

Friends of Urrbrae Wetland



Open Day - 18 October 1-4.30pm

The Wetland is looking terrific and well worth visiting.

To ensure you have a great experience, we have upgraded four different paths and developed information sheets for each one so you can walk and learn as you explore. We are still going to be around to answer your questions, but informally around the property.

What's there to see? The recently launched impressive new bird hide will be open for visits. Bring your binoculars to view the local bird life on the ponds. Who knows, you may even spy the shy Nankeen night heron in the reeds, or find a family of parrots in the newly installed bird boxes perched high in the trees.

The Bee Hotel is completed, and you are invited to check its occupancy rate, and guess who might be rearing larvae there.

We have finished our seedling plantings for this year, and you can check how well they are growing within their protective coverings - and judge whether we made the right choices of location!

Sanctuary for a family outing in COVID 19 times

Covid 19 has impacted on us at the Urrbrae Wetland. The restrictions have meant we have had to introduce changes to how we normally run our Open Days.

Our next Open Day will be **Sunday, October 18** and we hope to see you all there to enjoy spring at the Wetland.

The grand opening of our bird hide was quite an event. The Mayor, Heather Holmes-Ross, came to cut the ribbon, and several notables were also present, most especially, a founding member of the Wetland, Graham Kernick.





View from the Chair

This being my first report, I must thank Jim for his great leadership during the last 5 years. The group continues to enjoy coming on Tuesday mornings, enjoying one another's company and completing various tasks.

Prior to the COVID 19 closure, we were busy:

- The bird hide was completed
- Jim began building the bee hotel.
- Path signs placed & look great.
- Adelaide University Rotaractors helped us install the 16 bird boxes. Thanks to Kevin for making these.

We settled into the old TAFE classroom which replaced the original room, following its removal to allow for the new toilet block to be constructed.

COVID 19 virus restrictions prevented us from coming to the Wetland on Tuesday mornings, much to our disappointment. Thankfully the restrictions were partially lifted quickly and fully lifted soon after.

We immediately began planting a variety of species following the procedure we tried with grasses at the front gate, which was successful with a high survival rate - considering the poor soil in that area.

Jim completed the Bee Hotel. We hope the occupancy rate increases during the spring.

Lee created the Creek path.

Weeding has now become the main task. Some areas have been sprayed with Roundup or Slasher, while in larger areas the Whipper-snipper has been used.

Next year we will compare the effectiveness of the two sprays. Cardboard and mulch retardant has also been trialled. These processes do not replace the hand weeding, which we have all been doing.

A number of Urrbrae High School students have been involved in Wetland projects. Now completed, this program, supervised by Vanessa offered the students an opportunity for hands on experience in the Wetland.

It is great to be back. David.

An Interesting Patch

This special little part of the Wetland, just off the main track, keeps me intrigued.

During the hot summer, it can be very bare, but if conditions are right, it changes, so I go back often to check. At the top of the photo is a spiky plant, the Blue Devil, *Eryngium ovinum*. It dies down in autumn, but emerges late winter, and if we are very lucky in December it will have bright blue flowers similar to thistle flower heads.

The main plant is the Small-leaved mallee pea, *Eutaxia microphylla*, a low ground cover with tiny yellow flowers. But the real treasures are the little green rosettes of leaves of Maroonhood orchid *Pterostylis pedunculata*, which appeared first three years ago at this time.

I'm hoping there will be flower stalks rising from them soon. Will let you know if I see either of these special plants in flower! Chris Adams





Do lizards lay eggs or give birth to live young?

As you can see from our photos, we found some eggs in a mound of mulch and it's opened a can of worms - or of lizards - and some very interesting facts.

Could our eggs be lizards'?

Evolution has been caught in the act, according to scientists decoding how a species of Australian lizard is abandoning egg-laying in favour of live birth.

Along the warm coastal lowlands of NSW the yellow-bellied three-toed skink lays eggs to reproduce. But individuals of the same species living in the state's colder mountains mainly give birth to live young.

Evolutionary records show many reptile making the transition from egg-laying to live birth, and today about 20 percent of all living snakes and lizards give birth to live young only. (from *B Handwerk, National Geographic, Sept 2010*).

Uni of Sydney researchers observed a three-toed skink lay three eggs, and weeks later give birth to a live baby.

This is the first time that anyone has observed live birth and egg laying in a single litter ... it's very, very unusual,



Another skink in SA has also been shown to be bimodal. Bougainville's skinks give birth to babies on Kangaroo Island, while on the mainland they lay eggs. (*The Guardian, April 2019.*)

So who laid our egg nest? Certainly we have families of skinks on the site, and Blue-Tongues have been sighted at the Wetland previously.

Mating for most blue-tongues begins in late winter through to December. If you see two blue-tongues looking like they're having a vicious fight, it's most likely mating. They can be quite aggressive towards each other and can end up with cuts and scratches.

The female blue-tongue gives birth to live young three to four months after mating, which is very unusual in lizards as they normally lay eggs. The babies, who are able to look after themselves just four days after birth, can grow over 20 years to 50cm in length.

A Skink or a Blue tongue?

Skinks create nests in moist soil under objects in the garden. Females lay about five eggs each, sometimes in communal nests which hold dozens of eggs. Eggs look like mini chicken eggs but are soft and rubbery. They become enlarged as they absorb moisture from the surrounding soil. Sourced from: backyardbuddies.org.au

Obituary

It is with great sadness that we mark the passing of Graham Kernick (pictured below with Don Buick last year) who was such a force in the early development of the Wetland and a constant supporter of our work as it evolved, and as the Wetland established its own ecosystem. He and his family were welcome attendees at our Christmas celebrations for many years, and he would always take a turn around the ponds to refresh his appreciation of this marvellous facility. It is a credit to him, and to other founding members, and we appreciated his regular, informed and gracious support.



Graham, left with volunteer Don Buick



A YOUNG WOMAN GOING PLACES
SHIVANI PRESTON

“Having finished studying Conservation and Land Management at TAFE last year, I have some free time as I job-search. As I was familiar with Urrbrae Wetland it seemed a good use of my time and skills, and I could learn about wetlands biodiversity first hand.

I am hoping my volunteer work will help to prepare me for a practical contractor job with Trees for Life or as a Ranger. The environment isn't my only passion though.

Also I'm involved in the Adelaide Arts community as a musician, dancer, stage manager, and sound tech. For example our family performs the puppet show Punch & Judy in many festivals around SA.”



Volunteers enjoy the company of others interested in the environment

Focus on Volunteers

Chemical handling workshop

In February most volunteers attended this workshop arranged by Kat Hill (Volunteer Coordinator, NRM) and facilitated by Dave & Peter, both very knowledgeable in their areas.

Participants were from various bushland around Adelaide. The result was an informative and targeted session that highlighted old and new practices at the Wetland.

Key points for developing a Friends' policy:

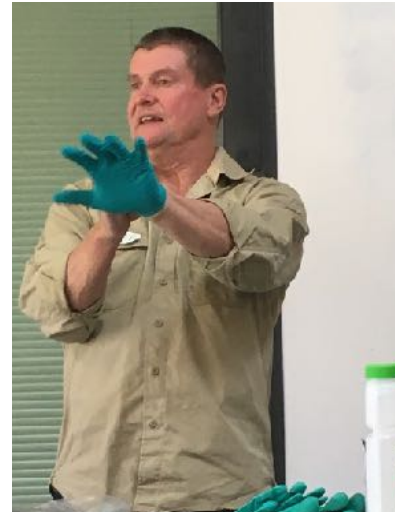
- Glyphosate was reinforced as safe if used as per directions
- use multiple gloves to protect and keep from overheating
- note difference between poisonous and hazardous labels
- do not to disturb the soil, as weeds will invade the area
- brush cut before seed heads form
- never allow seed heads, even immature green ones, fall to the ground, as they could germinate
- Slasher will kill weeds and only slow native grasses for one season
- mobile sprayers, sponge-ended dabbers, tongs with sponges attached - ways to apply poison.

Some individual plant advice:

- Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*) - cut and swab with Glyphosate
- Guildford grass (*Romulea rosea*) - use the 'Tongs of Death' with sponges saturated with poison
- Chickweed (*Stellaria media*)- use Slasher
- Soursofs (*Oxalis pes caprae*)— Glyphosate - don't hold your breath!

Currently we are absorbing/adapting this advice and turning it into pilots of different weed suppression methods.

STOP PRESS! We are sorry to lose our wonderful supporter and advisor, Ann-Louise, who will be leaving to have her second baby soon.



Want to know more?

Wikipedia: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urrbrae_Wetland and search 'Urrbrae Wetland'

Contact: David Gooley, Chair, for information:
davley60@internode.on.net

Urrbrae Wetland Learning Centre:
www.urrbraewetlandlc.org/

Site visits: Wetland Managers, Ann-Louise Breeding & Vanessa Greenslade 8274 7455

Pictured: our two Wetland Managers



New volunteers are welcome. Drop by any Tuesday morning between 9.00-11.00 to make contact.