

FRIENDS of VULKATHUNHA-GAMMON RANGES NATIONAL PARK Inc.

NEWSLETTER No.30

SEPTEMBER 2024

Edited by Graeme Oats

ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL YEAR WRAPPED UP

- ✿ More plants in the revegetation project at the Balcanoona Historic Precinct.
- ✿ 150 plant labels manufactured to be installed at Balcanoona.
- ✿ Return of the Curly Mallee (Manduwarra) Woodland to Balcanoona.
- ✿ A successful survey of fish and water quality at Weetootla, Nepowie and Yuwanhinya Springs.
- ✿ Toposcope (Marker) manufactured and installed on a cairn at the summit of the Ridge Walk.
- ✿ New project identified – refurbishing of Idninha Hut/Outstation.
- ✿ Record memberships.

Copley Propagation Day

On the way up to Balcanoona in August, four friends, Ric, Trevor, Nicki and Roger spent a day with Ron Johnston preparing tube stock from a wide range of seeds collected by Friends sourced from Balcanoona as well as some Ron secured locally.

This trip builds on an ongoing connection with Copley which is of mutual benefit to both re-vegetation initiatives. The first joint propagation effort was in December 2022 with Martin, Graeme and Roger. Unfortunately, due to the cancellation of our re-veg trip, joint propagation was didn't eventuate in 2023.



Trevor, Nicki and Ric with Ron



Ric on the job.



some of the completed tubes in the Copley propagation area

Over 500 tubes were prepared, with about 400 using seeds from Balcanoona. The species included:

Eucalypts: Manduwarra/Curly Mallee, Madlha/Beaked Red Mallee

Acacias: Minga/Elegant Wattle, Ulka/Umbrella Wattle, Nguriwarta/Silver Wattle, Ayaya/Balcanoona Wattle

Others: Matu/Native Apricot, Alka/Black Oak, Virnba/White Cypress-Pine

The Friends provided a large tub of slow-release fertilizer and some large tubes for potting up.

As in previous years, the Balcanoona Re Veg project specifies its tube stock requirements for planting out. Some are also planted out in the Copley Botanic Garden, and others are by local people from Copley and Leigh Creek as well as by pastoralists in the region. In 2023, around 60 plants sourced from Balcanoona seeds were planted out by Leigh Creek Area school student at the Nantawarrina 25th anniversary commemoration day

Roger Mathers.

Highlights of Balcanoona Re Vegetation Trip, August 2024



A productive and enjoyable time was had by all.

Over the week, 13 friends and family members attended: Graeme (& Joy) Oats, Peter (stone mason) and Jen Russell, Ric Williams, Trevor Brettig, Paul (& Janette) Saxby, Nicki de Preu, Jill Tugwell, John and Tracey Koumi, and Roger Mathers.

Rangers Sian and Jesse provided extensive support particularly around relocation of our shed and the installation of the directional dial.

Irrigation work

Area 1 irrigation was upgraded with an additional parallel 25mm header.

The Revegetation Areas have been relabelled:

At the main tap manifold, 5 areas are supported:

Area 1, Area 2, Area 3 (previously Mound Area), Area 4 (west of entry road including Historic SQ concrete slab), and Area 5 (east of SQ carpark). All 5 header lines have been labelled and tagged. As Areas 1 and 2 are very large, they have been split into 2 with two headers each (1A, 1B: 2A, 2B) in order to provide an adequate water supply to the plantings.

Areas 6 and 7 (Office/Carpark) and Area 8 (east side of entry road, near visitor's facilities, to be progressed in 2025)



Recent Plantings

In April 2023, around 20 Ayaya/Balcanoona Wattles were planted out in Area 4 (south of the Historic SQ foundation). With only one loss, they are progressing well.

In April 2024, there were around 140 new plantings mainly in Area 4 (north of the Historic SQ foundation), they too are progressing well.

New plantings

30 Manduwarra/Curly Mallee were brought up, 25 planted out and supported at Balcanoona (Areas 3 & 4) and 5 for Weetootla.

3 Yuthara/Lemon-scented Grass and 4 Vawa/Mitchell Grass also planted in Area 3 (around the Mound), and some as companions to Urti/Quandongs planted previously.

Maintenance

For all areas, all plants had drippers checked and cleared, fertilized, re-mounded and guards removed as need. The maintenance of Area 2 was undertaken in Week 2.

For Area 1, a general clear up was undertaken including the backfilling of empty holes with drippers still in place. No further planting is to be undertaken in this area as there are sufficient upper storey plantings in place, the ongoing focus being on natural regeneration. Over the coming years, the revegetation of other areas will also be declared 'complete'.

Plant labels

A range of plant labels have recently been installed near some of the plantings showing their Adnyamathanha, common and scientific names on the label.



Photo by Roger Mathers

The production of the labels was funded through a Friends of Parks grant that was overseen by Graeme Oats with input to the design and names from a number of our members including Richard Smith, Marg Easson, Martin Caon and Nicki de Preu.

Advice on the Adnyamathanha names was sought from Senior Ranger Sian Johnson and Rosalie Richards, the Adnyamathanha Language Coordinator from Leigh Creek Area School.

Using coloured flagging tape placed on specific plants in April, 2024 by Marg and Richard, the installation of labels progressed around the office and carpark area and along the route to the start of the Balcanoona walk with the remainder to be installed next year.

Creating a list of 65 species found within the Park with their Adnyamathanha, common and scientific names is a significant achievement by the group. The list will link to the plant identification project led by Chris and Greg Kirby and has been shared with the Copley folks and their Botanic Garden initiative.

Shed relocation & stocktake

Supported by the Rangers, the benches, tools and equipment were relocated from the previous shed to a larger one under the same roof. This was a huge task over several days and was ably supported by Ric and Trevor. Paul reinstalled the tool safety frame and display board and repaired the shed door. Stock of materials is largely adequate for the revegetation works next year



Photos by Graeme Oats

The installation of the Directional Dial and Propagation work at Copley

These initiatives were also part of the week's efforts and have been reported on separately.

Roger Mathers: Balcanoona Re-Vegetation Coordinator.

PLANT LABELS



During 2023 the Friends successfully applied for a grant to manufacture labels for some of the plants at the Balcanoona Historic Precinct. Members identified 65 different species of plants most of which occur around the Balcanoona area. It was agreed that each label would have the Adnyamathanha, common and scientific name.

Consultation was undertaken with V-GRNP Senior Ranger and the Adnyamathanha Language Coordinator at Leigh Creek Area School with reference to other publications to ascertain the accepted Adnyamathanha names.

Members were consulted in establishing the final size and colour of the label, the size and length of the stake and the number of labels of each specie. Consultation with the Adelaide Botanic Garden led us to a manufacturer, KP Sales at West Thebarton.

KP Sales were able to provide us with a product “spade ready” on time and within budget. The first labels were rolled out during the August visit.



Labels near the Sturt's Desert Rose & White Cypress Pine.

Graeme places the first label.

Graeme Oats

FRIEND'S BBQ PICNIC

In the previous edition of our Newsletter we asked if you would be interested in attending a social event. In November 2023 the reveg team met at Belair National Park for a chat over a BBQ lunch. This proved very successful.

A similar event will be held in November for the wider Friends members. Would you be interested in attending?

Please drop me an email at – gdoats@bigpond.net.au

Curly Mallee Woodland Returning to Balcanoona

After more than 120 years as a Pastoral Lease, the vegetation surrounding the Park Headquarters in Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park was badly degraded by land clearing and historic grazing. Small amounts of native vegetation remained and the seed bank remaining in the soil was limited. Balcanoona Station has been part of the National Park for more than 40 years, yet regeneration of vegetation around the Headquarters was negligible.

Prior to this degradation, the country would have been mostly a Curly Mallee (Manduwarra as it is known in the Adnyamathanha language or *Eucalyptus gillii*) Woodland, with the mallee being the dominant species supporting a wide range of understory plants and grasses.



The map above gives an indication of the extent of the degradation around Balcanoona. Some remnant Curly Mallee remains along gullies, creeks and drain lines. The revegetation areas shown in the map are practically devoid of Curly Mallee as are large areas to the east of Area 2.

In 2017, the Friends group was approached by the District Ranger to 'green up' the area around the Park Headquarters to make it more attractive to visitors. Extensive revegetation plantings supported by a network of irrigation have been established around the historic precinct and visitor facilities.

While a wide range of plants endemic to the area have been propagated and planted out, the Manduwarra/Curly Mallee has been the dominant species so as to respect and restore the natural habitat of this area of the Park.

Friends' member Nicki de Preu, on behalf of the re-veg team, undertook the first seed collection and propagation of Manduwarra/Curly Mallee and brought up a box of seedlings in 2019.



Nicki's box of seedlings in 2019.



Nicki standing beside one of the original Curly Mallee planted in 2019 during the August 2024 field trip.

Nicki brought her experience of propagation using seeds collected from the Park based on the resources and techniques of Trees for Life. Her experience and knowledge, along with other propagators, has been shared for the benefit of the Friends group.

Members of the revegetation team have now propagated and planted around 20 species of native plants that occur around Balcanoona including trees, shrubs and grasses.

The Headquarters surrounds are now noticeably greener, and the revegetation plantings have improved habitat & food resources for invertebrates & birdlife with some of the original Manduwarra/Curly Mallee plantings now over 3 metres in height.

Natural regeneration of vegetation is also occurring around the revegetation plantings providing long term benefits to the environment. Revegetation will provide visitors with an appreciation of the plant biodiversity of the Balcanoona site and the Park more broadly.

Photopoints showing the revegetation plantings have been established and are accessible on the [FoV-GRNP website](#).

Roger Mathers. Balcanoona Re-Veg Coordinator.

Toposcope (Marker)



In February 2023 the Friends Committee received approval from the Co-Management Board to place a cairn mounted toposcope on the summit of the nearby ridge walk at Balcanoona. The project was wholly funded from the donation received from the Estate of the late C Warren Bonython AO.

Ranger Sian Johnson provided the geographical features including the Adnyamathanha names to be engraved on the toposcope. Several DEW staff provided the correct location of the features on the toposcope. DEW introduced us to an Adelaide based foundry for the manufacture. It is made of bronze and weighs 30kgs..

We conducted research on the style of the stone plinth on which the toposcope would be placed. Ron Johnston of Copley introduced us to a professional stonemason, Peter Russell who when contacted immediately agreed to build the cairn and volunteered his labour. Local stone from an existing cairn and surrounds was used.



Left: - During 2023 Rangers Sian & Jesse built the concrete base and in August 2024 the cairn was built on which was placed the toposcope.

Below: - Materials and visitors were transported to the summit via an all-terrain utility vehicle.



Above left: - The toposcope, **right:** - The Recognition Plaque. **Below left:** - Peter and John inspect their work, **right** – Ranger Jesse applies his skills in cementing the recognition plaque.



Right: - First visitors to the site – Graeme, Paul, Roger, Nicki, Jill and Janette.

Graeme Oats - Convenor



Water & Fish Monitoring at Balcanoona - August 2024

Seven members: Annette V., Chris K., Greg K., Helen J., Martin C., Mike T., and Rob G. attended the 26 Aug t - 1 Sept visit to Balcanoona, immediately after the week of the re-vegetation group.

Water and fish monitoring:

As usual we visited Nepouie, Weetootla and Yuwanhinya Springs and collected water samples from each site as well as searching for fish. The “fishing” was difficult due to the prolific growth of Typha reed in and around the pools of water. This growth made it impossible to insert nets into free water at all but a few places. Nevertheless, fish were still there and no doubt appreciated the cover from predatory birds provided by the reeds. In contrast to the April visit, water was present again at Hells Gate and at the last site in the gorge containing Weetootla Spring, but unsurprisingly, fish had not colonised those waters yet. A water sample was also collected from Italowie Spring for analysis by Ray Hickman in Adelaide. The 3 trail cameras at Weetootla were reset and one camera was relocated to a new site at the Yuwanhinya Spring to see what we can find there.

Seed Collecting:

Seeds collected for propagating plants for the 2025 visits were: Slender-bell fruit (from Lesley and Tony at Angepena station); some Callitris from Weetootla, Quandong from ripe fruit; and Eucalyptus intertexta. We also planted some things that may be seeds from Bullock Bush – but we only found 4! We also dropped off some Hakea, Quandong, Iga and E. intertexta seed to Ron at the Copley Community Garden, as well as 2 Iga plants for the Copley Botanic Garden. Ron has lots of *Acacia araneosa* and *E. gillii* growing and which should be available for 2025 planting.

Munda (Lake Frome) visit: We located the 2 trail cameras that we failed to locate in April and reset



them. Any good images will be placed on the website. In addition we saw several Lake Eyre Dragon (*Ctenophorus maculosus*) when we disturbed them on the surface of the lake bed. During the journey we saw – and photographed – several Central Bearded Dragon (*Pogona vitticeps*) sunning themselves. As a condition of our DEW research permit, we are required to record our sightings of fauna on their BDBSA form or on iNaturalist.

Left: Central Bearded Dragon (*Pogona vitticeps*)

Activities at Balcanoona

Greg remained at Balcanoona while the rest of us were out (walking, seeding, birding, photographing quandong and fishing) and worked on the text of the rapidly progressing plant identification booklet. I am told that there are now 80 plants in the book.

During the week we had been admiring the new plantings and the plant labels that are placed around the Balcanoona plantings. The latter certainly add interest to a casual wander through the growing plants. On Saturday, having earlier planted 2 Iga and fertilised all the plantings in “Area 2”, we checked that all the drippers were working (unscrewed them and re-screwed them) and flushed the lines. All areas were watered. The newly configured watering system works much better than the previous iteration.

Martin Caon.

Port Augusta Meeting with DEW Staff

Representatives of the Committee recently met with Northern Flinders District Ranger David Phillips, Senior Conservation Ecologist Rob Brandle, and Senior Ranger Sian Johnson to discuss the future of our current projects within the Park. DEW was very pleased and appreciative of the work involved in the revegetation of Balcanoona and impressed by the energy of our Friends group.

Idninha Hut (Outstation)



The Committee have been in discussion with DEW recently about a possible refurbishment of Idninha. Some members accompanied Martin to the Idninha outstation (too big to be called a hut!) via the Wortupa Loop Track. They stopped to inspect the Wortupa well and yards, the Oodnaminta sheep yards, the Mainwater campground (with its new toilet), and the Gammon sheep yards. (Scroll down from here

<https://friendsofgammons.org.au/balcanoona-when-it-was-a-sheep-station/> to see them). A separate report on the possible restoration of Idninha has been prepared for the Committee.

Idninha Outstation is a nine-roomed building disposed as: East Half with 4 rooms coming off a corridor accessed from an external door. Plus a 5th room under the verandah roof, with a separate external door access only – currently closed by a galv sheet.

West Half with 3 rooms (kitchen, dining/lounge and bedroom) with 2 internal doors and 2 external doors. Plus a 4th room of west half (under main roof) has external door access.

East and west halves have no internal connection.

A verandah concrete surrounds the building, new on north side, steps up to verandah on south side.



Right: - The one-way section of the Loop Track has some heroic four-wheel-driving! The Wortupa Loop “Road” is a rough track, and then we see this sign!

Martin Caon

Record Membership

Our membership continues to grow, each year for the past 4 years our membership has grown and this year we have 85 registered members, over 44% of which were active in either an administrative role or “hands on” in the Park.

**Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia
Conservation & Wildlife (SA) Inc.**

Goat cull extract report from the Association's visit to the Park in May 2024.

Camel Yards: - 2 YFRW on southern boundary, big wedge tailed eagles, dog tracks on track near gate, 127 goats culled.

Italowie Gap: - Cat prints, and 1 seen on game camera, at Italowie Spring. Several YFRW using spring at night, black kites, pied butcher bird, red capped robin, crested pigeon, brown falcon, eagles, crows, magpies, finches, babblers, grey fantails and honey eaters, 96 goats culled.

Grindell's Hut: - 3 echidnas, 6 eagles, zebra finches, brown falcon, and a quoll. 108 goats culled. Discussion held at debrief re accommodation at Oocaboolina for future culls to try and bolster numbers at Camel Yards/Reedy Springs.

AED - (Automatic External Defibrillator)

In the previous Newsletter we asked members if the group should invest in an AED— *"To assist the Committee we are seeking views from members. Should we invest in a portable defibrillator?"* Whilst we had limited response, what we got was an overwhelming yes.

Our Newsletters are distributed to selected DEW staff members, one of them advised that DEW has an AED that it is freely available to Friends of Parks member groups. We took advantage of that and borrowed one for the recent Park visits. Whilst it came back in pristine condition it was comforting to know that there was one at our work sites away from Balcanoona.

We intend to have one on all future visits to the Park.

FRIEND'S 2025 AGM

Friday 21st March 2025 at the

FULLARTON PARK COMMUNITY CENTRE.

SPEAKER - ???

Looking for suggestions – any ideas welcome

BALCANOONA RANGERS' OFFICE UPGRADED

Visitors to the reception area of the Ranger's office will be pleasantly surprised to see the recent upgrade. The floor has been tiled from left over tiles from the Oocaboolina refurbishment, new glass top showcase cabinet filled with park and walking trail maps, brochures, post cards and artefacts. Various prints, maps and drawings decorate the walls.

