**FRIENDS OF THE ROYAL NATIONAL PARK INCORPORATED**

**MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEETING**

**Held on Thursday 25th February 2021 at 4.00pm at EEC**

**Meeting opened:** at 4.03 pm

**Chairperson – Ian Hill. Minutes – Dave Robson**

**Committee Members present**

Ian Hill , John Arney, Ralph Cartwright, Peter Donley, Dave Robson, Neville Bethe , Mel Keith - NPWS Liaison

**Presenters present**

Dr Kellie Leigh - Director - Science for Wildlife (SFW)

Brie Sloggert – Project Officer - Science for Wildlife (SFW)

**General Members present**

Liz Donley, Basil Ellis, Paul Rendell, Tony Larkin, Mark DaSilva, Peter Currie, Bridget Currie, Paul Stork, Helen Lewis, Jennifer Shelley, Peter Kahn, Julie Taylor, Georgia Wallace-Crabbe, Helena Chan, Celia Lewis, George Cotis, Gregory Miller, Martin Jaffe, Helen Voesy

**NPWS staff present**

Jodie McGill

**Apologies**

Diane Townley

**Acknowledgement of Country**

Ian gave the Acknowledgement of Country.

**Covid Regulations for the meeting**

This being the first meeting in the EEC since Covid arose, Ian confirmed the Covid protocols.

**Science for Wildlife Video and Presentation**

* Kellie showed a 20-minute video of the Blue Mountains Koala Project. Some key takeouts:
  + SFW have been monitoring a group of koalas in the Kanangra Boyd region who are the most genetically diverse of any koala group in the country.
  + The 2020 bushfires were huge and devastating for wildlife. Resources were committed to protecting people and property, so not available for wildlife.
  + SFW gained approval to remove koalas before the fire reached their habitat.
  + They captured 12 koalas from the Blue Mountains, which was the maximum that Taronga Zoo could hold. Gum leaves were gathered from the unburnt areas of the Blue Mountains and also from coastal regions. The koalas liked the moisture rich content of the coastal foliage.
  + When Covid hit they needed to release the koalas before lockdown occurred, far quicker than planned. They released 13: a baby had been born to one of the koalas.
* Presentation and discussion key points:
  + 3 subregions in the Sydney Basin:
    - Kanangra Boyd – Chlamydia free
    - Campbelltown – Chlamydia free
    - Hawkesbury – some Chlamydia
  + Chlamydia effects male and female equally. It is deadly, the earlier treatment is started the more likely the koala is to survive. Resistance seems to vary by population, Queensland has proved the most vulnerable.
  + Mating season starts in September for 2-3 months.
  + Males have a larger home range than females. Home range can increase when soil is poor.
  + Discussion on translocation:
    - A study is underway to analyse all previous translocations for learnings.
    - Translocation to NSW/QLD from SA or VIC is not recommended because the southern population has a narrow genetic profile, all coming from a few French Island animals.
    - Gut bacteria can cause translocations to be unsuccessful as the koalas are introduced to different vegetation.
    - Translocation if done well can diversify the gene pool but there is a risk of chlamydia infection. So there is a balance to consider.
  + Study of Hawkesbury region.
    - Prior to study 27 koalas had been observed in 5 years, during the study 160 koalas were observed in 3 years
  + Post Rehabilitation
    - All koalas captured in dangerous areas are sent to AREPH (Uni of Sydney hospital) for Chlamydia check
    - In the SFW 2020 project there were 21 koalas of which 17 were on suburban fringes
    - Rehabilitated koalas are studied to determine if they are behaving similarly to wild koalas.
    - One tracked koala moved 40 km then moved another 40km to return to its starting area
  + Lifespan of a koala is typically 10 years but the record is 22 years. A principal factor is teeth wearing as they age which causes them to be unable to eat and so they stave. The toughness of vegetation in a particular area is a key determinant.
  + Breeding is once per year with one baby, in poorer soils that can be once every two years
  + Sub adult males need to find new home ranges or risk being attacked by the local dominant male. Their search is jeopardised by the major roads that cut off populations from each other, so wildlife crossings are important.
  + Safe road wildlife crossings have been provided elsewhere in the country but usage by koalas was not confirmed.
  + Thermal imaging is an emerging tool and could work in determining the presence of koalas but it would need to be done in the early morning in winter so that the heat of the trees was reduced causing the koala’s heat to stand out. Drones would be used to conduct the search.
  + Bionet database captures koala sightings. Data can be entered by the public using the I SPY KOALA app. There is a public search facility.
  + The sub adult koala “Royal” was captured in Forest Road Kirrawee and tracked for 3 months.
    - He ranged over considerable distance and at times was close to the Princes Highway, but appeared to be street smart and not try to cross
    - His favourite trees were Grey Gum (E Punctata) and Brown Stringybark (E Capitellata) but he was found in others such as Sydney Peppermint and White Stringybark.
    - After 3 months he was recaptured and found to have tick bites under his collar and so was released without the collar.
    - The inference from sightings in the last couple of years is that there is probably a small population of koalas in the Royal.
  + It was suggested that links to Kellie’s video be placed on FoR website/Facebook page along with encouragement to fund SCW.

**Correspondence**

* A post targeted at reducing drownings in the park has been sent to Robin Thebe our website developer. Our statistics show that 3 Nepalese people have drowned in the Royal in the last 3-4 years. Robin has passed the post to the editor of the Australian Nepalese community portal and has confirmed they will be published soon.
* We received a request for information from a Jason Groves regarding his great great grandfather Bennett who was a ranger at the Royal in the early 20th century. Some fabulous research was very quickly conducted by John Arney and Judith Carrick. Jason was thrilled by the responses. Well done John and Judith.

**Treasurer’s Report**

* $8676 in bank and paypal accounts.
* 54 financial members

**Other Business**

* 2021 Activity Program:
  + One bushcare/litter activity per month from March to November has been loaded onto the calendar.
  + Middle Rill and Red Jacks Point have been chosen as the two sites for FoR in 2021. The first activity is Friday 26th February at Red Jacks Point, meet at 9am at the firetrail start.
  + Included in the calendar are also birdwalks and plant walks. The first birdwalk will be at 8am on Monday 29th March, venue to be confirmed but probably Wattamolla.
  + Registration for all activities can be done on the website.
* Meeting with Brendon Neilly (NPWS Area Manager) and the 4 FoR office bearers to be held next Monday 1st March. Topics to be discussed include weeds, mountain bikers, foxes, litter, park usage, deer.
* 2021 FoR Meetings:
  + Subject to Covid 19 rules changes the 2021 committee meetings will continue to be held over Zoom but all general meetings will be held in the EEC.

**Park Report (MK)**

* A major project has commenced at Bonnie Vale to address asbestos and erosion
* Work at Wattamolla for the carpark and drainage has commenced
* At Garrawarra Farm there is a road upgrade planned and the toilet block is complete
* Garie Surf club building has an upgrade planned: cladding and other maintenance
* Fire Trail upgrade is a project that is being planned under Dave Croft
* Peak Season review has commenced. Observations have been:
  + More local visitors
  + Many not experienced in bush walking: inappropriate attire, lack of water, mobile coverage not present
  + More litter
* Volunteer project to inspect pitfall traps has completed
* Mel and Jodie attended a Campbelltown Council presentation where they learned about how DNA testing of stream water is occurring to detect the presence of platypus etc. This could be applied in Heathcote NP and the Royal for platypus, fish species and water rats. But there is no current funding.
* An aerial deer shoot occurred late 2020 using NPWS shooters and 40+ staff in total. 50+ animals shot. This successful activity will be repeated.
* Aboriginal sites are being remapped to get correct GPS locations. Illawarra prehistory group are leading this activity.
* Opening of the Wattamolla lower track to the lagoon has been delayed by the heritage review of the rock shelters. An archaeological dig has been completed as input to this review.

**General Business**

* None

**Meeting closed:** at 6.10 p.m.

**Next General Meeting**

* Thursday 22 April, 2021 at 4 pm – EEC

**Next Committee Meeting**

* Thursday 25 March, 2021 at 4pm via Zoom