

CHAIRPERSON'S ADDRESS AGM 2008

Firstly I'd like to thank all Committee members for their hard work, their contribution of ideas, and their attendance at the monthly meetings.

2008 was a particularly difficult year for the Recovery Team of the Western Swamp Tortoise, as over 60% of their funding was cut. This has impacted on the group in small ways – there was no-one available for planting, or other on ground works for much of the year. In the future, we may have to become less reliant on DEC resources, and provide our own, necessitating some fundraising initiatives. If anyone has any bright ideas for fundraising events which are particularly successful, please let the committee know.

This year the Friends group has funded seed collection and tube stock and paid for new radio transmitters for the released juveniles and the refurbishment of the old ones. Our in-kind voluntary work has been cleaning up and GPSing aestivation tunnels and repotting tube stock so they will be bigger and better for the 2009 planting. We also held a morning games making session in preparation for a holiday program called Make your Mark at the Zoo in July. Thanks to the members who manned and womanned our stand. We were able to cement the connection with the Education Branch of the Zoo, by arranging a Field Trip for them to see Ellen Brook Nature Reserve in October.

We also released some tortoises at Mogumber, and last I heard, they were doing well. The colony there will now become a Maintenance Colony, with no further releases. Some of the early released tortoises are now approaching adulthood, and need to be left to their own devices for a few years so the scientists can determine if the colony is sustainable. The Zoo is still breeding, and the next release may be at Moore River Nature Reserve. Trials in 2006 and 2007 indicate that area is suitable for a new colony.

On the Education front, Margaret discovered a very old display (probably done by original Green Corps workers who put up the first vermin proof fences) at the Muchea Tree Farm, and offered to update it for them. I understand it looks great now.

Tanya presented to the Hills Branch of the Naturalist's Club following an approach by Dot, one of our members. They were surprised to hear of the long road to recovery for the WST. From this event, Tanya was able to contact Robert Boyd, who "rediscovered" the WST in 1953 as a schoolboy. She did a wonderful interview with him, which was featured in the Spring Tortoise Tales, and will be in the TSN newsletter soon.

I have been to Baldivis Children's Forest and Christchurch Prep School, speaking to the next generation who will need to ensure the WST is safe from extinction. These children are very aware of conservation and threatened species. They also loved our floor games.

Our free standing display has been at a Seminar for Midland Brick, a North Metro Catchment Group event, the Nats Club, several schools and is currently back here at the Zoo for the Australian Wildlife Management Society Conference.

Helen is still producing Tortoise Tales, the Group's quarterly newsletter. Our website has been refurbished, and promises to be better than ever once completed. Thanks to Helen and Rodney for helping spread the message.

2009 is the 5th anniversary of the Friends Group, and, as well as several events already planned, we will try to contact the original Green Corps members who were instrumental in the formation of the group, to join us for a celebration. It will be interesting to see what direction their lives have taken since then.