

# NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2007

NUMBER 14

Editor: Peter Bird



President: Chris Kaczan 8338 4443 Secretary: Joe Haslam 8271 2660  
[www.waite.adelaide.edu.au/reserve/friends](http://www.waite.adelaide.edu.au/reserve/friends)

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## President's Page

The Waite Conservation Reserve is looking particularly attractive at this time of the year with lots of fresh growth on the eucalypts and many flowers coming into bloom. Initially I thought that the yellow Bulbine lilies *Bubine bulbosa* were sparse this year but at the last working bee there were many comments about various patches that were thick with bulbines. Some of these bright yellow flowers were out in the first week of August and they have kept flowering till now at the end of September. In places there is a vivid display of purple Chocolate lilies *Arthropodium strictum* poking up amongst the contrasting bulbines. These are but one of many subtle floral displays that form an interesting patchwork of colour amongst the eucalypt woodland.

Several Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes were an enjoyable sight in Wild Dog Glen in early August. I gather not a lot is known about where these birds come from and where they go but they seem to be more than just day visitors. So presumably the reserve meets some of the needs of this striking black-headed bird that flies with a distinctive undulating pattern.

A Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike which was being rehabilitated by Fauna Rescue of SA Inc. was fed berries from epacrid species to see if passage through the bird's digestive system induced seed germination. Two epacrid species in the reserve are the Mt Lofty Ground-berry (*Acrotriche fasciculiflora*) and Honeypots or Cushion Ground-berry (*Acrotriche serrulata*). Both species produce nectar, pollen and fruit that provide a food source for many different native animals. However they are difficult to germinate and so it will be interesting to see if the research involving the Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike helps propagation efforts.

Research students from the University of SA are also using the reserve for studies into the effects of weed competition on another epacrid species Cranberry heath *Astroloma humifusum*. In addition they are also using tissue culture methods to grow other plant species that are difficult to propagate. It is pleasing to see the reserve being used for research which has the potential to improve and increase our revegetation efforts.



Bulbine lilies flowered in profusion this spring.  
Photo: J. Gardner

I'd like to thank the diverse group of people who have turned up to working bees to help our rehabilitation efforts. We have a good time as well as contributing to the conservation of the Reserve. We value the time given up by our members and in return try to give something back. This includes the AGM speakers, guided wildflower walks and this year a bird watching walk and breakfast. Further details on this interesting early morning event follow in this newsletter.

Regards

Chris Kaczan

# BIRD WALK

## Bird Walk Brekkie & Working Bee

**SATURDAY 3 NOVEMBER 2007 7.15 am**

The early bird catches the worm, or in this case, cornflakes and a cuppa tea!

Birds are active early so bird-watching is best before breakfast. Thankfully we're putting on the brekkie so you can join Penny Paton & Peter Bird for an early-morning bird walk through the beautiful upper sections of the Waite Conservation Reserve.

Early November is a great time for watching birds with (normally) good weather and avian hyperactivity. Spring breeding swells bird numbers and everything is abuzz as parent birds work madly to keep food up to their young and the next generation brawls rowdily over the spoils.

Penny & Peter are long time bird-watchers who will be able to track down trickier species, identify calls and share knowledge about the 50 or so species regularly seen in the reserve. Spare binoculars & bird books will be available.

Enjoy breakfast afterwards then stay if you are able for our working bee to help restore habitat for the birds and other biodiversity. Then its food again with the usual free BBQ lunch.

**Time:** *Meet at gate: 7.15 am sharp  
Bird Walk: 7.30 – 8.30 am  
Breakfast: 8.30 - 9.15 am  
Working Bee: 9.30 am – 12.30 pm  
BBQ Lunch: 12.30 – 1.00 pm*

**Location:** *Meet at "Springwood Park" gate (ex-Andrew Garrett's) – the first driveway on the right, off the Eagle on the Hill Road (old freeway) coming from the city.  
(People will be ferried from there in a lesser number of vehicles as necessary).*

**Bring:** *warm clothing, sturdy non-slip footwear & binoculars*

**RSVP by 30/10/07 (for catering purposes):**  
*Peter Bird 8352 3046 or [bird.peter@saugov.sa.gov.au](mailto:bird.peter@saugov.sa.gov.au)*

# WRENS OLIVES

On a recent visit to Canberra I was dazzled to witness a small party of Superb Fairy-wrens near the heart of the city. Seeing these tiny leprechaun-birds trampolining around the suburban shrubbery made my heart bleed for our own 'blue wrens' which disappeared from Adelaide gardens in the 1930's and 40's. As far as I can see wrens are extinct on the main Waite campus and yet you need climb only a few dozen steps up Wild Dog Glen to hear their familiar silvery calls. It is sobering to reflect that the western boundary of the Waite Conservation Reserve now forms the extinction frontier for this little bird. It is more sobering to think that management decisions we make today may have a bearing on the future persistence of wrens in the reserve.

Around Canberra, groups of fairy-wrens consisting of a dominant male with a mate and a handful of young, typically occupy territories of 2-4 hectares. Given comparable densities, Waite reserve might be expected to support a post-breeding population of 30 or so groups numbering upwards of a couple of hundred wrens. This might be a little excessive – parts of the reserve are probably a little too open to support many wrens – but having counted six groups in a couple of hours recently, fairy-wrens are certainly not uncommon on our patch.

Sightings of wrens are a possibility wherever a shrubby thicket or two punctuates the otherwise open grassy understorey. But take note of the composition of these thickets and you soon realise that most are dominated by olives. This tendency is even more pronounced for White-browed Scrub-wrens; the only place where you can reliably see these plucky little brown jobs is in the tangle of olives and rhamnus that choke the moist gullies of Hardy Block.

Watching parties of wrens mucking about in olives, it seems to me they are attracted more to the physical protection provided by their complex interlocking branches than to any food resource on offer; olives always appear relentlessly healthy, unburdened by any obvious insect load that might sustain a

population of wrens! Such high quality cover presumably allows the wrens to forage that little bit further from home knowing they can still regain the safety of the olives when predators threaten. Access to even a couple of extra metres of grassland in all directions would substantially increase the food resources available to a group of wrens, bringing with it obvious survival advantages.

You can see the conundrum we are in as keepers and restorers of the reserve's biodiversity. Just as Southern Brown Bandicoots hang on in some corners of the Mt Lofty Ranges due to the protection afforded by blackberries, it seems that fairy-wrens and scrub-wrens now rely substantially on olives for their persistence in the reserve. Yet here we are busily eliminating olives from our patch! Ecological processes are never simple - there will always be a downside to any management action we instigate - but how can we pursue our dream of reinstating the original bush without losing our wrens or other species along the way?

The simple answer is I believe to follow implicitly the widely accepted Bradley method of bush regeneration: methodical, minimal-disturbance weed removal working from the least disturbed to the most disturbed areas. Importantly it advocates short-term retention of some weeds until recovery of alternative habitat by natural regeneration. In the context of our reserve and retention of our wrens, it probably means deferring the complete removal of olives for a decade or more until regenerating *Dodonaea*, *Bursaria*, *Myoporum*, *Acacias* and the like are sufficiently mature to provide suitable alternative cover.

I am an impatient bastard though and it is fair to say I have some sympathy for the alternative 'slash-and-burn' approach which says hammer the olives now while we have the funding and energy. Hard as it is however I must curb my enthusiasm for the short-term 'neatness' of eliminating the last olive and focus instead on what is best for the long-term survival of biodiversity in the reserve.

We can do this by making haste slowly with olive removal. Areas targeted for olive control need to be carefully assessed to ensure there is sufficient native cover left to support refuge and breeding sites for wrens. In the absence of native shrubs we should be leaving strategic clumps of olives, some living but others perhaps treated using the 'drill & fill' method and left standing.

Olive wood degrades so slowly that 'drilled & filled' olives should continue to provide some cover for years to come. Ditto for piles of cut or pulled olives; wrens are already happily utilising such piles in the reserve, so we must forego the natural urge to 'tidy up' these piles by throwing a match in.

Instead we need to maintain these rough corners and, where necessary, augment the existing cover by judicious planting of clumps

of appropriate shrubs. Close observation of how groups of wrens utilize existing cover should give us design clues for the optimal distribution and density of such wren refugia so that we retain a wren-friendly landscape.

Although it causes me some pain to acknowledge this, it seems to me that the celebratory removal of the last mature olive should not be considered for some years. To console myself I have to believe that not everything needs to be done today and others will keep the faith after I am gone. Believing that a hundred years from now there will still be a 'Friends of Waite Conservation Reserve' working to protect the reserve gives me confidence that the wrens will be there as well.

*Peter Bird*

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## Welcome to our working bees

The Friends hold working bees on the **first Saturday** and **third Sunday** of each month from April to December - the last one is on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2007.

The work is varied, but usually involves removal of olives, general weeding and, in the cooler months, planting out seedlings of plants grown from locally gathered seeds. No particular skills are needed.

We gather at 9 am, work until about 12 noon, and then enjoy a free sausage sizzle as a 'thank you'.

We would love to have some new participants - a few extra pairs of hands would be most welcome. We're sure you will enjoy the friendship and the opportunity to work in the fresh mountain air.

If you would like to come, we will be happy to pick you up (provided you live fairly close) & take you to the first working bee. Our secretary Joe Haslam will be happy to answer your queries and help you to attend. Phone anytime on **8271 2660**.

### *FRIENDS OF WAITE* **CHRISTMAS PARTY**

*Joint gathering of*

**Friends of Urrbrae House**  
**Fiends of Waite Arboretum**  
**Friends of Waite Conservation Reserve**

**URRBRAE HOUSE**  
**Monday 3 December**  
**5.30 – 8.00 pm**

Commences at 5.30 pm with:  
Dry Rainforest Garden walk *or*  
Talks in Urrbrae House

Followed at 6.00 pm by  
drinks & nibbles  
in Urrbrae House

**ALL FRIENDS WELCOME**



# Working Bees

## Spring & Summer 2007

Working bees are held on the 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday & 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of each month, starting after Easter and continuing until 1 December.

**Sat Oct 6**

**Sat Nov 3** (+ bird walk & brekkie)

**Sat Dec 1**

**Sun Oct 21**

**Sun Nov 18**

**9.00 am – 12.30 pm**

**12.30 – 1.00 pm FREE SAUSAGE SIZZLE**

### Meeting places

**October:** working bees will be held in a different location.

*Meet at 9am at Gate 82, off Hillside Drive, Springfield.*

**November & December:** working bees will be held at the same location as last year.

*Meet at gate to Springwood Park (ex Garrett's) – the first driveway on the right, off the Eagle on the Hill Road (old freeway) coming from the city.*

### Activities

In October we will meet off Hillside Drive to plant in this part of the reserve. Plants include *Goodenia albiflora*, taken from cuttings at an earlier working bee, round-leaf wattle, saltbush, scurf pea and grey box for parts of the western slope.

October 6<sup>th</sup> will be the last planting date with the remainder of the year dedicated to weed control activities. If Friends could please notify me beforehand what plants they intend to bring along, it makes planning easier.

*Come and help us protect and reinstate the original vegetation of the reserve.*

All enquiries: Stephen Wait 0410 695 719

# Waite Reserve work report by Stephen Wait

It is a very pleasant time of the year to be in the Reserve, with many native species flowering at this time of the year. Conversely, many weeds also flower and flourish in the spring, so it is a busy time for weed control.

Boneseed, Broom, Cape Tulip and grass control have been the main focus for work in the Reserve in the past couple of weeks. The broom is mostly a matter of monitoring our boundary where the neighbour has a bad infestation. The boneseed is more widespread in the Reserve, mostly in the Groundberry Gully and Sheoak Slope areas. Cape Tulip is prevalent and well established along Urrbrae Ridge, but the areas we have worked are outlying and isolated populations in Hardy Block, beneath and on Pultenaea Hill, and along a weed front of newer colonisation.

Prior to this emphasis in spring, work has continued on olive control in the Reserve, and there has been a bigger attempt to control soursob than ever before. As olives become controlled in areas throughout the Reserve secondary weed control such as soursobs and grasses will become more pertinent to securing bush restoration.

The focus of recent Friends of the Reserve working bees has been the planting of tubestock that volunteers have grown. The results of previous year's plantings have been evident, which has been encouraging. Planting has taken the emphasis away from weed control in recent working bees, but I have been keen to get in as many plants as we can while the season allows us. From October the focus will switch back to weed control, and also some seed collection, so we can grow more plants over summer and next year for revegetation.

## Working bee pictures

David Kaczan planting *Dodonaea* seedlings



Meg Byrt digging up bridal creeper

