

Friends of Mt Majura (FoMM) October 2009 newsletter

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- **Rabbit follow-up control program**
- **Watson Woodlands talk – tonight**
- **Casuarina trail launch – this Friday 2 October**
- **Old tip working bee – this Sunday 4 October**
- **Spring Wildflower walk – Sunday 11 October**
- **FoMM working bee – Sunday 18 October**

Dear Friends,

The **Rabbit Warren Mapping** project received a [high commendation](#) at the 2009 ACT Landcare Award ceremony. It was noticed that this partnership project between community volunteer groups and government agencies delivered management outcomes in an efficient way that would have been not possible if groups or government had worked in isolation. Very well done and thank you everyone who had a hand in the nomination, support and delivery of the project.

Talking about rabbits – there will be a **follow-up control program**: Parks, Conservation and Lands (PCL) is planning a follow-up control of rabbits in the north Canberra nature reserves for this summer. According to information from PCL, the initial rabbit control conducted from March to August 2009 has achieved an overall reduction of 85% as per spotlight count with a smaller reduction around the old Ainslie tip and a higher reduction at the northwest corner of Mt Majura. Drawing from our experiences and the lessons learned from the initial control project we propose to meet with PCL to coordinate the next season's program. A tentative time for this meeting is Friday, 16 October at 10am at the PCL depot in Mitchell. Liese and Rosalie wrote up their [suggestions for the 2nd rabbit mapping round](#). Please contact admin@majura.org if you have further suggestions, if you are interested in attending the meeting with PCL or if you want to be part of a rabbit stirring committee.

Related to overgrazing is a proposal "**Explaining Change in the Mount Majura Nature Reserve**" for which FoMM won a 2009/10 Environment grant. The project will start soon and Dean has written an explanatory article "**Mountain Matters**" that will be published in the October 2009 edition of the Hackett newsletter. You can find the article at the end of this newsletter.

In the financial year 2008/09 FoMM and volunteers of the wider community have conducted a staggering amount of work to preserve and enhance the conservation values of Mount Majura. You can find the [2008-09 FoMM report](#) on our website.

There are a number of events coming up to which you are warmly invited. Please find the details below.

Warm regards
Waltraud

Watson Woodlands talk – tonight

John Briggs, Watson Woodland Working group

When: Wednesday, 30 September 8.30-9.30pm

Where: Holy Cross Anglican Church, Corner Phillip Ave and Antill St, Hackett

Casuarina trail launch – this Friday 2 October

Come and celebrate the official opening of the repaired Casuarina trail on Friday 2 October. Officials will meet at 11am to drive past the reservoir to the start of the repaired section arriving there at about 11.10am. The formal proceedings will take place at the rock platform area towards the end of the upgraded section of the walking trail.

Old tip working bee – this Sunday 4 October

The Mt Ainslie Weeders will host a working bee to combat weeds at the planting area of old Ainslie tip. Enjoy a cuppa and see how the young trees are recovering from rabbit grazing damage done during the time we were unable to attend the seedlings.

When: Sunday 4 October 2009, 9 am - 12 noon

Where: Old Ainslie tip, off Philip Ave

What: Spraying Paterson's Curse and thistles - before it's too late this season

Bring and wear: protective clothing, enclosed footwear and sun protection

Spring Wildflower walk – Sunday 11 October

Join local botanist Michael Doherty to explore the spring floriate of Mount Majura.

When: Sunday 11 October, 2pm to 4 pm

Where: Meet at Helms Place off Rivett Street in Hackett

Bring and wear: good shoes, sun protection and water, a gold coin for a list of the flora of Mt Majura and Mt Ainslie or download copy from the “Species lists” page of the FoMM website at www.majura.org.

Woody weeds working party – Sunday 18 October

When: Sunday, 18 October from 9 am to 12 noon

Where: Meet at the nature park entrance between 85 and 87 Mackenzie St opposite Hull Pl and Russell St.

What: removal of woody weeds using the cut and dab method.

Bring and wear: sun protection, enclosed foot wear and body-covering clothing.

Come along, enjoy a cuppa and give as little or as much time as you want.

Mountain Matters: Explaining Change in the Mount Majura Nature Reserve Article for the Hackett Neighbourhood Watch Newsletter, October 2009 edition

For those of you who walk in Mount Majura Nature Reserve (MMNR), this information may be of interest.

When next you walk past the Lower Hackett Reservoir, you will notice a new and unusual fenced area just behind the reservoir on the right hand side of the green Reserve notice board. This fenced area is another example of the Friends of Mount Majura (FoMM) at work on behalf of the Hackett community. Here is what it is all about.

FoMM successfully applied for a grant from the ACT Government for the fencing costs of a small project, which while designed by the parkCare group, has the support of the Park Rangers. This project is designed to provide information and insight into how two factors affect the landscapes of Mount Majura that we enjoy so much.

What is this information, and why is it needed? It is needed to answer two questions that often occur to anyone who regularly enjoys walking in MMNR, and who notices how the landscape changes. We all walk past the signs that declare one of the objectives of MMNR is to “protect the grassy woodlands” within its boundaries. That is, it is not just the woodland trees are to be protected, but also the ground layer of grasses and wildflowers. In contrast to the tree layer, which changes little over periods of years, the ground layer can change a lot within months. Our memories of the details of such change, when, what and how much, is far from perfect. But, repeated photographs can capture any change, refresh our memories and often generate some surprise.

For example, in this the area behind the reservoir, 2005 photographs show an abundance of native grasses where there are none now in 2009. The question is: why the big change in the grassy layer, and is this change permanent?

One can quickly think of two plausible reasons for this change. The first is seasonal (year-to-year) variation in rainfall. Most grasses respond best to summer rain, while forbs, and some grasses, respond best to winter rain. Because the rainfall during the last few years has been very low, that is why there are so few grasses and forbs now. The other possible reason is grazing pressure. While MMNR is protected from grazing by sheep and cattle, there has been no management of grazing by kangaroos and rabbits. In the last few years, populations of both these grazers have increased, and because rainfall has been low, their grazing impacts on the ground layer are greater than before.

Either of these reasons is persuasive. Most likely they act together, but which is more important? If we don't know which, then how can MMNR be effectively managed? The matter can't be decided because we have only opinions but no data: while the rainfall was recorded, there are no measurements of kangaroo and rabbit populations. Opinions, even if based on experience, are no substitute for facts.

Returning to the FoMM project. It cannot contribute understanding of the past four years but over the next few years, it will provide an answer to the question: what is the most important influence on the grassy layer within MMNR – seasonal rainfall variation or grazing by kangaroos and rabbits? The areas being fenced will do this by working as a sieve. Two plots of land will be fenced: one to exclude both kangaroos and rabbits, the other just kangaroos. Nearby is another plot that is unfenced. All three plots will receive the same rainfall but different grazing regimes.

Thus, by erecting these two small fenced areas and photographically recording the change within them, FoMM volunteers will demonstrate the relative influence of rainfall variability, and kangaroos and rabbits on the diversity and abundance of the ground layer. The changes will also be obvious to the interested walker because you will be free to walk around each plot and closely examine them. The fencing will be temporary: established and recorded for 5 years, then removed and the subsequent change monitored for a further 3 years. Furthermore, any interested public in MMNR will be provided with an informative and dynamic demonstration of how and why the vegetated landscape changes. FoMM members hold that the increased understanding that can develop from this simple demonstration project will enhance public appreciation of the value of Mount Majura Nature Reserve, and of all other ACT Parks and Reserves.

We hope you will keep an eye on the project. If you wish to be involved, please contact the FoMM coordinator Waltraud Pix at admin@majura.org or Phone 62477515.