



Friends of Woorabinda Bushland Reserves

NEWS LETTER

Number 75, March 2025

VALE Jack Benlow

Jack Benlow was an active member of environmental groups before the advent of the Friends of Woorabinda Bushland Reserves. He was a member of the Mt Lofty Ranges Association and helped to plant the Liquidambers in the main street of Stirling - which was a group project.

Jack was a stalwart for many years, giving invaluable input to the FoWBR group. He (and Shirley) joined the Friends Committee in Sept 1996, having been introduced by member John Swinburne who was at the time helping Jack set up a computer. Both Shirley and Jack gave the committee skills and energy that the FoWBR committee needed.

In those days we had our monthly meetings in the Council chambers in Stirling. Jack and Shirley both resigned from the committee in 2004. David Ragless recalls that Jack was a fast touch typist and for many years typed all of his letters, reports and grant funding applications - and there were lots of them! He filled a much needed and much appreciated role at that time. Jack also composed excellent letters to the Mt Barker Courier regarding the local environment.

Jack was a retired cartographer when he joined the committee. He used his skills to design the Friends' letterhead and logo, and drew the map and produced the walkers guide. All are still in use today with very minor upgrades.

Jack produced the Friends' newsletters from 1998 until 2004, and being a skilled cartoonist our newsletter often had whimsical cartoons featuring dogs. He also kept an excellent photographic record of reserve activities and started the detailed photo-monitoring program. He did not usually attend working bees or other on-ground work - except as the photographer.

Jack, along with Shirley, also supported the Friends of Mark Oliphant Conservation Park for many years. Shirley continues to be an important part of this Friends group.

For many years Jack walked daily around the Reserves for exercise and always gave encouragement and wise counsel to any Friends members that he met. In addition, his very cheerful attitude had incalculable value in keeping everyone going when times were getting very tough. He will be sadly missed by his many friends in FoWBR.

Jack and Shirley Benlow receiving their Life Membership of FoWBR at the Nov 2019 AGM



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Chair's Address, AGM November 2024

Welcome, one and all.

It is with sadness that we have to record the death of a former Adelaide Hills Councillor John Kemp, who was found dead at his home on October 4. He is believed to have suffered a heart attack.

Most of you will have seen him at our AGMs over the years – usually with a camera in his hand.

John was passionate about the environment, and local planning, and was a long time defender of these reserves and supporter of our Friends group. He joined the committee of the Friends at the AGM last year and I was secretly hoping that he might eventually agree to replace me as chair. Obviously that's not going to happen. He had offered to help David Ragless create a special digital presentation for next year's AGM but sadly he won't be doing that either. He will be missed.

Otherwise it has been another good year for the reserves. As usual there have been a few selfish individuals who let their dogs off leash, try to fish in the lake or ride their bikes on the narrow bush tracks. All we can do is remind people politely of the rules, report incidents to the council, and encourage the council to step up visits from a Council Ranger.

We realise we are not the only special piece of turf on the council patch, but these Woorabinda reserves are not only an area of significant biodiversity, they are also heavily used by the general public. It is probably time we installed a people counter for a while – the numbers do not seem to have fallen much since the great Covid surge in visitors.

The new, improved boardwalks have finally been finished, after lengthy delays and soaring costs, neither of which was within the council's control. We also have new trailhead signs – the council's Trails Officer, Meridee Jensen, has had a busy year, but has taken the time to keep us fully informed throughout, which is much appreciated.

Catherine Miles, an independent environmental consultant, was commissioned during the year by the AHC to review the management plan for the reserves. She has finished her initial report and we look forward to seeing the final result.

We are still waiting to see what will finally be proposed for these buildings – the one we are in at the moment will soon reach its use-by date if it doesn't

get restumped and have much of the woodwork replaced before long. The council some time ago received a report with a couple of options for the site, but whatever is decided will be a fairly major project, and not cheap. So I think we will see each other in here again this time next year.

To conclude I must acknowledge the great work done by the most important people in the Friends – the volunteers who turn up month after month for the bushcare working bees. Some of them have been doing it for 35 years. They are a great bunch of people, and I can say that because I am not one of them.

You don't have to be able to tell a watsonia from a whasit to do your bit for the ecosystem we all depend on. If you think the ecosystem is important, you are more than welcome to join our committee, even if you think a wallaby is something that plays a nasty rough game imported from England – along with foxes, rabbits and gorse – because at least one member of the committee thinks those were all a terrible mistake.

I'd particularly like to thank Phil Hicks, who not only organises the Sunday bushcare sessions but is also our number one person to tramp the reserves in the company of those splendid, boots-on-the-ground ladies Sarah and Tonya from the AHC who definitely do know the difference between watsonia and whasits.

And of course I must mention Jane Schoettgen, who runs the Thursday sessions.

Which brings me to the next item on the agenda. -- the award of life membership.

Jane, would you come up to the front, please.

Jane joined the Friends in July 2007. Among other things, she is a former committee member, and she initiated a second bushcare group in the reserves. Held on Thursdays, it is relatively small, because people who are working or at school during the week cannot attend, but nevertheless that group has put in 177 hours of bushcare in Madurta in the first 10 months of this year.

In addition to that, Jane has over the years put in countless hours of bushcare on her own, and more recently established the demonstration native garden overlooking the lake. Although she has had considerable help from the council, she has done most of the work herself and has bought numerous plants at her own expense. So congratulations, Jane.

New Committee Member Welcomed

The committee has welcomed a new member to its ranks, Alistair Cornell.

Alistair has considerable expertise in bush care and has made useful suggestions at recent working bees.

On the Lake

Walkers were entertained by a variety of water birds visiting the lake in recent months.

A Great Crested Grebe turned up in October and Great, Little Black and Little Pied Cormorants have appeared more recently.

Council bows to people power

Access to the reserves from the lower end of Branch Road is expected to re-open eventually – but certainly not before some time in the new financial year.

Adelaide Hills Councillors voted unanimously at their February meeting that “costings for a new set of compliant stairs at this location be considered as part of the 2025-2026 budget process”.

Council Trails Officer Meridee Jensen told the Friends that any new steps would unfortunately have “a somewhat urban look” and probably include a hand rail, but it was accepted that trying to close off access had clearly not worked.

Until new steps are constructed, the Council is urging people to use the main Branch Road entrance to Stirling Park, closer to Milan Terrace.

The council some time ago removed the old steps at the end of Branch Road on the grounds that they were a safety risk, fenced off the entrance and erected “no entry” signs. But walkers repeatedly moved the fencing aside.

With no clearly defined steps, visitors have simply gone around the fence and taken various short-cuts to the path that runs along the back of Branch Road, trampling rare native plants in the process.

Plants in this area identified by bush carers include *Wahlenbergia*, *Ixodia*, *Olearia grandiflora*, *Lepidosperma*, *Hibbertia*, *Achrotriche*, *Epacris*, *Goodenia*, *Scaevola*, *Kennedia*, *Platylobium*, *Arthropodium*, *Burchardia*, *Dianella*, *Lomandra*, *Thysanotus*, *Billardiera*, *Stackhousia*, *Pimelia*, *Pultenaea* and *Tetratheca*.

These plants are not just valuable in their own right, they also provide habitat and are food plants for various other creatures. For example, *Lomandra fibrata*, Mt Lofty Mat Rush is a food plant for a locally rare butterfly, Phigalia Rush-skipper. Common Brown butterflies have been seen depositing their eggs on *Microlaena stipoides*, Weeping Rice Grass, in this area.

The Council at its February meeting received and noted a petition calling for the removal of the fencing, signed by 49 people including all the residents in Branch Road and some regular walkers from outside the area.

Bushcare Working Bee Report

Sunday working bees

Since the last working bee report in our October 2024 Newsletter, and up to and including our February working bee, we have held three monthly Sunday bushcare working bees with two in Woorabinda Reserve and one in Madurta Reserve. Volunteer numbers at these three regular Sunday working bees were 16, 15 and 12 and they were supported by three ‘retired’ working bee members who kindly provided morning tea after each working bee.

In our October Madurta working bee we concentrated firstly, on following-up a small amount of weed regrowth, mainly Broom, within the area of good quality bush in the south west corner of the reserve and secondly, reducing the level of regrowth of Gorse, Blackberry, Broom and other weeds between this area and the creek line.

In our November Woorabinda working bee we continued earlier work in the area of high quality native vegetation between the Linwood Track and the railway line, working through dense vegetation that regenerated after a fire around 10 years ago and has only started to thin out in the last few years. Within this area we cut and swabbed some large infestations of *Sollya*, also known as Bluebell Creeper, and cut the usual high level of *Acacia longifolia* regrowth.

Our December Sunday working bee planned for Stirling Park was cancelled due to a forecast of very

hot weather but six volunteers were able to turn up at fairly short notice on the slightly milder preceding Saturday. We were fortunate to be able to work in the mostly shady lower end of the revegetation area between the Stirling Park Track and the Ethel Trail where we removed Blackberry and Ivy regrowth.

We started our February Woorabinda working bee by cutting and swabbing an area of *Leptospermum juniperinum*, a species we had not previously worked on. As it is well established in adjoining private properties, it is likely that we will have to add it to our list of species that continue to regenerate within WBR as a result of a seed bank from outside its boundaries. Those present at the working bee may be interested in some information about the species. The Australian Plants Society NSW notes that:

‘It has a large distribution, growing along the entire NSW coast and just into the central and southern tablelands, extending as far north as Fraser Island in Qld, scattered through Victoria with some records in South Australia.

It grows in sandstone areas such as heathlands on cliff as well as sandy swamp areas and peat bogs ... [and] moist sclerophyll woodlands.’

In *Information about Australia's Flora* produced by the Australian National Herbarium, *Leptospermum juniperinum* is described as being ‘Very hardy’.

2025 working bee schedule

Sunday working bees – 9 am to 11 am

Date	Location	Meeting place
16 February	Woorabinda	Woorabinda Drive
16 March	Stirling Park	Branch Road
13 April*	Woorabinda	Woorabinda Drive
18 May	Stirling Park	Branch Road
15 June	Woorabinda	Woorabinda Drive
20 July	Woorabinda/ Hender	Woorabinda Drive

Date	Location	Meeting Place
17 August	Stirling Park	Branch Road
21 September	Woorabinda	Woorabinda Drive
19 October	Madurta	Madurta Avenue
16 November	Woorabinda	Woorabinda Drive
20 December	Stirling Park	Branch Road

* Second Sunday in April to avoid Easter

Thursday working bees are held on the last Thursday of each month, from 9 to 11 am. Contact Jane Schoettgen, 8339 7245

Committee, 2025

Kath Bowman	Public Officer, membership, website	0459 291 777
Merilyn Browne	Newsletter	8339 6839
Alistair Cornell	Committee	
Brian Donaghy	Chairman	8339 2033
Philip Hicks	Treasurer, Working bee coordinator, Past Chair	0437 812 870
Bob James	Deputy Chair	8339 1903
Gwen Mayo	Minute Secretary	
Janet Pedler	Volunteer support	
David Ragless	Past Chair, History	8339 1038
Lorri Ragless	Committee	8339 1038
Jan Walker	Committee	

Contributors to this issue include Brian Donaghy, Kath Bowman, David Ragless, Philip Hicks, Gwen Mayo and Merilyn Browne.

Affiliations: The Friends of Woorabinda Bushland Reserves Inc. is a member of Friends of Parks and Nature Inc. It is a registered Landcare Group and a member of Trees for Life and the Central Hills Green Web.



Disclaimer: Contributors' views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily the views of the editor, the committee or the general membership of the Friends of Woorabinda Bushland Reserves Inc.

Friends of Woorabinda Bushland Reserves Membership application/renewal

I/we would like to join/renew membership of the Friends of Woorabinda Bushland Reserves Inc.
(Strike out words not applicable)

Membership fee for both individuals and family: 1 year, \$10.00, 5 years, \$40.00

\$.....membership fee is enclosed.

\$.....donation is included. (Donations of \$2.00 or more are tax-deductible. A separate receipt will be issued.)

*Payment included / Bank transfer made (*please circle your payment method)

Name.....

Address.....

Email address for sending Newsletter.....Phone.....

Please return this form to: Brian Donaghy, Friends of Woorabinda Bushland Reserves Inc., 3 Branch Road, Aldgate 5154

Bank transfer details: BSB: 105-079
Account: 040748240

Please include your name and "Subs" or "Subs/Don)" for identification of your payment.