

The Bushland Whistler

Friends of Forrestdale Newsletter ♦ Edition 15 ♦ March 2017

LAKE FORRESTDALE WALK TRAIL

BEAUTIFUL SUNNY DAYS of autumn and winter are ideal for bush walking, and the City of Armadale—Forrestdale Included—has nature reserves well equipped with walk trails.

One such trail is the 6.5km limestone track and paved footpath that encircles Lake Forrestdale. Officially opened in March 1998, the Lake Forrestdale Walk Trail—situated within the Lake Forrestdale Nature Reserve—provides abundant natural interest along the way and goes through a variety of habitats including damplands as well as banksia and paperbark woodland.



Along the trail, there are views to enjoy too. On the east side of the lake, you can look across native heathland to the Darling Scarp; and here also—on the highest point of the trail—there is a vista of the lake, which, depending on the time of year, may or may not have water.



Because the natural vegetation on the east and south side of the lake escaped heavy grazing by livestock in the early days of settlement, it is still in fairly good condition, and while invasive weeds such as veld grass are certainly present, much of the native understory plants still remain.

By contrast, the north and west sides of the lake have suffered extensive grazing in the past which means that very little of the original understory vegetation remains; as a result, kikuyu grass, arum lily and other persistent weeds now prevail.



Hoary twine rush *Meeboldina cana* growing in shallow water beside the walk trail.

On the southeast corner, the trail passes through a small stretch of dampland habitat, where, after heavy rain in winter and early spring, the track is sometimes under a few centimetres of water.

Tadpoles and several species of aquatic invertebrates, including shield shrimps *Lepidurus apus viridis*, may be seen if you look carefully into the clear shallow water on either side of the track. At this time, too, the air can resonate with the sound of froglets as they emit their clamorous mating calls; the species heard is mainly the squelching froglet *Crinia insignifera*, whose penetrating voice is remarkably loud in proportion to its body size.

Other native animals that might be chanced upon on the trail are western grey kangaroos and southern brown bandicoots. Many bird species including splendid fairy-wren, scarlet robin, grey shrike-thrush, common bronzewing pigeon and several types of honeyeater can be seen or heard during a walk around the lake. Having the ability to identify them by sight and sound can greatly enhance a bushwalk experience.

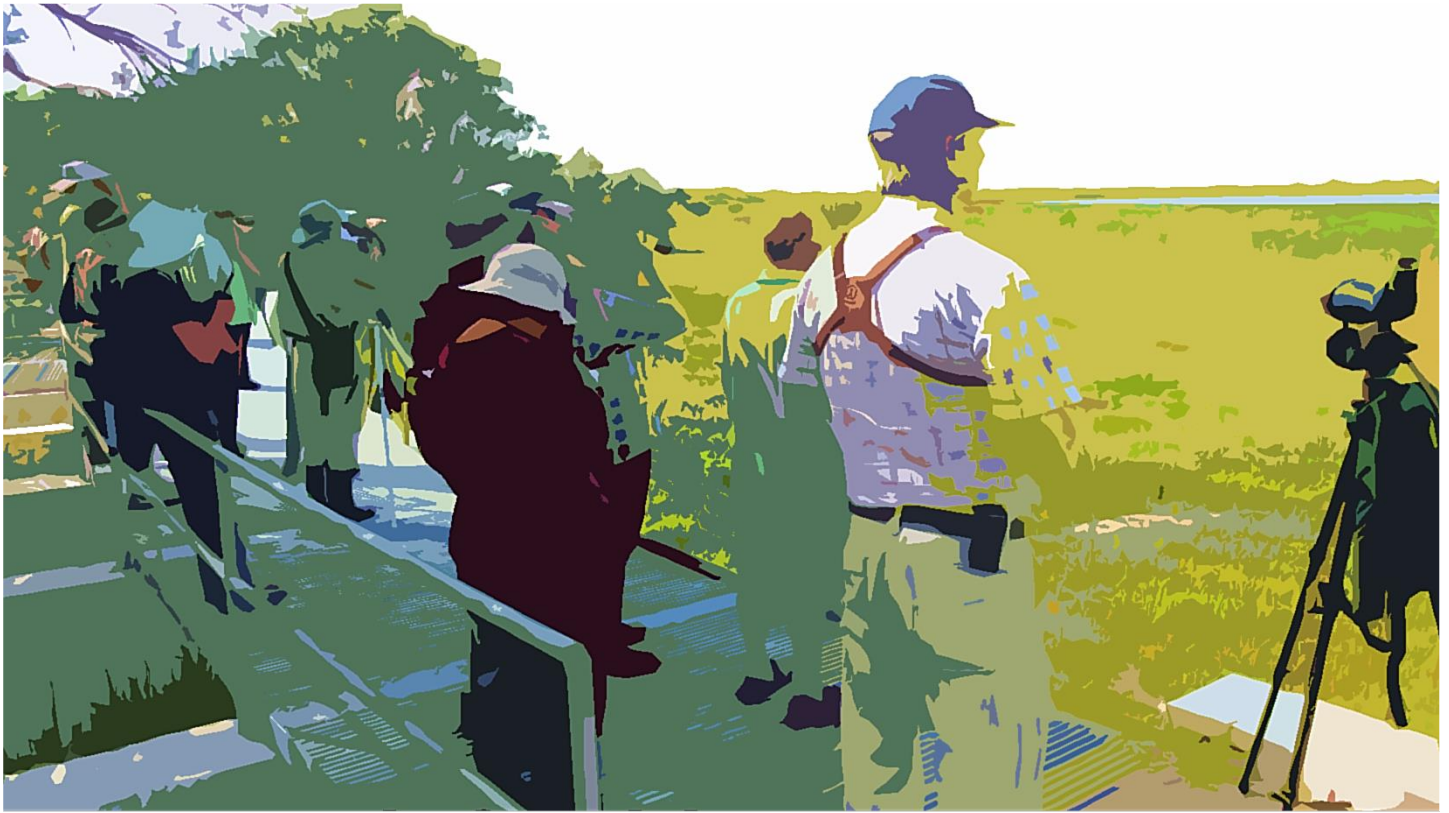
As in most bushland habitats, dugites and tiger snakes are present in the reserve and it is wise to keep an eye out. These snakes, however, usually only bite if provoked or stepped on, so provided you stick to the trail and keep your distance if a snake is encountered, they shouldn't be a problem.



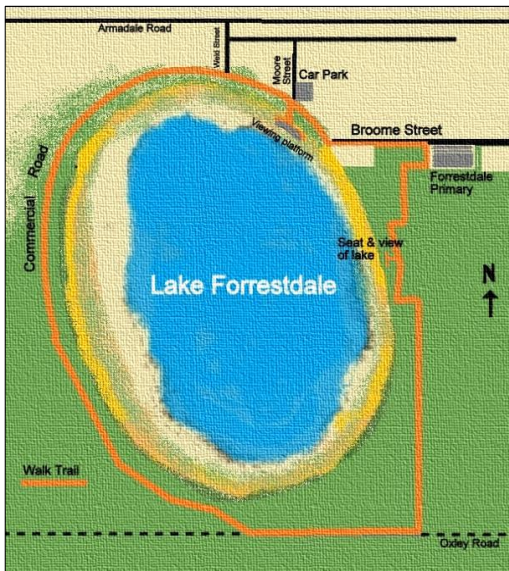
If you're lucky, you might spot a roo; or perhaps a bandicoot, which in this case is busy digging a hole in search of food.



Many types of insects including native bees (more likely to be seen in warmer weather) live in the reserve. The native bee species most visible on the trail is the blue-banded bee (far left), which is about the size of a honeybee. It can often be found hovering around and entering the tubular flowers of *Hemiandra pungens* (left) which grow beside the trail on the east side of the lake. (The bee photographed is feeding at the flower of *Dasypogon bromeliifolius*, which also grows in the nature reserve.)



Lake Forrestdale viewing platform.



A good starting point for the walk is from the car park at the southern end of Moore Street, Forrestdale. Nearby is the viewing platform which allows a clear view of the lake—for anyone intending to do the full walk around the lake, the view from the platform will give a good indication of distance. From there (if choosing to go clockwise), follow the Broome Street footpath, then turn right through the kissing gate onto the limestone trail at the Primary School.

(See the booklet *Armada Walks and Trails* for more information.)

Inappropriate use of the trail

With its variety of habitat, views of the lake and the hills and the prospect of seeing wildlife along the way, the Lake Forrestdale walk trail (a Grade Two trail—suitable for families with young children) is surely one of the top walk trails in the Perth region. It was created

specifically for walking and cycling, and the use of unauthorised vehicles is prohibited.

But despite signage, fences and gates to keep out joyriders and rubbish dumpers, unlawful use of the trail and the Nature Reserve continues unchecked.

Fences encircling the Reserve are cut or rammed by vandals repeatedly; gates are breached, chains and padlocks securing them are damaged or stolen and rubbish is dumped. These and other nefarious activities are unrelenting, have far-reaching ramifications and if left unchecked can only worsen over time. Other nature reserves in the region are equally affected. The escalating cost of fixing the damage and removing the rubbish—borne ultimately by taxpayers and ratepayers—is considerable.



Examples of damage by vandals to gates and fences around Lake Forrestdale Nature Reserve.



Prime Lake Forrestdale Nature Reserve habitat damaged when a stolen vehicle was taken deep into bushland for stripping.

Nature reserves are established to protect native vegetation, to sustain biodiversity and to provide safe haven for native animals where they can live their lives unhindered by human activity and traffic.

Few such areas remain in the Perth region and those that do, need to be valued by community and government and given the highest level of protection.

But many are threatened because too often government policy puts low priority on environment protection, and, sadly, many people grow up having missed out on the encouragement needed as children to appreciate and respect their local environment—hence the problems mentioned above.

At a personal, community, government and global level compassion and appreciation for the natural world is fundamental. The benefits to humans of living in a healthy environment are boundless and well documented. Nurturing the environment is key to our survival as a species.

Children have an inborn fascination and empathy for the natural world and animal life of all kinds—something as simple as a line of ants scurrying across a footpath can inspire an expression of sheer joy on the face of a small child. This inborn quality that children possess should be recognised and fostered, at home and at school, from an early age. When this happens, children are much more likely to grow up with a sense of pride and protectiveness towards their local environment. ✧



OBLONG TURTLE (*Chelodina colliei*)

KNOWN BY SEVERAL OTHER NAMES—long-necked turtle, snake-necked turtle, southwestern snake-necked turtle—the oblong turtle is endemic to the southwest of WA and lives in freshwater swamps, streams, lakes and lagoons between Kalbarri and Esperence.

Classified as Near Threatened (NT) on the IUCN Red List, this turtle has declined in numbers since European settlement—in recent decades quite significantly.

A member of Friends of Forrestdale and long-time Forrestdale resident, David James, recounts some of his memories of turtles (known then as tortoises) back in the 1950s and '60s at Lake Forrestdale:

- *“While swimming or canoeing in Lake Forrestdale as a kid, it was common to see numerous tortoise heads poking out of the water as they came up for a breath of air; it was always fun trying to count them.*
- *Looking out for baby tortoises was a yearly event as they were regularly seen crossing Commercial Road [Forrestdale] or crawling about the lake’s fringing bushland.*
- *Each winter when James Drain flowed strongly into the lake, masses of tortoises were seen struggling against the current as they tried to get to the swamps west of Lake Forrestdale.*
- *Often when swimming in the lake we felt tortoises scooting away from under our feet—they were so numerous we couldn’t help treading on them.*
- *Tortoises nest around Lake Forrestdale in the higher sand dunes above the water table; we often saw baby tortoises crossing the road as they tried to get to the lake; many were run over by cars.*
- *As years went by, the lake became dry more often and it was common to see empty tortoise shells where the aestivating tortoises had been dug up and eaten by foxes.”*



Reasons for the decline in turtles are manifold and include:

- **Drying and loss of wetland habitats:** diminishing rainfall is a threat to the survival of turtles in many wetlands; and on the Swan Coastal Plain alone, 70 to 80 per cent of all wetlands have been filled, drained or cleared, leading to local extinctions of oblong turtles.
- **Road strikes:** female turtles often must cross roads to access suitable nest sites on dry land; and baby turtles must also cross the roads when travelling to the water.
- **Predation by foxes:** turtles have natural predators such as monitor lizards that dig up and eat their eggs, or birds that take turtle hatchlings. But the introduced fox—a highly efficient predator, taking eggs, hatchlings and adult turtles—poses a serious threat to these animals.
- **Introduced weeds:** when migrating to wetlands from nest sites, turtle hatchlings find it difficult or impossible to navigate dense areas of introduced weeds and often perish. Weeds are also a hindrance to adult turtles looking for nest sites.
- **Fences, roadside curbing, storm water drains:** all can be traps and barriers for turtles and their young.
- **Pet trade:** regrettably, native turtles (along with many other native reptiles) are now allowed to be kept as pets. Animals are obtained from the wild, are often kept in cramped conditions and because there is little or no understanding of the needs of these shy retiring animals to ensure their health and wellbeing, stress-induced mortality rates are high.



Oblong turtle eggs dug up and eaten by either a fox or a natural predator such as a monitor lizard. Empty oblong turtle shell showing the ventral surface (known as the plastron); the turtle was likely killed and eaten by a fox. Since the 1950s and '60s, turtle numbers at Lake Forrestdale have declined significantly—fox predation being one of the chief causes.



Southern heath monitor (*Varanus rosenbergi*), one of the oblong turtle's natural predators.

More facts about the oblong turtle

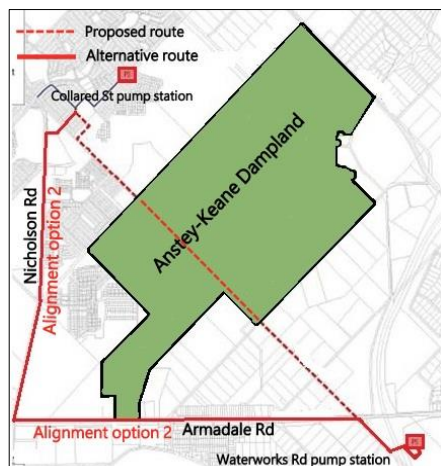
- Oblong turtles are carnivorous and hunt by day; their diet includes small fish, crustaceans and aquatic insects, tadpoles and frogs.
- Turtle hatchlings eat small invertebrates and help control mosquitoes by eating their larvae.
- Turtles can use their long necks to lunge at prey with snake-like speed.
- The female oblong turtle is larger than the male, but the male has a longer, thicker tail.
- Being reptiles, oblong turtles are cold blooded; to increase their body temperature and to aid digestion, they sunbake out of the water.
- Depending on weather conditions and availability of food, it can take 5 years or more for oblong turtles to reach sexual maturity.
- The female oblong turtle nests between September and January, choosing a nest site well away (sometimes several hundred metres) from the water. She lays approximately between 8 and 15 eggs which she buries; using her plastron, she then tamps the soil to compact it.
- The incubation period for turtle eggs is long—between 26 and 42 weeks depending on weather conditions.
- The female turtle returns to the water once her eggs are laid, and when the baby turtles hatch they are entirely independent.
- The mortality rate for baby turtles is high; only a small percentage reach maturity.
- During hot or dry periods, oblong turtles are able to bury themselves in mud and aestivate (a state of torpor) until conditions improve. ✧



BALLANUP WASTEWATER PRESSURE MAIN

THE WATER CORPORATION proposes the construction of a 4.5km underground wastewater pressure main to connect the Collared Street pump station in Harrisdale to the Waterworks Road pump station in Haynes.

Three alignment options were evaluated to connect the pump stations, however, the Water Corporation's preferred option has 1.5km of the pipeline passing through Anstey-Keane Dampland.



A long hard battle was fought to stop the “Keane Road Strategic Link” which would have seen that road intersect Anstey-Keane. In the end the EPA and the Minister for the Environment deemed the proposal environmentally unacceptable and the road was rejected. The Ballanup wastewater pressure main is set to follow the same route as the rejected Keane Road, even though the environmental impacts would in many cases be the same as those for the road and in some instances worse.

When infrastructure such as roads and pipelines are constructed in areas of conservation value, lasting environmental damage inevitably occurs.

The concern is that the Water Corporation's alignment option 2 has not been given due consideration. As is stated in the EPA Report and recommendations, the majority of the proposal is located *“within existing road reserves through residential areas ... presenting no significant environmental issues for 3km of its length”*. That being so, we see no sound reason why the entire pipeline cannot be installed the same way: thus avoiding the inexorable problems—vegetation damage; spread of *Phytophthora* dieback; exposure of acid sulphate soils; hydrology issues; pollution from potential pipeline leaks and spills; introduction of invasive weed species; degradation resulting from ongoing pipeline maintenance: all this in a part of the reserve currently in near pristine condition.

By following the Water Corporation's alignment option 2—along Nicholson and Armadale Roads—environmental damage can be avoided entirely.

We now await a decision by the new Minister for the Environment who has the final say on whether or not the pipeline goes through Anstey-Keane Dampland. ✧



Sections of the 1.5km route through Anstey-Keane the proposed pipeline would follow. Heavy machinery used to install the pipe would do untold damage to native vegetation along the way, and the amenity of the area would be downgraded forever.