

# Friends of Yongka Birl and Friends of Susannah Lakes

## Restoring and caring for nature in the Perth Hills



*Stephen Jones and Mario Cavallaro*

A small but dedicated band of volunteers has been working feverishly for the last two years, caring for nature along the Susannah Brook in the Perth Hills.

The Friends of Yongka Birl, (Noongar for Kangaroo Stream), and the Friends of Susannah Lakes both volunteer in the Susannah Brook Nature Reserve reducing weeds, removing rubbish, old fence lines and reticulation piping, planting endemic species and restoring wildlife habitats.

Stephen Jones and Mario Cavallaro, two of the most active volunteers, are passionate about restoring and nurturing the natural heritage in their patch. 'We abuse and take so much from Mother Nature, and we take her for granted. It is satisfying and rewarding to do a little something for her', say the pair.

The Susannah Brook Nature Reserve runs along the foreshores of the Susannah Brook from near Waterford Drive in the east to some 2- 3 kms further west from Strawberry Hill Drive in the west. The total catchment area of the brook is approximately 6,000 hectares meandering from Stoneville in the east until it meets the Swan River.

The nature reserve provides a wildlife corridor of endemic plants, reeds, shrubs, and trees attracting and providing a safe haven for wildlife, including migratory birds, among the neighbouring farmlets. As urban encroachment continues in this peri urban landscape, reserves such as this provide a welcome break from the sea of roofs and sometimes barren urban streetscapes.

The reserve is also an important community resource for walkers and community members to enjoy the peaceful surroundings and the emotional and physical benefits of being in nature.

The Friends of Yongka Birl, cover work on the western end of the reserve, of approximately four kms of reserve. This group is a relative newcomer as far as landcare groups go, forming as recently as March 2020. The Friends of Susannah Lakes works the eastern section of the reserve around the lakes.

The two volunteer groups have strong support from the Susannah Brook Catchment Group, the City of Swan and the State NRM Program providing advice and financial support and ensuring their volunteer activities are planned in the context of the overall objectives of the Susannah Brook Nature Reserve.

These passionate land carers are among hundreds of land and coast care groups caring for our environment who have signed up as members of the WA Landcare Network, the peak state landcare body established to represent and support community based groups across WA.

Stephen Jones, Convenor of the groups said, 'the reserve was a mess when we started, with weed infestations of every kind, old plastic tree guards choking previous plantings, old dilapidated fences lines, PVC piping and rubbish littered the place'.

"We have removed the old remnant fence lines and rubbish of all kinds. The brook looks so much more aesthetically pleasing now, and obviously is a better place for the plants and animals that inhabit the Reserve," said Stephen.

'It has taken a hard slog to get the reserve in a state where it is relatively weed and rubbish free and to have large endemic plantings planned. There is still lot to be done, but we are proud of what we have achieved to date and welcome other members of the community to roll up their sleeves and get involved', he said.



***Susannah Brook Nature Reserve – Now devoid of old fences and weeds with some new rushes and wet footed shrubs***

Invasive weeds are constant problem in the Susannah Brook Nature Reserve and the hawk-eye vigilance and ongoing back breaking work by the Friends Groups is vital to keeping them out the reserve.

'The reserve contained massive overgrowths of the insidious, exotic cotton bush and other horrible weeds including nightshade, fleabane and stinkwort. We have pulled out the weeds and also removed the old fence lines, weld mesh barriers and old rusted pylons. This has improved the aesthetics of the reserve and allowed native plants and wildlife to thrive', said Stephen.



***Removal of rampant cotton bush***

Both Friends Groups have a preference for mechanical weed control and aim to avoid chemical usage where possible. They are especially proud of the successful trialling of the use of second-hand heavy-duty tarpaulins for solarisation to literally cook the weeds, eliminating the need for the spraying of chemical herbicides.

This method has successfully been used in Susannah Brook Catchment Group's State NRM funded broad planting project areas. Some of the weeds that have been totally eradicated from the reserve, without the use of chemicals including dock, arum lily, bridal creeper, blackberry and agapanthus. A number of other weeds have been brought under substantial control including cotton bush, watsonia, fleabane, stinkwort and weedy wattles. The volunteers recognise that the eradication of weeds is an ongoing yearly battle. Rampart paspalum and wavy gladioli clumps remain untamed, but the groups are working on selected fronts to beat them back and regain ground for endemic plantings.



***Second hand tarps are laid to control weeds in preparation for future plantings in the State NRM funded project area***

Among the many successes of the volunteers has been the planting of a patch of juncus (reeds) on the flood plain of the reserve.

“They have taken off, thriving and will provide future habitat for the local fauna, while contributing to the health of the waters within the reserve” added Stephen.



***Juncus (reeds) planted as 20 cm high seedlings in July 2021 on the solarised sections now waist high***

The Friends' Groups work very closely with and receive tremendous support from the City of Swan “bush crew” lead by Graeme and Bradley. Their work also ties in with the overarching Susanah Brook Catchment Group, who are very active within the reserve with pasture weed control, water quality surveys, bird surveys and endemic plantings.

The volunteers now look forward to planting 1,200 reeds and wet footed trees and shrubs along the southern foreshore of one of the lakes within the reserve this year. They are very fortunate to have secured funding from the Swan Alcoa Landcare Program for this important work and have applied for funding for further plantings of some 3,200 seedlings in 2023-2024.

Stephen Jones, Convenor of Friends of Yongka Birl emphasised that “there is a lot of fun and satisfaction to be had out and about on the reserve, so anybody young, old or in between who would like to join the group, please feel free to contact me on **0437 242 299** or email at [\*\*smokebush@hotmail.com\*\*](mailto:smokebush@hotmail.com)”

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