AGM President’s Report for Cooleman Ridge Park Care Group July 2022 - June 2023.

The last 12 months from July 2022 to July 2023 were characterised by vigorous growth due to the regular and at times, heavy rainfall. Of course, the weeds seemed to love the rain more than our native species, so at times, our persistent work seemed to be insignificant. However, at least, many of our native trees are now looking much healthier with generous and full canopies.

Our Group’s main activity continued to be the monthly weeding, with some additional weeding done by individuals on their patch. We have welcomed a small number of new members who have assisted us in managing the weeds.

Our change of rotation of weeding sites is working well, particularly with the addition of the Old Dam. An additional weeding party was spent reducing the briar-roses that have grown on the Western Ledge. It was satisfying to see that very few bushes had re-grown after our attack three years ago.

At times during the summer the exotic grass was so long that few other weeds could be seen. The delay in approving volunteer-usage of whipper-snippers has impacted on the control of this high grass in certain areas.

The main concern of the Group over this past year has been the run-away proliferation of St Johns Wort and fleabane. Both these weeds, with verbascum, now cover extensive areas of the Ridge, and are a depressing sight. We have attempted to focus on controlling small areas, with combined manual and chemical means. The good news is that Patterson’s Curse decided to have a rest for at least a year.

We engaged the local scout group to join us in a successful planting in November 2022. They provided funds for some plants, and this donation was enhanced by Parks and Conservation Service (PCS) donating extra shrubs and trees. A keen group of scouts and parents planted about 60 tress/shrubs south of the Square Reservoir. Fortunately PCS rangers offered to dig the holes with a mechanical digger, which made the planting task a lot quicker and easier. And the rain over summer has helped many of these plants thrive.

Last year’s plantings beside the Old Dam are generally doing well, although many of the smaller plants have been consumed by the vigorous grassy growth over summer. The leptospermum are springing out of their protectors, as are some of the larger tussocky grasses. And the Blue Devils have flowered, and we are hoping that not only will the existing plants re-sprout, but their seeds will disperse and grow. Interestingly, the Old Dam has been covered by Ferny Azolla since January. It is supposed to disappear in cold weather, but it was still there in August. Despite enquiries to resident botanists, there appears to be no apparent reason for its presence, nor its long-lasting cover on the dam.

Our display cases at each end of the Ridge have now been refurbished, thanks to ranger Tenzin. Two of our members have worked together to provide and install in each display-case an excellent map of the Ridge, including a QR code for access to our website, and some photographs which show the Ridge’s natural diversity and views.

During the year the Group submitted ideas to the Environment Volunteer review, and we have formed a close working relationship with the Conservation Council, of which the Group, represented by Helen Govey, is now a member. Helen has also taken over the Water-watch monthly testing, with the assistance of Peter Lindenmeyer and Robyn Gow. They spend about 3 hours every month testing the water of our 2 dams. This year they plan to extend this activity by identifying the insects that use the dams.

Led by Chris Oates, we also worked with the Southern ACT Catchment Group to write up and submit an application for a grant to pay for some educational signage, however, unfortunately we were unsuccessful in securing the grant.

Additionally, thanks to Helen Govey, we have developed a working relationship with Conservation Council of the ACT, and we have also become concerned regarding possible development of the Western Edge as we seek to protect our local environment.

To cap off the 2022/2023 year some of us enjoyed a special piece of music commissioned by one of our visitors who was inspired by her regular visits to Cooleman Ridge and the views that she was able to enjoy. The Canberra Symphony Orchestra played this piece in late March.

My thanks to the Committee, Rob Lundie, Chris Oates, Rohan Thomas, Helen Govey, Jenny Horsfield, Jenny Shapcott, Paul Sheils, Natasha Newman, and to all the enthusiastic volunteers who have worked on the Ridge during the past year. Special thanks to Chris Oates who stepped in for me when I was away, and to Rob Lundie, who, apart from editing our monthly newsletter, has made an extra contribution by installing some discreet tree-identification-signs, which have been placed beside significant trees. We believe many visitors have enjoyed the extra information. Thanks also to Paul Sheils for providing some on-line maps which we can use to locate certain features around the Ridge, and to Jenny Shapcott for taking over the web-master role. Jenny Horsfield is stepping down from the Committee after many years of service. Thank you Jenny for your tireless efforts providing support for the Group over many, many years.

Linda Spinaze,

President, Cooleman Ridge Park Care Group.