



NEWSLETTER

No. 26 - AUGUST 2023

Photo:- Balcanoona Creek

Editor – Graeme Oats

Balcanoona Re-Vegetation Report - May 2023

Summary

The focus for this re-veg trip was on irrigation and digging holes in preparation for a major planting in September. The irrigation layout and improvements were largely achieved and all existing plants were checked and maintained as well as some new and replacement plantings. Blocked drippers were the major cause of plant loss over the long summer period.

Volunteer and Ranger Engagement

During the previous week, the Weetootla Monitoring team contributed significantly to both maintenance tasks and some planting out. Their contribution was very much valued.

During the second week, six friends Meg, Richard, Graeme, Roger, Carol and Michael focused on re veg activities.

The Copley folks who expressed an interest in visiting in May were not able to come this time, a small group is keen to visit in September.

Seedlings brought to site were Red Mallee, Sturt Desert Pea an advanced Myoporum Montanum (water bush) and some Balcanoona Wattle seedlings from Ron at Copley.

Both Sian and Jesse spent time with the friends, in particular an intense hole digging session south of the Old SQ concrete slab. .

In addition to re veg activities, time was spent on local walks, evening meal at Arkaroola (with Chris & Greg) and some musical & visual recording of re-veg activities.

Re Veg Activities Undertaken

All plants in all areas were checked, lines flushed out and drippers checked and adjusted and photos taken. About 40 seedlings were planted out including 11 replacements (Area 1 and 2, mainly Madla), 4 desert peas, 24 Balcanoona Wattles in a grove south of the old historic shearer's quarters (concrete slab).



Impact of Kangaroos - In Area 3 east of the entry road some Curly Mallee have been trampled by Kangaroos, yet are likely to survive. Near these mallees are some saltbushes which the Kangaroos clearly enjoyed eating and jumping on them, as well the nearby mallees. Sian suggested we remove these saltbushes to enable our plantings to progress unhindered. Other options include placing large guards around the saltbushes making them inaccessible to the kangaroos, or we could be to develop a grove of saltbush near Area 4 for the kangaroos.

Irrigation work - Changes were made to the existing irrigation system with each of the areas, Mound, Areas 1, 2 and Area 3 east & west of the entry road allocated one tap to each.

In Area 4, a new 25 mm header was laid out (with several reducing T's 25mm to 13mm inserted) from the tap near the Visitors Area parallel to the entry road and around along the road towards the DEW houses. The layout of the 13 mm lines and a tap / filter fitting will be completed in September. 13 mm lines and drippers were laid out to support the grove of Balcanoona Wattles.

Plant propagation, Copley etc. - A limited number of plants were ready for planting out in May 2023. The scheduled re-veg trip for June was quite close to the May trip and with only a limited number of plants ready for planting out. As more plants will be ready in September it was decided to cancel the June trip.

Ron at Copley is propagating a large number of seedlings from seeds collected from the Park for planting out at Balcanoona and Copley. While propagation rates have been very good, the growth rate has been slow especially for the eucalypts. The blend of light gravel and potting mix seems to be fine for the wattles and for striking cuttings, but not so for the nutrient hungry eucalypts. Time was spent at Copley on the way up which included re-potting the eucalypts with more potting mix and slow-release fertiliser. The friends provided Ron with a tub of slow-release and liquid fertiliser for his ongoing use.

The friends will keep in touch with Ron over coming weeks regarding the progress of our plants to enable a large number of plants to be ready for planting out in September.

Seed collection - Seeds were collected from the local area including eucalypts, acacias and sennas. Water bush cuttings were given to Ron for propagation.

Plant label design - Options for the design of plant labels were discussed with the Rangers, the outcome being the adoption of the same or similar label design used by DEW Botanic Gardens and the Arid Lands Botanic Gardens.

The label is 120mm x 75mm with a slim stake [235mm] to enable the label to be moved as the plants get larger. The words on the label will be the same format / style / colour as used on the larger labels [200mm x 100mm] used in the Weetootla Walk.



Next step is to liaise with DEW staff who have offered to assist us with design & production matters.

Old Balcanoona Homestead Garden (OBHG)

Ranger Sian advised that the responsibility regarding design and plantings for the Garden resides with her. Sian asked the Friends to look at the plantings in the Hawker Memorial Garden as a proposal for use in the OBHG as they consist of a mix of hardy native and exotic shrubs about 1 metre in height.

Roger Mathers.

Birds of Arkaroola and the Northern Flinders Ranges

The Friends in July 2022 were successful in obtaining a grant through the SAAL Grassroots Grants Program to produce and print 5000 copies of a brochure depicting the most commonly seen birds in the Northern Flinders Ranges and Arkaroola.

Members – Chris Kirby, Jan Hutchinson Georgia Darter and Garry Trethewey have been busy pointing their long range lenses at the birds; Janet Stone, Martin Caon along with Chris have been busy setting up this spectacularly visual document. It is currently with the printer and should be available for distribution soon - look for the announcement via a post to the website. Then it can be downloaded from the "publications" page of the website.

Birds of Arkaroola and the Northern Flinders Ranges

Friends of Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park Inc.
friendsofgammon.org.au

We are a group of volunteers whose aim is to support the management of the park and its intrinsic biodiversity, values, and diverse cultural heritage. We are affiliated with Friends of Parks and Nature Inc.

We promote scientific studies, revegetation, and restoration of old-new infrastructure within Vulkathunha. This brochure is also available from our website along with details of how to join the Friends Group.

[Find us on Facebook](#)

The birds featured in this brochure are of cultural significance to the Adnyamathanha First Nations people, Traditional Owners of the Flinders Ranges. We recognize and respect their knowledge and their deep feelings of attachment and relationship to Country. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging.

Adnyamathanha names (where known) are listed on McIntyre J.C. (2000). *Adnyamathanha names are given in italics.*

Hints for birdwatching

- Birds are most active early morning and late afternoon
- Look at the habitats in the brochure for places to go
- Look for water, rocks, waterholes, dams, watering points, tracks
- Listen for bird calls. Approach quietly and sit or stand still
- Never approach a nest as the adults might abandon their chicks or eggs

When trying to identify a bird

- Where did you see the bird?
- Bird size is important. Bird length is measured from tip of bill to tip of tail. Feather colour, shape of bill, behaviour observed, flight pattern are all factors which will help you.

Tick boxes included to record your sightings.

Photographers:
 Chris Kirby, Jan Hutchinson, Garry Trethewey, Georgia Darter.
 Sightings verified from eBird for Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary and Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park.
 Design: Janet Stone. Printed on recycled paper by Upstock Howden.

01. Little Corella, *Womarrulu*
 02m White zodiacoo with white ruff on male. Blue-grey eye-ringing. Pink stain between bill and eye. Feeds on ground. Seen in large flocks with high pitched chatter. Resident. Common.

03. Galah, *Milangula*
 03m Pink and grey coloured zodiacoo. Makes high pitched 'chee-chee' call. Male has brown eyes, female red eyes. Social and playful birds which feed on the ground.

04. Eastern Pigeon, *Makambere*
 03m. Usually seen in flocks. Red eye-rings. Has a habit of raising and lowering tail when landing. Wings make a noisy whirring sound when taking off. Resident. Common.

05. Common Bronzewing, *Mambil*
 03m. Large plump pigeon with striking green-bronze iridescent coloration in wings. Usually in pairs. Call slow repetitive and far carrying 'yoo-hoo'. Head bob when working. Flies with a wing-whirring sound.

06. Diamond Dove, *Doom*
 02m. Variable Australian dove. Males mid eye-ring. Makes a mournful high and low-down gut 'too-coo-coo' sound. Takes off with a whirring 'trrr' of wings when disturbed.

07. Thornbush, *01. Zebra Finch, *Abil**
 010m. Colourful grass finch, large flocks. Breeds all year round. Resident. Common.

Vagrant birds recorded:
 House Sparrow
 European Starling
 Note: Nocturnal birds are not featured.

Binosoculars are useful for identifying birds.
 See back page for more birdwatching hints.

Birds found on the PLAINS which include dry grasslands, areas of low woody shrubs, open river courses, and dunes. Also, low rocky slopes and spinifex (*Triodia*) grasslands. These birds mostly feed on insects and grass seeds.

Your Guide to identifying the birds that you might see in the area.

Compiled by Chris Kirby for the Friends of Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park
 Issue 1, July 2023

2023 PARK VISITS

WEETOOTLA MONITORING

Sept. 7th to 14th

BALCANOONA REVEGETATION

Sept. 14th to 21st

Contacts – Weetootla – Martin Caon – mcaon56@gmail.com

Balcanoona – Roger Mathers – roger_mathers@yahoo.com

Note underscore between roger and mathers

New projects to be undertaken by the Friends group as approved at the Co-Management Board meeting at Hawker in February 2023

- **Buffel grass control in Balcanoona Creek**
- **Revegetation works at Weetootla Campground**
- **Directional dial marker at the summit of a short ridge walk near Balcanoona**

May 2023 Balcanoona Water & Fish Monitoring Report

Participants: Martin Caon, Angelo Caon, Michael Tanner, Judy Harvey, Isobel Barret, Greg Kirby, Chris Kirby (both from Thursday), Garry Trethewey (on Tuesday), Jan Eccles (on Tuesday).

On arriving in Copley we took the opportunity to visit the Copley Community Garden to catch up with Ron Johnston and to see how the seedlings were progressing. Ron gave us 3 *Acacia araneosa* (Balcanoona wattle) to plant at Balcanoona. Before arriving at Balcanoona we stopped at the Slender Bell Fruit tree near Italowie creek in order to bury some seed "in situ" in the hope that it would be encouraged to germinate. Every other germination attempt so far had failed.

Yuwanhinya, Nepouie and Weetootla Springs were visited on successive days. At each of them we were surprised at the regrowth of Typha bulrush and River Red Gum saplings. Along the Balcanoona Creek the RR Gum saplings were more than head-high where we cross the creek bed and water extended upstream for about 50m from the place originally identified as the Yuwanhinya Spring-Head. But the pools were without fish. We have not seen water there before. Flowing water, with fish, also extended further downstream than before.

Water with fish, was also present upstream of where Wortupa Creek (from Weetootla Spring) joins the Balcanoona Creek. We have not seen water there before either. Fish were present at the pools in Hells Gate and we fished there. What previously seemed to be unsuitable fish habitat, because it had too little cover, now seems like good habitat as the Typha has grown and RR Gum saplings provide cover and shelter for the fish.

On the way to Nepouie, we stumbled onto a Quandong tree adjacent to the northern roadside at about 6km from the entrance to Balcanoona. This is another individual of this uncommon tree to add to our list. The keen birders will be interested to learn that we sighted a Nankeen Night Heron (probably juvenile) flying to roost in a tree – it is a piscivorous bird, so would be feeding on the Mogurnda. The very significant growth of Typha bulrush made access to water suitable for dipping a net into or to place a baited trap, difficult. Indeed, some pools were completely hidden. Walking through the bulrush was also not feasible. RR Gum saplings were also regenerating. I think the regrowth is due to Wooltana station being de-stocked of cattle and the absence of goats and horse/donkey browsing. Floods and Typha growth dramatically alter the appearance and profile of the Creek and its pools. A previous sampling pool was now separated from the upstream pools by a section of dry creekbed due to the movement of river stones.

At Weetootla Spring, we retrieved the SD cards from the remote cameras and replaced them and the batteries with new/recharged ones. The Typha had grown substantially at this site also. Fish were present in the Spring Head pool and in the pool upstream of the SH. However, downstream of the SH, river stones had "filled in" the creek so that now, "dry" creek bed separated the pools adjacent to the SH from those further downstream. I have not seen this before.

This trip we again visited Munda (Lake Frome) to swap over the SD cards and batteries of the 2 cameras placed in the sand dunes in August of 2022. We saw very few birds and we saw no Lake Eyre Dragons. On quickly browsing through some of the SD cards that night at Balcanoona, we noted a Great Cormorant and a Quoll at the Weetootla SH and dingos, cats, rabbits, kangaroo and emu at the cameras at Munda.

Having completed our fish and water monitoring activities in the previous days, we performed some maintenance of the watering system and flushing of the water lines. We also planted about 12 seedlings: some Iga, Quandong, Sandalwood, Desert Pea and Balcanoona Wattle into places where a plant had died.

On the morning of the last day some of us (MC, AC, MT & CK) walked from Nudlamutana Hut along the well-marked Oppaminda track to Arkaroola, where we planned to have dinner. There were zebra finches at NH enjoying the water overflow from the header tank there. The track rises steeply away from NH as we gain height toward Mt Warren Hastings. There is a good photo-point for the hut from the track. The track continues to be uphill and downhill. We were looking for Balcanoona wattle and

had little trouble locating it as it was growing on the track as well as on both sides of the track. In fact, we had to push past it to walk on the path (a disused vehicle track). There is very little biomass to the wattle as the phyllodes are sparse and thin, but some had a few flowers attached. It may have a restricted range, but it is locally quite common in association with *Eucalyptus gillii*. We also found a quandong tree adjacent to the track. Another aim was to find the exclosure that was 2-3km from NH. It cannot be missed as it is immediately adjacent to the walking track. This seemed to be in good order, was still acting as an exclosure, but the vegetation outside was in better condition than that inside. Interestingly, the Balcanoona Wattle plants ceased abruptly at the exclosure.



Angelo, holding the stem of the largest Balcanoona wattle that we saw. The exclosure about 10m from where Angelo is standing.

The walking track continued past some “gum-barked” coolabah trees (*Eucalyptus intertexta*) on the way to the cairn on Mt Warren Hastings. Within 50m of the cairn, we found an Iga tree growing. We enjoyed this find as well as the 360° views. The descent from Mt WH is along a narrow switch-backed foot track (to avoid steep drops) and we went past several Iga trees. Balcanoona Wattle again appeared on the track, this time with some seed pods. Before Dinner at Arkaroola, Chris and I met with Doug Sprigg & Vicki to show them our draft bird brochure. They agreed to fund a larger print run and we will give Arkaroola these extra brochures as well as those we were intending to supply.



Left: Mike, Angelo & Chris near the Iga and view of Lake Frome (Munda) from Mt. Warren Hastings