Council of a series of fact sheets, the development of a policy document *Bush at the Boundary*, a booklet on *Living next to Nature* and a book *Treasures of Mt Ainslie/Mt Majura*.

Much of FoMM's on-ground activities have revolved around this latest project, with the need for clean-up, mulching and watering of last year's plantings, herbaceous and woody weed control and preparations for this year's National Tree Day event.

National Tree Day 2013 has been a terrific success. Between two and three hundred enthusiastic volunteers turned out to plant, water and mulch 400 local trees, shrubs and ground cover plants. This spectacular effort built on last year's tree day planting on the north-west slope of Mt Majura. Mass plantings like these are vital for improving degraded grassy box-gum woodland, an important habitat for local native plants and animals. Plus we had wonderful coverage of the event on the local ABC news program in the evening and in the Canberra Times the day after.

Very special thanks go to National Tree Day co-coordinator Rebecca Palmer-Brodie and the Conservation Council crew for the excellent promotion and for engaging the community in a fun way, which has lifted our annual community planting event on Mount Majura to a whole new level. One of the new ideas was to provide customised 'adopt a tree' tags for families who wanted a special link with their personal tree. They will come back in the following months and give their special tree some extra TLC!

Follow-up work at the sites of older FoMM projects included Woody Weed Working Bees, a Planting bee at the old sheep camp, hand weeding and seedling care at the Majura Paddock and weeding events held together with the Mt Ainslie Weeders at sites we have collaborated on for some time.

Like every year, FoMM also organised a series of walks: *Walking with Ants*, a *Bird Walk*, a *Tree Walk* and a *Spring Wildflower Walk*.

On 18 March, 2013, we launched a Media Release on *The grazing impact of Kangaroos: A three year experiment*, reporting on the results of a three year experiment by FoMM that demonstrates the serious consequences of kangaroo grazing pressure on the integrity of endangered grassy woodlands.

Since late 2009, with financial help from the ACT Government and the North Canberra Community Council, the FoMM conducted a simple public awareness project by recording vegetation change, and demonstrating the cause.

We set up our *Explaining Change* project to gain a better understanding of the relative influence of kangaroos, rabbits, and season on the herbaceous ground layer in the reserve. We fenced small grassland areas to exclude kangaroos and rabbits, kangaroos only, or none of the two herbivores and recorded the changes of the ground layer with repeat photography at fixed times of the year.

It is obvious now that grazing by kangaroos is both heavy and unsustainable, because there are too many of them in the small remaining grassy woodlands. The reserve islands of Canberra Nature Park clearly have limited carrying capacity for large herbivores. The herbaceous layer, the grasses and forbs, is repeatedly reduced to a lawn or a cover of unpalatable weeds. Consequently, large unmanaged kangaroo populations defeat the purpose of protecting the grassy woodland, because they make it impossible to rehabilitate native grass, forbs and other ground cover.

A time-lapse video of the 3 years repeat photography and explanatory background information is available at <http://majura.org/explaining-change/>.

In October 2013 FoMM launched a petition to return two Majura paddocks to Nature Reserve, something FoMM has been lobbying for since 2003. At the time of writing, over 2000 residents, mainly from Hackett, Ainslie, Watson and Dickson have signed this petition and we do hope to be able to report on its success next year.

Jochen Zeil
Convener, Friends of Mount Majura
www.majura.org

Image Material



Shane Rattenbury showing excellent planting skills.



Making a lasting contribution



Decorated tree



The Fair planting site.