

## **CHAIRPERSON'S ADDRESS AGM 2007**

I'd just like to remind you of all the hard work we've done and the accomplishments of the Friends of the Western Swamp Tortoise during 2007.

Membership has been gradually increasing, and now our Tortoise Tales quarterly newsletter reaches over 200 people. Although Helen left us earlier in the year to go to Sydney, she has continued to produce Tortoise Tales, for which we are all very grateful.

We have kept our treasurer, Bob, busy again this year with 2 new grants – a Community Conservation grant for the Zoo prototype tanks which we will see later today, and a Threatened Species Grant for next year's planting. In addition, we have had donations from the ANZ, Uniting Credit (thanks to Melinka and Ivan), Edgecombe Brothers and two members.

Our ongoing partnerships are still strong. We have finally managed to mount a permanent display for Edgecombe Brothers, and although the information panels are not yet complete, at least tourists and others visiting the Winery can learn something about the tortoise. A new display was mounted at Ginger's Gull Service Station, and the superseded display, thanks to Melanie and the City of Swan, was erected in Bullsbrook. We worked closely with WWF, who provided a guest speaker for one of our meetings, CVA, who built a concrete spillway in Ellen Brook, and the DEC.

Our on-ground work this year has mainly focused on planting seedlings, sometimes in rock-hard soil, sometimes in slushy mud, in Ellen Brook Nature Reserve.

Our members have spread the word of the tortoise's plight through radio interviews (thanks Janelle and Jessie and Helen earlier in the year) and displays at various venues, ranging from the Conservation Council Conference to the Bullsbrook Library and, most recently, the Chittering Landcare Open Day. There have been articles in Landscape, Australian Geographic and the RAC's Road Patrol magazine, an item on Stateline, and numerous mentions in environmental magazines and newsletters of other groups. Every little bit helps to raise the profile of the recovery effort.

An initiative by Edith Cowan University resulted in over 500 students viewing our display, and 150 of them participating in 45 minute presentations at an Earth Day at Mt. Lawley campus. We have been invited to attend again this year. I have done talks to students at St. Dominics and Mirrabooka Primary, and worked with 4 schools who used the WST as a theme for study on Threatened Species. The Education pack on the website was a great resource, and since one of the schools was on the Gold Coast in Queensland, it would have been a bit hard to get to. (Although if the group want to pay my airfare.....) Each of the schools fundraised to adopt a tortoise from the Zoo, (so that's over \$500 towards the Captive Breeding Program) and Mirrabooka kids also planted at Ellen Brook.

The highlight of the year for many of us was the release of 25 juveniles into Sheep Swamp at Mogumber. It was a special celebration, as last year was too dry for releases. We wish these little tortoises well and hope that they are the beginning of a self-sustaining colony. While they grow, aestivate, dodge predators and fires in a struggle to reach breeding age and increase the size of the colony, the Friends Group will continue working in the background on strategies designed to raise their profile and remove them from the Critically Endangered list.

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