

Friends of Chiltern-Mt Pilot National Park, Inc.

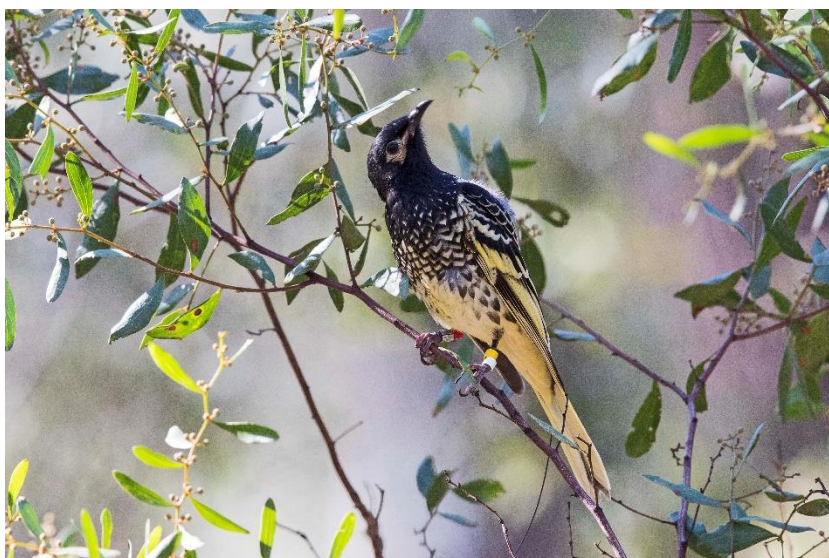
Annual Report: 2014-2015

The group has had a busy year with many activities that were carried out at and in between the usual monthly gatherings.

Friends' activities during the year included:

- 2015 release of captive-bred Regent Honeyeaters

In April 2015, 77 captive-bred Regent Honeyeaters were released in the Crusher Road area on the Southern side of the Chiltern section of the Park with 39 of the birds fitted with radio transmitters. This was the first time that many of us experienced this part of the Park as it had been closed completely due to the presence of quarry activity. The resplendent ironbarks and other trees in the area have provided one of the popular places for this year's birds to live. Many members have been active in assisting with the tracking and monitoring of released and wild birds.



- Rutherglen Natural Features Reserve project

Early in 2014, the Friends' group was successful in gaining a grant of \$10,000 from the "Communities For Nature Grants" administered by the Department of Environment, Land and Water Planning (DELWP) for work to clean-up and enhance the 33 hectare Rutherglen Natural Features Reserve. This reserve is several kilometres North West of the National Park and has much important flora and fauna that complements that in the main Park. The work during the year has involved cleaning the debris left near an old mine site and the planting of understory at the Southern end of the reserve and the ongoing effort to remove the olives and thistles that abound in the reserve. Assistance has been received from a school group during the clean-up phase earlier in the year. Members have also conducted surveys and maintained mammal nest boxes at the reserve. An enclosure has been established to monitor the effects of herbivore grazing. This approach has been very successful at the Tuan

Campground (see the review later in this report). We appreciate the assistance of Parks Victoria field staff who assisted by erecting the posts for the enclosure. We are in the process of interpreting the significance of the mining structures that were on the site in readiness for the provision of interpretive signage in the reserve.



- Weed removal

Removal of various weeds from the Park is a constant part of Friends' activities each year. This year work has focused on Olives, Cootamundra Wattles and Bridal Creeper throughout the park and many hundreds of plants have been dispatched by Mick Webster and an enthusiastic band of helpers. This team has done an outstanding job during the year. While Olives are not aggressive invaders, their presence has gone undetected for such a long time that a number of very old trees have become established and have been contributing to the growth of many new seedlings. This is the case no more!

Other weeds that have been tackled during the year include Caper Spurge and Vinca/Periwinkle (Bartley's Block), Agave (Howlong Road) and Genista (several locations). A patch of Freesias was sprayed. We have made progress overall with weeds but a few of them require vigilance and regular action. We should not let our guard down on this front as some of these weeds will spread rapidly if given a chance.



- Tuan campground – a review

Over the last ten years, the Tuan Campground area has had three areas fenced off, mulch laid out with new plantings of trees and shrubs. The results have been most impressive and encourage us to continue the practice at the Rutherglen Natural Features Reserve. In both cases there was heavy grazing by herbivores and establishing new plants was difficult. The fenced off areas reduced the grazing pressure sufficiently to allow new plants to get established and this has resulted in an excellent spot for birds. The photographs below show the Tuan Campground area before the enclosures were installed and as the site looks now. The group has purchased a picnic table to be erected at the site for the use of visitors.

Before Enclosures - 2005



After Enclosures – 2015



- Web-site enhancement

One of the major projects for the web-site is the continued compilation of a flora library for the whole Park with a set of photos showing the life history of each plant. Neil Blair is undertaking the photography and Eileen Collins is updating the web-site. This library will constitute a significant resource for anyone interested in the flora that can be found in the park.

- Maintenance of the area around the bird hide at the south-western end of Valley No 2 Dam

The Friends' group has continued to maintain the plantings around the bird hide and new plants have been planted to supplement the ones thriving there already. A new batch of bark mulch was added during the year.

- Checking of mammal nest boxes

This is an ongoing activity that can be readily undertaken when other activities are impractical. Boxes with occupants are often encountered and it is a delight to see many of the boxes being used by Squirrel Gliders, Sugar Gliders and Tuans. Richard Jerome has taken on the role of managing the nest box monitoring part of our activities and he has spent many hours checking and maintaining boxes throughout the park. All occupancy data is fed into a state database every three months.

- 2015 Calendars

A calendar featuring many photographs taken around the Park was prepared by Neville Bartlett and printed. The sale of 200 calendars contributed substantial funds (over \$2,000) to the group. Thank you to the photographers: Eileen Collins, Jim O'Toole, Jo Heatlie, Neil Blair, Peter Spencer, Pam and Andris Niedra and Neville Bartlett.

- Donations make a difference

Many members pay their subscription and also contribute a donation towards the work of the group. The amounts vary but the overall total has grown to the stage where we have received \$1,090 for the year. We thank members very much because this helps us to respond quickly when we spot an urgent need for facilities, equipment or contracted work within the Park that cannot be financed by other means.

During the year we have:

- purchased signage and a seat for Bartley's Block
- employed a contractor to spray Freesias
- purchased mulch for the picnic area near the bird hide at Valley No 2 Dam along with trees for extra planting near the hide, and
- purchased a picnic table to be sited at the Tuan Campground.

- Committee for 2014-15

At the Friends' 2014 AGM, held in September, the following were elected to the committee: Eileen Collins (President), Richard Jerome (Vice President), Neville Bartlett (Secretary/Public Officer), Peter Gotham (Treasurer), Jenny Davidson, Jan Heywood, Moya Smith, June Gotham, Phillip Seely, Mick Webster, Neil Blair, Jim O'Toole and John Hawker.

- Presentation by Richard Loyn

The Friends' AGM was treated to a very interesting and informative presentation by Richard Loyn about one of his recent trips to Madagascar. It was a treat to hear about another place with unique flora and fauna.

- The Grassland Block. This block on Fishers Road in the Northern part of the park was formerly known as Oates Block and the group has been removing briar and other weeds from this lovely elevated site.



- Participation in regular bird counts

Regular counts of Regent Honeyeaters and Swift Parrots are conducted twice a year as part of national surveys.

- Activities for 2015-16

Work will continue with the Rutherglen Natural Features Reserve project. Removal of weeds and mammal nest box monitoring will continue as usual in the Park. Friends will no doubt continue to be involved in tracking and monitoring associated with the recent release of captive-bred Regent Honeyeaters.

We greatly appreciate the support provided by Parks Victoria rangers Brian Pritchard and John McDonald. Thanks also to the Parks Victoria field staff who erected fencing at the Rutherglen Natural Features Reserve. The recent funding cuts and staff reduction within Parks Victoria is causing us to be concerned about the future for the park as key ranger activities have been reduced substantially.

Friends would like to thank Tony Marsh for managing the group's web-site as well as the support of Matt and Emma at the Post Office and others in Chiltern who have sold calendars on behalf of Friends.

Neville R. Bartlett
Secretary
4th September 2015