



River Conservation Society

From the Chair

It's so good to be back on deck, and realise that the RCS is still functioning well. Since we last produced our newsletter the Water Rat Project has continued and a few dedicated members ran a successful seminar/workshop, which stimulated a renewed interest in the Community around York. Our thanks, in particular, to Robert Pearce and Audrey Sole for their drive and enthusiasm which contributed greatly to the day's success.

Another event if in the process of planning, with speakers being arranged, please read the notice later in this edition of the newsletter and don't forget to mark the date in your diary.

During the gap between newsletters we have held two Committee Meetings at the Sandalwood Yards in York, with these being thrown open to all members. These meetings have been instrumental in triggering discussion on the Seminar/Workshops, on subjects to include in such a program, and the names of potential speakers. If this is the first time you've heard about these meetings, the Seminar/Workshops and you have some thoughts on them, or any aspect please contact us and have your say; it'll be most appreciated.

The General Committee is currently examining ways to reconnect with the Community of York. One way, we are considering to achieving this goal, is to enter into communications with the Shire of York regarding a joint venture, such as a collective Communal clean up around the Town Pool. Another action we have taken is to enter in negotiations with a view to rent space to be used as a base within the township of York. We have also taken up membership of the local radio station York FM Community Radio.

So you may see that much has been happening, with more to come. Please read on, enjoy, and join in wherever and whenever you can.

With best wishes,

Trevor Moffat



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Obsessed By Orchids

By Helen Amyes



Fringed Mantis Orchid (Caladenia falcate) also known as the Green Spider Orchid (photo Paul Amyes).

Each year at a certain time determined largely by the season's weather, local York photographer Paul Amyes starts what is affectionately known as "Operation Orchid".

Armed with his trusty GPS marking secret locations of various stands of orchids and mountains of tripods and camera equipment. He sallies forth visiting various reserves in the Avon River Valley catchment, as well as further afield.

Part of the appeal is slipping away during the week and "going bush", quietly to areas where it is rare to encounter another person and kangaroos and echidnas are the more usual companions. Part is the "thrill of the hunt" with the quest for that novel orchid to add to the photographic collection.

Paul's approach photographically is more akin to portraiture in technique rather than a scientific documentation and all photographs are taken "in the field".

This body of work which is ongoing and the fruit of 10 plus years has recently culminated in an exhibition "Sex, lies and flowers" at Beverley Station Gallery, September 2016 .

Paul has won a photographic award at the Zig Zag gallery, Kalamunda and has made several YouTube films showcasing our regions rich flora.

The work can be see at:

<http://www.redbubble.com/people/amyesphotograph>



Paul Amyes photographing orchids near Kojonup, Western Australia (photo Helen Amyes)

The Fringed Mantis Orchid (*Caladenia falcata*)



What a wonderful season we are having and the orchids have not been seen in such numbers for a long time. The *Fringed Mantis Orchid* has been seen in just about every reserve I have been out to. It is in the group of 'Green Spider Orchids' and can be recognised by its green, yellow and red-maroon colouration, upswept lateral sepals, long comb-like fringe segments and 4 or more rows of spots called 'calli', in the centre of the labellum. It grows 200-400 mm high and has a single, erect, hairy leaf 100-200mm long by 5-15mm wide. It can have up to 2 flowers per stalk which may be 50-80mm across.

It can be found growing in *Wandoo woodlands*, *Allocasuarina* woodlands, tall shrublands and in pockets around granite between Wongan Hills and Jerramungup. Many of the genus *Caladenia* attract the male *Thynnine wasp* by emitting a scent undetectable to humans. They also mimic the shape or colouration of the flightless female to assist in pollination. The orchids are tuberous plants and rely on micorrhizal fungi to grow in their native habitat.

Other orchids that have been seen in profusion this year are -: The Sugar Orchid- *Ericksonella saccarata*, The BlueBeard or Blue Fairy Orchid - *Pheladenia deformis*, The Little Pink Fairy Orchid- *Caladenia reptans* and the delicate White Spider Orchid- *Caladenia longicauda* subsp. *Longicauda*.

Do you have a favourite orchid photo that you would like to share or have identified?

Send them in to our website www.riverconservationsociety.org.au with details where it was found, etc and we may be able to help.

Become a Member

Members of the River Conservation Society participate in and enjoy a diverse range of environmental activities that the society engages in throughout the year. The society's newsletters and website enable us to communicate with our members and volunteers regarding our activities that make this society special.

There are so many ways for you to get involved. We are working on a number of conservation projects, including creation of a local flora database, working to protect our native water rat, and protecting our Avon River pools and reserves. If you would like more information about any of these projects, please visit our website or contact us at info@riverconservationsociety.org.

We are an active group and welcome all levels of expertise from beginner to expert. In the past six months we have carried out rehabilitation work at our reserves, held informative environmental education events and are actively involved in the York community.

I know that life gets busy, but I personally hope you will make time to come to our next meeting. Please look for the date on our website, in the local newspaper and radio station. Our members will be happy to introduce you to other members who share your interests.

Please visit our website at www.riverconservationsociety.org where you will find information on past and present projects and activities that you can become involved in and details of how to become a member or volunteer with the society.

I look forward to seeing you at one of our many activities and events.

Robert Pearce
Vice Chair
River Conservation Society



The Western Banjo Frog (*Limnodon dorsalis*)

The Western Banjo frog is a large robust ground dwelling frog growing up to 7.5cm long. It has a grey or dark green back with irregular, dark brown blotches and a thin yellow line running through its centre from the nose to the rump. It has bright orange to red patches in the groin area. Large glands can be seen on the upper side of the calves.

The male Western Banjo Frog has thicker, more powerful arms than the female. They breed in winter and spring and you can hear them call as early as May in the north of the South West Land Division, and in July-August nearer Perth, continuing through until early December.

It has a loud, single 'BONK' call which is repeated at intervals.

The female will beat the surface of the water during mating and produces a mass of white foam. The eggs are laid into the base of this mass and usually hidden below overhanging vegetation. This is a unique attribute of the Western Banjo Frog.

Their tadpoles are quite large, some up to 8cm long, are very dark coloured with a blue tinge to the underbelly. They are found in deep, permanent pools and develop into froglets in early summer to April. You might find them in farm dams, swamps, wetlands or streams.

Adult and juvenile frogs may be found a long way from permanent water and survive by digging themselves a deep burrow where they can stay cool and moist.

(Thankyou to the WA museum for the use of their Banjo Frog Picture for this article).

Avon Park Working Group

The RCS recently approached the Shire of York regarding the current state of Town pool and Avon Park. The Town Pool area has been showing signs of severe degradation due to erosion, water quality and vegetation die off along its banks for a number of years with little sign of improvement in the environment occurring in the area. The RCS suggested a joint project between the shire and interested community groups to enhance and rehabilitate the area of Town Pool which would also encourage environmental improvements both upstream and downstream of this pool as well as resulting in a much more appealing open space environment for the York community and visitors to the township of York.

We are pleased to announce that the Shire has responded positively to the RCS approach and has formed a joint Shire of York – Avon Park Working Group made up of shire representatives and community group members. Robert Pearce of the RCS has been informed by the shire that he has been accepted to this working group to help work towards the improvement and rehabilitation of the Town Pool / Avon Park precinct.

The RCS acknowledges the shires willingness to work towards improving this area and looks forward to working towards improving this significant historical area that benefits both the York community and the York town precinct.

Society Activity Update

Native water rat project

Our work with Rakali is gearing up again with the winter rains nearing an end and the Avon River water levels beginning to become more manageable. Pool surveys are commencing shortly and trail cameras will be deployed to begin recording activity at likely habitats. The data we have collected to date on these amazing animals is being collated and recorded in an easy to use format using mapping and satellite imagery techniques. Keep an eye on our website www.riverconservationsociety.org for up and coming activities of surveys and participation information for those who wish to have a bit of fun on the water and bushwalking. Brush the dust of those sit on kayaks and see if you can help learn more about our water rats.

Herbarium Project

For those not familiar with this project here is a short summary:

Under the supervision of Cecily Howell herbarium volunteers collected plant specimens from many reserves and sample soil communities within the Shire. These specimens were all identified by the Perth Herbarium and are now being logged into a database with all information collated from over 2500 vouchers. Our aim is to develop our own local florabase with information about each plant, its description, soil types where they are growing and localities where they can be found. We would also like to offer botanical history and horticultural information. This can then be used as a resource to help identify educate about local species and also provide a record of what has been collected in the past. As you can imagine this is a long term project but it is slowly being completed. I have been logging all vouchers and now have only 8 hours' worth of vouchers left to complete. After this is done we can start our 'build' of florabase where information can be accessed through a computer program. The real work is only just starting as the more information we can research on each species the better.

So if there are any members or volunteers out there that are computer literate and have a strong interest in local flora - PLEASE ring me

-Audrey Sole 96 411428.

Part of the project has been compiling a library of photographs of each species in the florabase. This has given me the opportunity to get out into the field which I just love. We have come across so many species which are not even represented in the florabase so it looks as though we will have to keep building our collection for a few years yet. This week alone we have found a declared rare *Stylidium*, new populations of Threatened species of *Thomasia*, a Priority 1 *Thomasia* and 2 Priority 3 *Stylidium*s. It is hoped that by giving locals the ability to easily identify species we can help locate, protect and conserve the diversity in floral remnants left in York for the future.

Busy Bees

Joint Busy Bee's a first for York RCS !

The Orchid Conservation Reserve on the York-Beverley road received some TLC on the 15th of September. Gradually weeds have been encroaching on the reserve which has been a prime spot for native orchids over the years. Originally 3 areas on the railway reserve were set aside as conservation reserves but only one of the 3 has maintained a healthy population of orchids.

6 volunteers associated with the RCS and/or the Avon Branch of the Wildflower Society spent the morning pulling radish to try and limit the weed burden threatening the orchids. This was followed up by another busy bee a week later by the same assisted by a group of Curtin Student Volunteers. As a result most of the reserve was cleared of radish. Other weeds such as capeweed and wild oats exist in pockets which will pose a problem for the future unless a management plan is put into place for the future.

Sugar Orchids, Bearded Blue, Lemon scented Sun Orchids, Fringed Mantis , Little Pink Fairy and other species of Spider Orchids have all been sighted on the reserve this year as well as other bulbous plants, everlastings and flowering shrubs.

An area like this so accessible to the public should be worthy of protection but its small size and proximity to farmland place it under great pressure. WELL DONE TO ALL THE VOLUNTEERS!!



White Punk Fungi (*Laetiporus portentosus*)

Walking amongst the river gums and sheoaks of Gwambygine Reserve last month I stumbled across this unusual fungi spied out of the corner of my eye. At first I thought my eyes were deceiving me as it looked just so big and out of place on its own amongst the green and browns of the vegetation and the blue sky. I must admit that I have never seen this type of fungi on the reserve before and definitely not so high up in the tree canopy. At least 20m above ground level, very large and not another to be found in the vicinity! The size of this fungi was massive. At least 300mm across and sticking out from the tree trunk perpendicular at least 200mm. Thickness was about 70mm.

A couple of photos later with the happy snap digital I sometimes carry around with me on these walks, I sat down with a cup of coffee in the sunshine and started my research.

This is what I believe I found;
 Specie - *Laetiporus portentosus*
 Common name – White Punk

RCS Environmental Day Presentation

The RCS recently held an Environmental Day Presentation at the Sandalwood Yards in York to highlight issues surrounding our native flora and fauna. We are pleased to say the day was a great success with positive feedback from all those who came to listen to our presenters and discuss the very informative topics chosen for the day.

A big thank you to all who attended this successful environmental presentation. Thank you to Simon Nevill, Robert Pearce and Wayne and Desrae Clarke for the very interesting talks given on bird life and water rats in the Avon region and what it means to be a volunteer in our community.

I would also like to especially thank our sponsors for the event, the lovely gifts donated for door prizes and the local produce that was enjoyed by all present during and after the event. A special thank you to our secretary Audrey M who undertook the organisation of the event and to all our members who helped achieve this successful event.

The RCS is in the process of organising a similar event on Saturday 26th November so keep an eye on our website www.riverconservationsociety.org for further details or contact us at info@riverconservationsociety.org for further information.

Cowering Well Nature Conservation Reserve

Cowering well nature conservation reserve is located on the Quairading – York Road in the Shire of York and covers an area of 6.3 hectares.

Named after the old stone Cowering Well which had been dug alongside the Boonmull Brook in the late 1800's. This well is still intact within the reserve and is a valuable part of local history. The area also holds significance for the descendants of Tommy Yarran, a prominent Ballardong elder.

The reserve's vegetation includes woodlands of York Gum, Wandoo, Salmon Gum, Morrel and Gimlet. It has a range of soil types including yellow sandy earth, yellow/brown deep sandy duplex, alkaline grey deep sandy duplex, red deep loamy and sandy duplex and saline wet soil.

The Cowering Well Nature Conservation Reserve is well worth a visit for its historical significance and native flora, especially during wildflower season.

For more information concerning this reserve please visit our website at www.riverconservationsociety.org.