



KANGAROOS AT THE PINNACLE NATURE RESERVE

By Warren Bond



At 9 am on May 1st, 32 fotpin members, family and friends gathered at the Dungowan Street entrance to the Reserve to assist with the first count of kangaroo numbers to be carried out on the Pinnacle Nature Reserve (PNR). The count was repeated in the afternoon by 24 mostly different people, making this fotpin's largest ever participatory event. Not surprising given that it was a perfect Canberra autumn day. The event was nicely evoked by Rosemary Blemings' **"A Sunday walk with a difference"**.

Conscious of the management issues associated with kangaroo numbers, as outlined below, the fotpin coordinating committee had requested that the PNR be included as part of the series of kangaroo counts being carried out around various parts of the Canberra Nature Park this autumn. Unlike the other counts, this one was carried out predominantly by volunteers organised by fotpin.

The experts were on hand to drill us in the procedure and guide us through the process of a

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“sweep count”; Don Fletcher and Claire Wimpenny from ACT Land Management and Planning’s Office of Conservation Planning and Research gave up their Sunday to join us.

WHY COUNT KANGAROOS?#

The grasslands and grassy understorey of woodlands that are part of the Canberra Nature Park provide ideal kangaroo habitat for eastern grey kangaroos. Ironically, the building of Canberra in the post-war period has resulted in the growth of large kangaroo populations in the ACT. Up until the 1960s most of the Territory was in rural use and kangaroo populations and densities were low. Withdrawal of rural leases, establishment of reserves from the 1960s, and planning that provided for extensive areas of open space in the urban area, all contributed to conditions conducive for eastern grey kangaroos to increase in numbers.

Eastern grey kangaroos perform an important role in native grasslands; however, their density in grassland remnants is a significant management issue. Sustained heavy grazing pressure can lead to deleterious impacts on grassland communities and the animals and plants that depend on these grasslands for habitat. This impact is similar to that of overgrazing by livestock. Overgrazing is of particular concern when it affects endangered grassy ecosystems and threatened animals and plants, as any reduction in the suitability or quality of their habitat places them at higher risk of extinction. Overgrazing may also affect the regeneration of woodland tree species.



Large bare areas under trees where Kangaroos camp

WHY COUNT AT THE PINNACLE?

Regular visitors to The Pinnacle, particularly those who get off the well-worn tracks, will have noticed the large number of kangaroos. Evidence of their impact was particularly obvious during the drought, but even recently they have been having considerable impact. Perhaps the most obvious effect is the creation of large bare areas where they camp, particularly under trees (see photograph). Preliminary data from the **fotpin’s grass experiment** suggests that their grazing has a significant impact on the amount of grass. Cognisant of the overpopulation by kangaroos of other parts of the Canberra Nature Park, we thought it prudent to check on the numbers and make sure they were at a sustainable level.

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WHAT WAS THE ANSWER?

The estimated total number of Eastern Grey Kangaroos was 772, based on a count of 762 in the morning and 783 in the afternoon's repeat count. The count included the areas adjacent to the PNR and enclosed by William Hovell and Coulter Drives, which the kangaroos move freely between. Combined with the PNR this gives a total grazing area for the kangaroos of 357 hectares. The estimated kangaroo density is therefore 2.16 kangaroos per hectare. This is higher than the "conservation density" which research in the ACT has estimated to be in the range of approximately 0.6 to 1.5 per hectare in grassland areas. With plenty of grass available for feed this year, the kangaroo density at The Pinnacle is not considered to be an immediate threat. However, if the climate shifts back to the drought pattern of the last decade, the density is likely to be unsustainable. Fotpin's kangaroo count will assist the ACT Government to make appropriate management decisions to maintain a sustainable kangaroo population in the PNR and surrounds.

Many thanks to everyone and their supporting families for making the survey a success. We received a great deal of positive feedback from Don Fletcher on how the day went and on the fotpin participation.

For more information about how the count was done, the area covered, more photos, and more information on kangaroo management in the ACT, see fotpin.org.au/kangaroos.html.

Footnotes

† [Methods for estimating kangaroo numbers](#)

‡ [From the ACT Kangaroo Management Plan, 2010](#)



Volunteers carrying out a sweep count

THE GRASS PROJECT

By *Don Driscoll*

Our grass experiment moved into an exciting phase in April as we implemented our experimental treatments for the first time. We finished marking out the plots (some were impossible to find beneath the lush wet-summer growth), and then we applied the slash, sugar and crop treatments to quadrats inside and outside of the fences. This was not a small task, and was completed thanks to the fantastic effort of 18 people who put in a total of 167 hours.

Some interesting observations were made along the way. As we weighed the slashings that we took from plots, we discovered that the plots outside the fences generally had less grass than plots inside the fence. In just over two months, the grazing exclusion treatment is showing an effect. What will it be like after a year? There was also an enormous range of grass removed from our 5 x 5m quadrats, ranging from 2 kg to 37 kg of grass and weeds.



Rosemary and Dierk Von Behrens as the grass experiment sugar fairies.



Christine Byrnes from Hawker College helps with plot marking. Students from Hawker College played an essential role in getting our study back on its feet and ready to fly after a wild summer of growth had completely hidden many of our sites.

Rosemary Von Behrens was among our sugar-sprinklers, and she noticed insects coming to take away the sugar from one site. Hopefully the insects didn't have the capacity to remove a large proportion of the 12.5 kg we spread across each quadrat. This is one of the key reasons that we have replicates in our experiment: a myriad of different things can happen at each that could alter the way plants respond to our treatments. By having so many replicates, the main trends are unlikely to be obscured, even if one or two sites are aberrant.

Our next sugaring day will be on the weekend of August 20th. Then between October 22nd and November 13th, we will resurvey the flora at each site. These surveys are a wonderful way to familiarise yourself with the flora of The Pinnacle; personal development that enriches your experience in Canberra Nature Parks, as well as contributing to the discoveries that will emerge from our experiment. If you can spare some half days later this year, sign up for a position on the flora survey team. Information will be available via the **fotpin website**.

WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON FOR FOTPIN?

By Pax



Site of proposed focal point – North Kama

An inconspicuous menu item on our webpage – **advocacy** - contains an insight into fotpin “policy”, as expressed by fotpin committee. With our AGM drawing close (24 July), now is an especially good time to read our submissions on various processes, and to consider what the committee is saying on your behalf and where you would like our group to be headed. Whether it’s during the formal AGM or over afternoon tea – come and be part of the democratic process. Submissions on a couple of policy issues are described below to provide you with food for thought ahead of the AGM.

The committee’s strongest policy position is that the Bottom Pinnacle and North Kama should be used for nature conservation purposes (see <http://www.fotpin.org.au/corridor.html>). We believe that the Bottom Pinnacle should be included in The Pinnacle Nature Reserve. Its place in the Kama - Pinnacle corridor, its topography and that it is designated (protected) land under the National Capital Plan means there is little else that this land could or should be used for.

We have not advocated the type of reserve dedication for North Kama, only that it be put to uses sympathetic to conservation, such as restoration science, outdoor education and as a parkcare focal point. For the sake of seeing a consistent management regime across the Pinnacle area, North Kama could also be dedicated for nature conservation – perhaps with a “special purpose” enclave created so as to exclude the residence and associated buildings.

Combined, these three parcels of land would about double the size of the current Pinnacle Nature Reserve. The committee has expressed a strong interest in fotpin undertaking conservation activities in Bottom Pinnacle and North Kama - already six of the ten grass experiment plots are located there. If and when these areas are formally protected our group will need to plan what we can do here without prejudicing the good outcomes we’re achieving in the existing reserve. For example we might target only African Love Grass and Blackberries in the first year or two and/or

other weeds that have a high likelihood of spreading from those areas into the current nature reserve.

South of William Hovell Drive, and accessible from North Kama via an underpass, is the Kama Nature Reserve, a strip of land about 1 km wide running almost down to the Molonglo River. Kama Nature Reserve adjoins the Lower Molonglo Nature Reserve, which straddles the river corridor down to the confluence with the Murrumbidgee River.

We believe the buildings and power supply to North Kama offer an opportunity to establish a focal point for parkcare and community conservation activity across The Pinnacle and down to the river corridor. The shearing shed is a practical size for storing materials, for holding planning meetings and AGMs, and for conducting educational and artistic activities. These are public buildings, managed and overseen by the Parks and Conservation Service, around which we can build our community of interest.

Potentially, this would provide more than just a focal point for community activity. The ACT Government is committed to spending \$1M over four years on woodland restoration in the ACT, and at this time the Belconnen Hills corridor, comprising the Aranda Bushland, Mt Painter, The Pinnacle and Kama Nature Reserve, is in contention for some significant investment under that plan. A properly situated venue for parkcarers, Government, researchers, conservation groups (e.g. Friends of Grasslands, Canberra Ornithologists Group) to meet and plan, to collect equipment etc would be a good thing. Once established it will be used. The interest in our conservation estate and the focal point will grow along with the new suburbs in Molonglo.

“ These possibilities are about real, tangible outcomes - increasing the reserve’s size, setting up a conservation focal point and improving woodland condition and connectivity. ”

Our submission to the review of the Nature Conservation Act 1980 touches on a number of key roles and opportunities of a more general nature, such as how we work with others, and how conservation management and restoration might be funded in the future.

The greater part of our submission speaks to changes required of the Act to help us achieve our goals at The Pinnacle. Firstly, we call for the preparation of landscape scale management plans that guide land management at that scale, to give context to property plans – such as our weed plan, or any restoration plan that we might prepare to guide any planting program.

We also propose that parties such as us be able to prepare management plans and for those plans – subject to meeting content and consultation requirements – to be approved by the ACT Government. This would give us certainty that community goals and volunteer effort are actively supported by Government.

A desirable outcome to all this reform would be formal joint management arrangements between the ACT Government and adequately resourced parkcare groups, and that these planning and governance arrangements are the portal through which investments are agreed, and programs integrated, to achieve enduring community and conservation outcomes.

WHERE THE BIRDS ARE

By John Brannan

One of the latest (and surely most valuable!) additions to the fotpin website is the Pinnacle birdlist. Thanks to Warren's masterful web skills, the list comes with nifty links to pictures of the birds and even recordings of their calls.

The list names all the birds that have been observed over many years in the reserve, and includes the year-round residents, the winter visitors and those who come to the reserve purely to nest and raise their young. You can check it out for yourself on **Birds of the Pinnacle**.

Right now, the Pinnacle offers some real delights to the intrepid birdo willing to brave the cold. At this time of year, a lot of the small birds come together to form what we birdos imaginatively call mixed feeding flocks (or MFFs to the cognoscenti). So you can be strolling through an apparently bird-free bit of the reserve and suddenly find yourself, with minimal warning,

surrounded by a bewildering number and variety of birds, all busily foraging from ground level right up into the treetops. A typical MFF can include as many as 30 or 40 small birds of different species, often with brightly coloured Scarlet Robins, noisy Brown-headed Honeyeaters and perhaps a striking White-eared Honeyeater, as well as hordes of Thornbills and/or Silvereyes. Trying to identify all the species in one of these constantly moving flocks is next to impossible, so sometimes it's best to just put the binoculars aside and enjoy the spectacle.

Your best chance of encountering an MFF is in the morning (doesn't have to be early when it's this cold) on a day when there isn't too much wind about, particularly if we've just had a bit of rain. Next time there's a bit of sunshine, get out there and try your luck!

friends of the pinnacle AGM



Fotpin is holding its first Annual General Meeting on **Sunday 24th July at 2.00pm** at Weetangera Primary School. This meeting is an important event for our group: to celebrate the year's achievements; finalise the group's rules; elect a new Committee; and establish a new position of Coordinator. All fotpins are encouraged to attend. Please RSVP to fotpin@optusnet.com.au. For further details go to www.fotpin.org.au/governance.