

# NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2010

NUMBER 20

Editor: Penny Paton



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*New members are welcome. Contact Jennifer Gardner, Manager Waite Conservation Reserve, above*

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## President's Page

Spring has come. A walk in the reserve at this magical time of year reminds me of why I signed up as a Friend and gets me wondering why others do it.

In my case I have been a 'field naturalist' as long as I can remember. I'm one who gets innate pleasure simply from hearing the haunting call of a Grey Shrike-thrush filtering down Wild Dogs Glen or turning a rock, as I did at a recent working bee, and discovering a beautiful Little Whip Snake, a new and exciting find for the reserve. So I suspect my attraction to the reserve comes simply from some selfish instinct to protect the habitat of the things that inspire me. I work on campus so the reserve is part of my extended back yard for which I feel a sense of ownership and responsibility.

I experience a deep sense of loss for never having had the opportunity to see, for example, an Eastern Quoll fossicking around the western slopes of the reserve or a Regent Honeyeater visiting Blue Gum flowers on Netherby Spur. Once abundant in the district, quolls went extinct almost 100 years ago while the honeyeater survived a little longer. By my actions I hope I can prevent any other species from going the way of the quoll.

That's me. What about you? You may have altogether different stories for why you joined the group (stories that probably don't involve snakes!).

I'm sure Penny Paton would love to hear them. Why? Because Penny has joined the Committee and is the new Newsletter Editor. Penny is a highly regarded ecologist with specialist knowledge and practical skills in managing grassy woodlands. She will be a great asset to the committee and I welcome her.

Apart from twice monthly working bees we have a couple of activities lined up for the coming spring and summer. Firstly a Native Grass Survey led by botanist and committee member Peter Lang. This will be your chance to get your heads around a particularly tricky but important group of plants. You can't have a grassy woodland without grass. And if you're going to have grass it may as well be the native variety; there are already way too many weedy ones. There are over 20 species of native grass listed for the reserve including some not seen for many years.

Next year is our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary so I think it appropriate that we celebrate with a few activities. To kick things off and following on from his great presentation at the May AGM, Terry Reardon has kindly agreed to lead a bat survey evening in the reserve sometime in January or February. As well, we will run a bat roost box construction day and BBQ early next year. We'll let you know nearer the time on both counts.

**Peter Bird**

# President's Annual Report 2010

Chris Kaczan passed on the Presidential baton to me mid way through the year when he and the family moved to NSW. The fact that I get to give the President's Report means I have the distinct pleasure of looking back over Chris' time with the Friends group and thanking him for his contribution. Chris was on the inaugural committee when the Friends group started almost 10 years ago and was President for the last seven. As a result he had a unique opportunity to influence both the Friends group and the reserve in its formative decade. I've already outlined in the recent newsletter some of Chris' qualities which made him such an asset to the group – his passion and determination for the job at hand, his ability to listen and make sound decisions, and his willingness always to roll up his sleeves and do the hard work, be it in the reserve or on the committee.

It is always difficult to gauge what someone's contribution has been. In the case of a CEO you might look at the company share price. But in much the same way it is possible for us to quantify Chris' performance by looking at the Friends' bottom line. Our core business is the protection and restoration of the reserve's plants, animals and ecological processes. We do have some objective measures for how the reserve is faring but I'm comfortable with the subjective condition score as recorded last year by our inaugural President Scott Field. Scott revisited the reserve after an absence of five years and offered the following observations. He said of the reserve, and I quote: "It is a stunning transformation and a major achievement of which the management team can be justly proud". He went on: "It was great to return and see the reserve moving forward so well and to know that its management is in such capable and dedicated hands".

Sometimes it is difficult for those of us who visit the reserve on a regular basis to fully appreciate what can be very incremental improvement. So it was very comforting to have had such positive feedback to confirm that truly the reserve has undergone a transformation, the great majority of it under Chris' Presidency. And while obviously it has been a team effort, Chris' captaincy of the team has been critical and I thank him on your behalf.

I also thank Wendy and David and Anna who contributed so much to the Friends and the reserve through their hard work and dedication.... and cake (Wendy was a generous provider of baked goods at Friends functions). We wish the Kaczan tribe well in their new life.

There are others to thank on the committee. I particularly wish to thank Secretary Joe Haslam who has a special passion for the reserve and who has a knack of keeping the group's constitutional wheels from wobbling. I also offer thanks to: Lynda Yates our long-running treasurer and membership officer who keeps us solvent; Peter Lang for his botanical and restoration knowledge and fabulous

newsletter articles and photos; Helen Pryor, for promoting the group at every chance; Meg Byrt for, amongst other things, organizing the Kaczan farewell; Stephen Wait for 10 years of dedicated restoration work in the reserve and for organising all our working bees; and not forgetting the wonderful Jennifer Gardner who ensures the conduit between the University of Adelaide and the Friends group runs smoothly.

I also take this opportunity to farewell Grant Joseph from the Committee. Grant was employed by the university in the restoration team but contributed more than just paid time. Notably he produced a beautifully researched Revegetation Manual and all the maps for the biological survey.

Thank you also to Annette Baker for her spectacular barbeque lunches which follow every working bee; it is a great institution and one which I suspect significantly boosts attendances. Finally thank you to the powerhouse of the Friends – all the weed-pullers and tree-planters that give up their mornings on the first Saturday and third Sunday of the month to contribute to the working bees. This effort yielded over 700 hours of volunteer rehabilitation works.

In the coming year we will continue our efforts across the reserve but with a particular focus on re-vegetating the extensive soil dump near Springfield Gate before it succumbs to weeds. The process of planting some 3000 understory tube-stock is already well under way.

As mentioned earlier, The Friends group is almost 10 years old. Accordingly it is appropriate that we as a committee spend some time in the coming year to engage in a little navel gazing. This will involve revisiting and reviewing past management plans with the university to ensure that we continue to get best value from our group's considerable efforts. I am also keen to strengthen ties with some of our neighbours, in particular the considerable human resource here on campus.

Finally I'd like to finish off with an invitation to those of you who have never ventured up into the reserve. Here are a few statistics to tempt you to at least take a look: at 7 km from the GPO, it is equivalent to the closest substantial patch of remnant vegetation near Adelaide. It is the largest intact patch of Grey Box grassy woodland in South Australia, which under the Federal EPBC Act has recently been listed as an endangered ecological community. The reserve is home to 200 native plant species including orchids, lilies, peas and wattles – many of them rare in SA. As well there are kangaroos, echidnas, possums, 13 lizards, 5 frogs and God knows how many bats – no doubt Terry (Reardon) will enlighten us in a minute. This patch is an absolute gem. So, do yourself a favour and go for a walk up there, then come back and see us and sign up as a Friend - it is truly worthy of lots more Friends. Alternatively, you could take my word for it, save a stamp, and sign up as a Friend tonight.

**Peter Bird**

# DEAR OH DEER!

Feral deer have the distinction of being the least hated of Australia's many feral pests. So says the latest survey of community attitudes posted by the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre. It is easy to see why, judging by this photograph taken recently in Wild Dogs Glen. Like politicians, you get a head start in life if you happen to be good looking! Conversely the not so handsome Cane Toad was voted the most hated pest in the same CRC survey! But I digress.

Eight Fallow Deer have been in the reserve lately and, while they certainly make a cute picture, the damage they cause through browsing, thrashing and rubbing is not so endearing. Our planted Sheoaks (*Allocasuarina verticillata*) seem particularly palatable. Repeated browsing by the deer has whittled 2- and 3-year old saplings down to knee-high sticks to the point that some will likely die if browsing persists. Thrashing is where Fallow bucks use their antlers to flail and trash shrubs as a territorial signal to other bucks. The plants are not usually killed but can take a fearsome battering, as illustrated by shredded young Hop-bushes (*Dodonaea viscosa*) seen on Netherby Spur and a chopped up Twiggy Daisy-bush (*Olearia ramulosa*) seen on Urrbrae Ridge.

Rubbing is also used to delineate territory. Bucks rub their antlers against the trunks of saplings both anointing the trees with a scent mark and creating a blaze by exposing the lighter-coloured wood beneath the darker bark to physically advertise their presence. They target young trees of a certain diameter which are very susceptible to ring-barking. Examples of this can be seen in Leafhopper Gully where several young Sheoaks have been completely ring-barked and will almost certainly die over the coming summer. Elsewhere they have damaged a number of planted Sheoaks and Golden Wattles (*Acacia pycnantha*) as well as naturally occurring Native Cherries (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*). Two Native Cherries have been killed on Pultenaea Hill already. This is unfortunate because these elegant and biologically important small trees are already uncommon.

We have attempted to protect some susceptible trees by 'guarding' them with fallen tree branches dragged in from nearby. Ultimately however we are probably reliant on neighbouring landholders to develop a taste for venison.

**Peter Bird**



Fallow Deer, WCR (Photo: P Bird)

## Friends of Urrbrae House

2011 will not only be a significant year for South Australia in celebrating its 175<sup>th</sup> Jubilee but the Friends of Urrbrae House will celebrate 20 years since the inaugural meeting on 17 April 1991.

The main aim of the FOUH is to use Urrbrae House for events that fit in with the history and atmosphere of this splendid 1892 family home of Peter Waite and his family and raise money for specific projects to assist with its restoration and conservation.

As well as arranging functions for the enjoyment of all associated with the Waite Campus and Historic Precinct, the FOUH enjoy such opportunities to have people visit Urrbrae House for the first time. Their usual response is that "I did not realize that we had such a splendid mansion in Adelaide"!

The most successful and long running activity in the FOUH program is the Twilight Concert in the Drawing Room. Since 1998 these have been run in association with Vivente Music and promote local talent, including members of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. Because of the unique acoustics of the Drawing Room and discerning audience attracted, this venue is regarded by the musicians as one of the best in Adelaide for such chamber music recitals. Those attending also appreciate the refreshments provided prior to the concerts by the Committee.

In the past two years we have introduced some Sunday afternoon concerts in association with a tour of the House. On these occasions we are seeking to provide an opportunity for students from the Elder Conservatorium of the University of Adelaide to gain experience in public presentations. The next Sunday afternoon tour and concert will be on 5<sup>th</sup> September.

In contrast to the above but also taking advantage of another unique feature of Urrbrae House, the ballroom with its special sprung floor proved a great venue for a 'Peter Waite Heritage Ball' in 1991 and a '1920's Ball' in 2000. A Ceilidh was held in 2008 and a Bush Dance in 2009 was so successful it will be repeated this year on 28 August.

In October last year the FOUH arranged a special presentation by The Lumina Vocal Ensemble. This was one of two performances to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this ensemble which comprises 16 a capella singers.

A follow up performance by Lumina will be held at Urrbrae House on Sunday afternoon 27 February 2011 as a Festival Fringe Event. On this occasion small groups of singers will present a range of mediaeval, early renaissance and contemporary music at different venues throughout the House.

For the third year, FOUH will be presenting a 'Games Day' on 6 October 2010 for children and parents / grandparents. Featuring 'games our grandparents used to play' and a traditional 'Punch and Judy Show' this has proved a fun day for all.

From the profits of the above function the FOUH have been pleased to assist with the following major projects in Urrbrae House: restoration of the dining room chairs, conservation and re-hanging of the original drawing room curtains, refurbishment of the timber floors upstairs and the purchase of rugs and restoration of the billiard table.

The bell call system is currently being restored and a major project in the planning is the restoration of a children's bedroom to represent that of Eva Waite who was 12 in the year the current Urrbrae House was completed.

**Bill Wallace** (President 2007-2010) and  
**Yvonne Routledge** (President 2010-11)

**JOIN**  
**Friends of Waite Conservation Reserve**  
&  
**Peter Lang**

for a

**NATIVE GRASS**  
**SURVEY**  
of  
**Waite Conservation Reserve**

**Saturday 20 November 2010**  
**9.00am (sharp) - 12.30pm**

**Lunch provided**

Meet at the entrance to "Springwood Park" (ex Andrew Garrett property). Take the SE Freeway & exit first left on to Eagle-on-the-Hill Rd before the tunnels. The driveway is the first possible turn on the right.

**We aim to:**

- Systematically collect and identify grasses in all 14 vegetation communities represented
- Collect grass samples, photos, GPS location, and site description data from as many sites as possible to map the distribution & abundance of grasses in the reserve
- Pay particular attention to Wallaby Grasses *Austrodanthonia* & Spear Grasses *Austrostipa* of which 7 and 11 species respectively are listed for the reserve

RSVP Peter Lang  
[langpl@ozemail.com.au](mailto:langpl@ozemail.com.au)

8379 6373 (H) 8222 9446 (W)

Note, this activity replaces the normal third Sunday of the month working bee on 21 Nov 2010.

## New addition to fauna

This beautiful **Little Whip Snake** *Parasuta flagellum* found recently at the top of Wild Dogs Glen becomes the fifteenth reptile species added to the reserve list. This species was always a possibility for the reserve based on records from nearby Cleland and Belair parks, but hope waned when it was not recorded during the intensive fauna survey in 2008.

Interestingly I had turned the rock under which it was located many times before but had only ever found small skins. Skinks just happen to be the favoured food of whip snakes which they hunt simply by waiting under a likely rock until joined (for lunch) by an unsuspecting lizard seeking refuge.

The Little Whip Snake is venomous but not considered dangerous. This has nothing to do with its small size. At a mere 28 cm the snake was already adult, yet a bite from a similarly small juvenile Eastern Brown Snake would be potentially fatal.

Because of this it is not a bad idea to know how to identify one from the other. The easiest way to tell them apart is by the black head and neck markings. The Little Whip Snake has one patch of black on the head while the deadly baby brown has two distinctly separate black markings, one on the head and a separate black band across the neck.

If you can't be sure of your identification there is another pretty foolproof way to tell them apart. If it bites it will be a brown snake! Brown snakes are highly nervous and invariably try to bite whereas Whip Snakes are much calmer and almost never attempt to bite.

**Peter Bird**



*Little Whip Snake, WCR (Photo: P Bird)*

## Working Bee dates

**Sat Sep 4<sup>th</sup>**  
**Sat Oct 2<sup>nd</sup>**  
**Sat Nov 6<sup>th</sup>**  
**Sat Dec 4<sup>th</sup>**

**Sunday Sept 19<sup>th</sup>**  
**Sunday Oct 17<sup>th</sup>**  
**Sat Nov 20<sup>th</sup> \*\*\***

\*\*\* Note: Both November working bees are on a Saturday. This is done to accommodate a presentation/workshop on grasses by Peter Lang on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> November.

For Sept, Oct, Nov working bees, meet at 9am at the driveway to Springwood Park property, first driveway to the right on the Eagle on the Hill Rd.

For the Dec 4<sup>th</sup> working bee meet at gate 82 entrance to the Reserve, in from the water tanks on Hillside rd, Springfield.

Spring working bee activities will be the final plantings for this year, weeding, seed collection and Peter Lang's native grass activity. For the last working bee on Dec 4<sup>th</sup> we will return to the major revegetation site on the western slope to weed, monitor and water the plantings. There may also be the opportunity for some seed collection there.

## Working Bee Report (Autumn & Winter 2010)

We began the Friends working bee programme this year at the major revegetation project site the University has undertaken on the western slope. The mass of plantings are visible from the easement, marked by pink coloured stakes. Thousands of seedlings were planted in the first five working bees of the year, mostly wattles, grasses and saltbush species.

Working bees through winter have been spent weeding at Pultenaea Hill and Hardy Block, and planting at Urrbrae Ridge, Leafhopper Gully and along the Yurrebilla Trail towards Netherby Spur. This year we have been splitting the group to tackle different tasks during the same day. It is hoped that this enables participants to choose activities best suited and most interesting to them, thereby maintaining our morale and enthusiasm for our contributions towards the improving condition of vegetation within the Reserve.

For enquiries about working bees Ph: 0410 695 719

**Stephen Wait**

# Entomologica:

## The mysterious Eastern Alchemist

A few years ago I photographed the caterpillar below on a Grassy Bindweed (*Convolvulus remotus*) in Wild Dogs Glen. Apart from identifying it as an *Aedia leucomelas*, I took it no further. Recently Stephen Wait reported that many of the new plantings of *Convolvulus* in the reserve were being eaten by a caterpillar which matched my recollection of this one, so I decided to do a little more investigation.



*Aedia leucomelas* larva, Wild Dogs Glen, 30 Mar 2003, (Photo: P.J. Lang)

*Aedia leucomelas* is a widespread moth species found in Europe, throughout Asia to Japan, Malaysia and Indonesia, but subspecies *acronyctoides* is native to Australia. It is a night-flying moth of the enormously species rich family Noctuidae. With a wing span of about 35 mm it has a rather inauspicious mottled appearance. On the lower wings there are large white basal patches which it alternately exposes and hides by the partial opening and closing of its forewings when in a resting position.

*Aedia leucomelas* goes under the common names of **Eastern Alchemist**; **Sorcerer**; or the less romantic: **Sweet Potato Leaf Worm**. The latter is due to it being an economic pest of the Sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*), a cultivated plant from the same family as *Convolvulus* (the Convolvulaceae). One consequence of this is that Eastern Alchemist, unlike

most native moth species, has been the subject of considerable biological research. One paper I came across was solely about its courtship behaviour, and it got me thinking about how little is known about the habits of most of our native insect species, each with their own particular ecological specializations and idiosyncratic behaviours.

I imagined climbing up into the Waite Reserve on cold damp nights and waiting patiently for hours at a time, torch in hand for a chance of observing these moths in the wild; and then one night finally being rewarded by a chance encounter, as if stumbling across a secret ritual. I could witness in nature, under cover of darkness, what Choi *et al.* (2005) observed in the laboratory:

*"Aedia leucomelas L. (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae) was observed under laboratory condition. Behavior of antennal probing and wing fanning in presence of opposite sex was observed in dark room. Both male and female exhibited similar behaviour, fanning wing and raising antenna before male flew toward female. Some of moths began raising antenna 20 minutes into scotophase, and 20 minutes later both sexes started to exhibit spectacular behaviour, fanning the wings intermittently in high frequency as if producing sound for attracting opposite sexes."*



*Aedia leucomelas* adult (Photo: Donald Hobern)

## References:

Choi, M.Y., Kim, D.H., Paik, C.H., Seo, H.Y., Kim, J.D., Lee, G.H., Gries, Gerhard & Roitberg, Bernard D. (2005). Courtship Behavior of the Sweet Potato Leaf Worm, *Aedia leucomelas* (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae). *Korean Journal of Applied Entomology*.  
Don Herbison-Evans & Stella Crossley (2010). <http://lepidoptera.butterflyhouse.com.au/acro/leucom.html>

**Peter Lang**

