

Friends of Urrbrae Wetland



Open Day at the Wetland

Sunday 23rd June 1.30 – 4.00 pm

Come for a winter's afternoon. Illustrated talks/guided walks, self-guided visits, and children's activities.

- *Illustrated Talk & Guided Walk* – our usual popular program
- *Self-guided Walk* –visitors manage their own visit using a brochure and map
- *Children's Focus* - UAHS students assist young visitors and families to understand and interact with different aspects of the Wetland.



Marsupial visitors

Visits from local koalas are becoming more regular, and they sometimes stay for a few days, which is encouraging. Last summer one had to be rescued by Fauna Rescue of SA (above) as it was dehydrated. Call: 1300 KOALAS

Koalas were re-introduced to South Australia from Victoria. Some suggest the species was driven to extinction by the local fur trade of the 1920s. Others suggest that the SA population disappeared over millennia. Nevertheless, the current national koala population (which could be under 100,000) appears to have derived from 18 individuals, leading to concerns about inbreeding issues.

In the case of South Australia's new management strategy, Prof Bradshaw (Adelaide Uni) recommends the government could turn our local koala population into a truly useful insurance policy for the entire species. <https://wild.com.au/magazine/features/koalas-of-south-australia/>

Guess who laid these eggs! Yes, you're right, our resident turtles. Unfortunately this nest had been plundered by a visiting fox. To find out more about short and long necked turtles: <https://www.samuseum.sa.gov.au/Upload/Files-Biological-Sciences/R-and-A-text/Freshwater-turtles-SA-2018.pdf>



View from the Chair

Wow! That volunteer cabin has gone to shelter walkers on the Heysen trail, we have moved to the old TAFE classroom and adopted the CSIRO shed as our storage area, and the new toilet block is in place.

We are rethinking our role for educating the public to the wonders of the Wetland. We are still going to hold another of our regular Open Days this year on June 23.

However we support additional openings of the area out of school time.

To strengthen our case, we are enhancing the area's education opportunities, in line with the requirements of the "Waite" bequest.

We will be:

- continuing our vegetation tours, labelling and self-guiding brochures
- building a large native bee hotel
- clearly marking our 4 tracks, and providing information sheets to support their use
- working hard to get funds for a much needed bird hide with learning work sheets, and 16 new bird breeding boxes.

Our argument for opening the Wetland out of school time will be based on presenting it as an education site where you can also picnic rather than a picnic site with additional activities.

There is support by members of Mitcham Council for the greater public use of the Wetland.

Optimistic Jim

Arrival of toilet block



OUR NEW TOILET BLOCK has arrived with great fanfare and a very skilled installation team (see photos above). It is a welcome addition to the facilities at the Wetland. Work has already begun to replant the construction site with plants indigenous to the Grassy Grey Box Woodland, which will complement the new pathways, and ensure the building melds into its surroundings.

On 18 November, 2018, we were the venue for the annual NRM Volunteers event showcasing the work of Warriparinga Wetlands, as well as our own site's engineering and ecosystem. The event was attended by almost 100 people and was a great success. Workshops were run on the significance of this land to Aboriginal inhabitants, traditional basket making, bush tucker, and the collection of artefacts. Awards were presented, and our Friends group was recognised for 20 years of service.

All dried out

The first sighting of the pipe from the main pond to the Farm Dam since the Wetland construction (left) illustrates how low the water levels were in January 2019



Surviving the Big Dry

AT THE END OF APRIL the Weather Bureau had recorded just 17.8mm of rainfall for the year, breaking the 1988 record low of 19.2mm. What were the effects of this at Wetland?

We have a large Farm Dam that acts as an emergency source for the main pond. The main pond is clay lined so it is essential that it has water at all time to avoid cracking of the clay, which would affect the long term sustainability of the Wetland. When the water in the main pond reaches a sufficiently low level, water is automatically pumped into the main pond from the Farm Dam. During the months of January and February this happened regularly, so much so, that the Farm Dam was almost empty. Luckily we received small amounts of rain which meant that the Farm Dam did not need to be topped up.

How did the plants survive? While we water the recently planted plants, most of the others had to survive the Big Dry without additional water. At the end of April, and with the drought just about to break, most of the plants have survived. This is because the plants of the Grey Box Grassy Woodland are adapted to periods of drought. The tops of the grasses, such as Wallaby, Spear and Kangaroo Grass, are dry, but when we go to the very base of the plant we find just a small amount of green. They will bounce back with the recent rains.



We have lost some plants, particularly those near the water's edge. As the water has receded some of the Silky Tea Tree, whose roots need access to water, have not survived.

The stand-out survivor has been Ruby Saltbush. It has remained green without additional water and appears to be unaffected by neither heat nor drought. It acts as an effective ground cover to suppress weeds, its berries provide a food source for the birds and it gives an attractive green tinge to an otherwise dry landscape.

Bird sighting strategy

VISITORS TO THE WETLAND will soon be able to learn more about our birds. Jo Gloster and Wen-Ai Jackson, our enthusiastic bird recorders, are developing a Fact Sheet (text and photos) that visitors can use to identify the most commonly sighted birds. This poster will be plastic-coated, and available for our Open Day tours, both self-guided, and guided.

The sightings of birds has risen in past years from 53 to 63 different species: this is a clear indicator of the health of the Wetland's ecosystem. The birds most commonly seen who are likely nesting in the Wetland are Pacific black duck, Magpie lark, Australian wood duck & Eurasian coot (below).

The most numerous of course are the Pacific black duck and Australian wood duck. The newly found species, for example the Blue-billed duck and Pink-eared duck only have been seen once each in the last few months, but we hope they will make this at least a seasonal home.



Focus on Volunteers

ROB BALL

ROB HAS JOINED THE TEAM recently, and has a special link with the Wetland, as he was a teacher of Science and Geography at UAHS from 2000-2010. In fact, he was acting Manager of the Wetland for part of 2003.

Not always a teacher, Rob has worked in applied metalwork, in pay offices of large companies, then studied year 12 as a mature aged student aged 26 and won a scholarship to Flinders Uni to become a teacher.

"I came back as a volunteer because of my passion for this particular Wetland. I've seen its development up close, and it's an asset to the community."

If we thinned the trees we could develop more understory which would attract more animals generally, particularly insects. I look forward to helping with that."



There are plenty of Autumn tasks that need attention as we prepare for the winter rains.



Vanessa Greenslade: Wetland Manager

VANESSA GREW UP ON a farm on Yorke Peninsula where she spent her childhood exploring the local agricultural as well as marine environments.

She is passionate about the environment – spending her spare time picking up beach rubbish, planting for Trees for Life and encouraging others to care for the land around them.

- Studied a science degree at Uni and worked in research projects at the University of Adelaide for a number of years relating to agriculture and native ecology.

- Had some 'time off' to raise 3 girls, and during this time went back to Uni to study a teaching degree.

- Spent several years at Arbury Park Outdoor School (APOS) teaching and coordinating the school visits. APOS caters for mainly Primary students who stay for several days and have hands-on lessons about the local ecology: freshwater life, nature's recyclers, bird ecology, animal adaptations, plant propagation; as well as learning about land-care, revegetation, orienteering and indigenous culture.

- Developed environmental workshops for Stradbroke PS and taught about their local creek ecology and the human impacts on this environment.

She has spent the last few years at Urrbrae High school teaching mainly Science, Agriculture and Environmental Science & Technology as well as assisting on numerous outdoor education camps.

Vanessa is thrilled to have the opportunity to manage the Wetland this year while Ann-Louise is on maternity leave.



Ann-Louise visited the Wetland early this year as promised (above) to introduce us to baby Leila Ann, who is of course just gorgeous.



A good turn-up for a well-earned rest in our new cabin on the 'hill'. We have more room for projects and socialising at morning tea.