Friends of the Royal National Park

Annual General Meeting 2021

President’s Report

Friends of Royal has now reached its ninth year of incorporation and has provided again some very successful outcomes for the Royal National Park thanks to the good will and efforts of the membership. Friends of Royal activities even have expanded since the last AGM and would have been set for even greater achievements but were contained by the constraints imposed by Corona Virus restrictions.

Friends of Royal had 46 members in August 2020 which rose to a peak of 64 at 24th June 2021. Financial membership has since dropped away since more than likely due to the restriction surrounding the Delta variant of Coronavirus.

The outcomes attained by Friends of Royal from the last AGM in 2020, display progress in achieving clearly four of the five objectives written in the constitution. They are as follows:

1. To coordinate and foster understanding and cooperation between people with diverse attachments and interests in the Royal Area.
2. To support and encourage volunteer community involvement in the Royal Area reserves.
3. To serve as a link in the conservation of natural and cultural assets.
4. To facilitate contribution into the draft Plan of Management for these reserves.

Friends of Royal operates across six key areas which are land care, native plant regeneration, biodiversity monitoring, track maintenance, litter removal and advocacy.

**Land Care**

Landcare is a core activity and has been a regular feature of Friends involvement once again. This has been achieved through the contributions of the Royal Bushies, Wednesday Group and Special Project days.

**The Royal Bushies**

The Royal Bushies operates of a Thursday and Saturday has continued to be led by Neville Bethe. He has held this role for about 6 years. During a period where Neville was on leave mention also needs to be made of Steve Johnson who stood in for Neville and did a great job.

The Royal Bushies includes members of Friends of Royal. There are commonly twelve volunteers of a Thursday and six of a Saturday with twenty odd members on the mail-out list. In comparison to the time period between the 2019 to 2020 AGMS the Royal Bushies had their achievements halted twice by Covid restrictions but still achieved 1854 registered hours from 27 volunteers.

In addition to the Bushies achievements with landcare they were also involved with seed propagation at Sutherland Nursery and planting of tube stock as well as weeding all over Royal, Heathcote and Garrawarra SCA.

The landcare activities of the Bushies are extensive and their achievements since the last AGM are as follow:

At the north eastern section of the Royal National Park the Royal Bushies have worked at Jibbon Beach removing Mother of Millions (*Bryophyllum* species), Green Cestrum (*Cestrum* *parqui*)and Prickly Pear (*Opuntia stricta*).

In the central eastern section of the park at Governors Game Lookout the Royal Bushies carried out quick checks for new weeds and weed removal occurred where necessary.

At Garie the work was largely at the Garie car park and up the slope beyond the club house.

Many weeds were removed, most of which were Mother of Millions (*Bryophyllum* species), Cotton Bush (*Gomphocarpus fruticosus*), Pampas Grass (*Cortaderia* species), Spider Plants (*Chlorophytum comosum)* and Scotch Thistles (*Onopordum acanthium*).

In the central western section of the park at Audley work has occurred at Bus Stop Flat and behind the old post office known as Allambie Slopes, around the Boat Shed and Allambie Flat. Weeds that are common include Mother of millions (*Bryophyllum* species), and Scotch Thistles (*Onopordum acanthium*).

Work also occurred between the Bungoona lookouts and the Honey moon track where common weeds such as ‘cobblers pegs’ (*Bidens pilosa*) and asparagus fern (*Asparagus aethiopicus)* were found.

At the western areas of the park work is carried out at Loftus, Heathcote and Waterfall.

At Gardners Garage at Loftus early morning sessions are carried out every third Thursday to maintain the area where Croftan weed (*Ageratina Adenophora*), asparagus fern (*Asparagus aethiopicus),* Cotton Bush (*Gomphocarpus fruticosus*), Scotch Thistles (*Onopordum acanthium*) and Green Cestrum are removed.

At East Heathcote work is carried out from Bottle Forest Road. The common weeds dealt with included Croftan Weed (*Ageratina Adenophora*), Green Cestrum (*Cestrum* *parqui*), Cotton Bush (*Gomphocarpus fruticosus*), and Pampas Grass (*Cortaderia* species).

Behind Houses at Waterfall lot of work weeds were removed. Weeds were mostly Scotch Thistles (*Onopordum acanthium*), Alum lily (Zantedeschia aethiopica), Croftan Weed (*Ageratina Adenophora*).

At Oliver Street Heathcote weeds were removed included Croftan weed (*Ageratina Adenophora*), Cotton Bush (*Gomphocarpus fruticosus*), Pampass grass (*Cortaderia* species) and asparagus fern (*Asparagus aethiopicus)*.

**The Wednesday Bush Care Team**

The Wednesday Bush Care Team works at times in remote locations of a Wednesday. The team is led by John Arney and Paul Rendell. Other assisting include Dave Robson and Peter Donley. This group has contributed 22 days of landcare from the last AGM starting with the 30th September 2020 to the 23rd June 2021

They have continued work south from Audley to Upper Causeway along Lady Carrington Drive and around into McKell Avenue.

On the way to weeding along Lady Carrington they have maintained weed control over the area at Figtree Flat at Audley which they previously dealt with before the last AGM. Here the weeds included Turkey Rhubarb (*Acetosa sagittata)*, Stinking Rodger (*Tagetes minuta)* and Scotch Thistle (Onopordum acanthium) .

Along Lady Carrington Drive at the north end, weeds removed include Green Cestrum (*Cestrum* *parqui****)***, Arsenic Bush (*Senna septemtrionalis*) and Easter cassia (*Senna pendula*),Lions ear **(***Leonotis nepetaefolia)*, Castor Oil plants (*Ricinus* *communis*) and Trad (*Tradescantia fluminensis).* Tarro (*Colocasia esculenta*), Croftan weed (*Ageratina Adenophora*),

At Calala, halfway of the total length or 4.5km from Audley along Lady Carrington Drive, the weed Noogra Burr (Xanthium occidentale) and Palm Grass (Setaris palmifolia) were removed.

Further south at Jersey Springs a little work was carried out on the remaining Arsenic Bush (*Senna septemtrionalis*) and Stinking Rodger (*Tagetes minuta).*

Lower Peach Tree area is found the distance of 4km along Lady Carrington Drive from Audley where Tree of Heaven is cut and painted with Vigilant II. This was undertaken in November and on December 9 the southern outcrop was completed to the dry creek on the western side of the Hacking River.

Along the Forest Path around Forest Island, Arsenic Bush (*Senna septemtrionalis*) and some Easter cassia (*Senna pendula*), Lions ear **(***Leonotis nepetaefolia)*, Trad (*Tradescantia fluminensis*) and Tarro (*Colocasia esculenta*. Also the occasional Thornapple (*Datura* *stramonium*), African Daisy Bush (*Datura* *stramonium*), Crofton weed, Ginger (*Hedychium* *gardnerianum*) and Madeira Vine are dealt with.

At McKell Avenue near the ‘Leveson Site’ – Senna Septemtrionalis, Lions ear **(***Leonotis nepetaefolia),* Trad (*Tradescantia fluminensis*), Easter cassia (*Senna pendula*), Common thornapple (Datura stramonium), Lantana (*Lantana camara)* and Tarro (*Elephant ear*) is removed. One Coral tree was also removed and some Palm Grass (*Setaris palmifolia*).

On the Couranga Track on the western bank of the Hacking River the weeds Arsenic Bush (*Senna septemtrionalis,* Easter cassia (*Senna pendula*) and Croftan weed (*Ageratina Adenophora*),

On Monday 29th March 2021 at Loftus Oval the following were removed: Tree of Heaven, Senna pendula, Privet narrow-leaf (Ligustrum sinense) and Asparagus fern

On Monday 2nd November 2020 the group worked at Garie Beach Middle Rill removing Pampas Grass and Cotton Bush.

On the 1st June 2021 at Jibbon one fence post damaged by heavy seas was reset and the weed ‘petite licorice’ (*Plecostachys serpyllifolia)* was removed*.*

On the 7th June at Bonnie Vale south of the creek where the central toilet block exists, Green Cestrum (*Cestrum* *parqui****)*** plant was cut and the remaining stump had the jell Vigilant ll applied.

**Special Projects**

Special projects involving Friends of Royal occurred in two ways. NPWS ranger Patsy Nagle led an operation at Kellys Falls and Friends of Royal Secretary Dave Robson initiated a program of activities at the north east section of the Royal National Park from Garie Beach to the headlands at RedJacks on the Port Hacking.

The Kellys Fall operation occurred on Friday 9th October with NPWS Ranger Patsy Nagle facilitating the activity. Vice President John Arnie from Friends of Royal and the Royal Bushies track cleared the paths and removed Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus species aggregate*), Asparagus fern, (*Asparagus aethiopicus)*, Croftan weed (*Ageratina Adenophora*), Easter cassia (*Senna pendula*).

A series of special project days were undertaken due to the initiative of Friends of Royal Secretary Dave Robson. They were as follows:

* Garie Middle Rill
  + 2 mornings doing Pampas…one digging up the first few…one cutting and bagging the seed heads
  + 3 mornings doing cotton bush…pulling and bagging seed heads
* Port Hacking Headland Red Jacks
  + 4 mornings …………huge Cassia (Senna) outbreak, Green Cestrum, Canary Island Date Palm
  + One morning we had 21 volunteers working

The details of these are as follows:

Wednesday 14th October Garie Beach access Road and Middle Rill wild cotton (*Gomphocarpus physocarpus*) and Prickly pear (*Opuntia stricta*)

On Monday 19th October a large operation occurred at the headland between Red Jacks and Costens Point on Port Hacking. This was the second part of an effort to rid the area of Prickly Pear (*Opuntia stricta*). This operation necessitated co-ordination with an extreme tide and on this day it peaked at 1.9m. Two boats owned by Friends of Royal members were kindly provided for transport and volunteers met at 8am at the Bonnie Vale and Grays Point boat-ramps. The boat coming from Grays Point boat ramp came with 4 people and the other boat coming from Bundeena with two people. Two more were picked up from Wallys Wharf and another walked in thereby providing 9 volunteers in total.

The remainder of the Prickly Pear was removed by mid-morning and work started on the other weeds including Aloe Vera, Pampas Grass (Cortaderia species), Senna, Asparagus Fern, Mother of Millions, Cotton and others

Four boatloads of weeds and rubbish were taken to Bonnie Vale and dumped in the bins. All agreed it was a successful and enjoyable day.

The next group activity occurred on the 2nd November at Middle Rill at Garie Beach. Here very large pampas Grass was removed.

On the 3rd December Garie Beach wild cotton (*Gomphocarpus physocarpus*) removal along the southern side north eastern facing hill.

10 December Garie Beach wild cotton (*Gomphocarpus physocarpus*) removal plus a few Mother of Millions (Kalanchoe delagoensis)

Friday 26th March 9am – Bushcare at Red Jacks Point removed Easter cassia (*Senna pendula*) Aspagus Fern and Green Cestrum.

13th April Red Jacks Point Poisoned Pampas Grass (Cortaderia species) and deseeded and removed Easter cassia (*Senna pendula*). 19 people on 13th April. Huge progress made in pulling out all the Cassia (Senna). Three new FoR volunteers all of whom enjoyed it and want to come back and five new Sutherland Bushwalkers.

Monday 19th April 9am – Bushcare at Middle Rill. 8 volunteers. We removed all the seed heads from the 50+ pampas grass present in the valley. Pulled hundreds of cotton plants and removed their seed pods

17 May Red Jacks de-seeded, cut and painted or hand pulled Easter cassia (*Senna pendula*). Some 40 kilos of Senna seeds were removed.

**Native Plant Regeneration**

As noted in the Bushies Report, once a month the Royal Bushies team worked at the Sutherland Council nursery for three hours on a Thursday afternoon. Seed had been collected from the parks and then the plants were grown from the seed for replanting into the Heathcote or the Royal National Park.

By October 2020, 100s of new plants were established by the Royal Bushies in the Heathcote National Park.

Royal Bushies also planted 400 plants at Audley between Office car park and the new toilets to the beginning of the new pathway to the beginning of Honey Moon track

On Wednesday 09-12-2020, Friends of Royal volunteers were engaged in tree planting at West Heathcote with two volunteers, President Ian Hill and Treasure Ralph Cartwright assisted Ranger Jodie McGill and other NPWS staff.

**Biodiversity Monitoring**

Biodiversity monitoring of the rare and threatened plant species Prostanthera Densa continued with a brief Survey at Waterfall on 23rd September with John Arney and Paul Rendell assisting APS Conservation Officer Dan Clarke.

Biodiversity monitoring of the Koala population came after a male koala was found at Kirrawee and then released in the park with a collar to allow its tracking and given the name “Royal”. From late August to mid November 2020 a few members of Friends of Royal were involved in tracking the koala at least once per week. The koala was released in November 2020 because of tick bites surrounding the collar and was seen twice on roads within the Royal subsequently. A koala was sighted in the evening of 13th April on the Bundeena Rd just north of the Mt Bass fire trail. The ear tags on the animal identified it as “Royal” the koala that had been monitoring in 2020. Subsequently the koala was seen twice with one occasion being on Bundeena Rd and one about 10 days later at Flat Rock.

Further to Biodiversity conservation, at the February General Meeting in 2021, Friends of Royal hosted Dr Kellie Leigh - Director - Science for Wildlife (SFW) and Brie Sloggert – Project Officer - Science for Wildlife (SFW) where a Science for Wildlife Video and Presentation was made. Key facts concerning Koalas and their survival in the 2020 bushfires was made.

In March 2021 an application for a grant was made from Wettenhall Environmental Trust attempting to get funding for the DNA sampling from Woronora and Hacking Rivers for evidence of Platypus. This was not successful but Friends of Royal will endeavour to make further progress in this regard.

**Track Maintenance**

Through the joint membership of Tony Larkin in both Friends of Royal and Sutherland Bushwalkers, the Sutherland Bush Walkers team works on track maintenance under the Friends of Royal banner. This occurred every 5 weeks with 15 members participating each time. Since last AGM they worked on the track linking the Costens Point trail to Anice Falls. Beginning at Costens Point walking trail they completed down to the Anice Falls by June and were stopped from further progress by Covid restrictions. Here Banksias and Hakeas vegetation up to 2m high was trimmed to make the paths presentable and functional.

On Friday 9th October, Ranger Patsy Nagle, John Arnie and the Royal Bushies track cleared at Kellys Fall from the lookouts back to the falls. Further work was carried out cleaning up the car park.

**Litter Removal**

On Saturday 14th November Friends of Royal conducted a Wattamolla Litter collection from 8.00 a.m. to 10.30 a.m. assisted by NPWS ranger Mel Keith.

**Advocacy**

Friends of Royal made a substantial submission to the Draft Plan of Management in July 2021. This involved identification and significant content covering the issues affecting the Royal National Park, Heathcote National Park and the Garawarra State Conservation Area. The issue of Mountain bikes and proposed areas for their use was covered with the general submissions accepting the Mountain Bike areas as proposed along with the condition of allowing trails subject to Environmental Assessment as supported by four members of the committee while a separate submission favouring minimal mountain bike use in the park on approved access trail only was submitted by three members of the committee.

Friends of Royal also co-signed a letter with other environment groups concerning the Heathcote Road Bridge Widening Project at Woronora River to provide Koala passage both sides of the river. The other groups were Sutherland Shire Environment Centre, NPA Southern Sydney Oatley Fauna and Flora Georges River Environmental Alliance and the Sandy Point Residents association.

**Special Activities**

Guided walks for the general public were provided by Friends of Royal seeking to encourage public interest and knowledge of the Parks and to increase membership.

For bird watching 2 walks were run at Bonnie Vale, 2 at Wattle Forest, 1 at Wattamolla. The feed-back was very good with some great species seen. For the walk on 21-09-2020 all participants appeared to enjoy themselves and 6 raffle ticket books were sold.

Thursday 12th November Walk along Wattle Forest

On Monday 29th March 8am – Guided bird walk –Wattamolla to Eagle Rock had four participants and birds that they had never seen before were identified for them

Saturday 5th December 2021 Patsy Nagle organised a plant and bird walk at Red Cedar flat. Patsy led the Plant walk and Dave Robson led the bird walk in lieu of Steve Anyon-Smith who was unable to attend. Many Friends of Royal members attended.

A ‘Plants walk’ by Friends of Royal on Monday 21st September provided a guided plants walk at Florence Parade

* + All agreed that it was very successful, 10 people attended
  + John had pre-walked the route and listed the plants that the walkers could expect to see. A couple of the orchids had died a few days before the walk but otherwise all were there.
  + John had produced a list of 115 plants
  + There were new participants: a couple from North Sydney who John picked up and dropped off from the station. Lisa a new member of APS also attended.

**Public Relations**

Continuing work to engage and educate the community via Facebook has been carried out on a regular basis thanks to the efforts of Treasure Ralph Cartwright and the Friends of Royal Website thanks to Secretary Dave Robson.

The Website saw a steady increase in visits and unique visits from January to July with no sign of decrease due to Covid delta virus restrictions on actual mobility.

**Donations**

Friends of Royal donated $500 to Science for Wildlife in recognition of their good work and their help with the Koala tracking.

**Meetings with the Area Manager**

These meetings are and initiative if Friends of Royal seeking to establish good relations with NPWS at the Royal and to enhance the combined effort of the two groups. Successful meetings were held on 01-03-2021 and 18-06-2021. Issues discussed included fox predation deer numbers and impacts, park damage from Mountain bikes and encroachments into park lands by private owners.

**Conclusion**

I would like to express my thanks to all members of Friends of Royal who have contributed to the activities and especially to the committee members who have generously given their time efforts and expertise to the smooth running of the organisation.

It is pleasing to recount the many activities and positive outcomes that Friends of Royal have achieved for the past year. As a group we look forward to continuing the progress made, to encourage greater membership and make a contribution to the parks in general.

Given the constitution which dictates that the President can only hold office for three consecutive years, I will be stepping aside from this role for the second time. I have enjoyed this privilege and wish the organisation many good years ahead.

Ian Hill

President Friends of Royal 2021