



2019 AGM Chairperson's Report

Dr Chrissy Sharp

I did something unusual a couple of weeks ago. I went for a walk at the Tree Park with a friend. With over 50,000 visitors last year, taking a walk in the Tree Park is hardly unusual, except in my case, as I am invariably “on a mission” during my visits. I rarely just enjoy the scene. On that day the World Collection was by then in its wintery dormancy and the sky was grey; the effect like an old black and white photo, it was indeed a lovely walk, and one which gave me great satisfaction.

At the beginning of 2018 before I took over chairing this committee again midyear, our arboretum was facing a litany of challenges; some of the early infrastructure was worn out and needed replacing whilst progress had been excruciating slow on adding new elements for visitors to complete our infrastructure development plan, higher sheep prices were a challenge to good landcare, the native old growth flooded gums along the creeks were in dismal decline and becoming dangerous, the Australian Collection – always our wild child – was growing nicely but including an abundance of woody weeds.

Little over a year later, on this special walk, I saw improved landcare, new fences, the flooded gums pruned and reshooting healthy foliage, new Jarrah tree posts and plaques, safer walk tracks mulched with our own woody weeds from across the road, and the wooden gates on them repaired, displays full of new edition brochures, and at the main picnic site a beautiful new BBQ shelter. The whole place felt loved. As indeed it is; and I am astounded at what we, as a dynamic group of volunteers, have achieved together, along with many others from the community at busy bees. We have worked really hard and it shows.

Add to this what has been achieved behind the scenes; a new constitution has been approved and lodged under the *Incorporated Associations Act*, taking us into the modern era. Then early in this period we dealt with a surprise takeover bid under the Noongar Native Title Settlement by local artist Sandra Hill, to which we all gave deep thought and responded with generosity and integrity. That adding a Noongar art and cultural centre, respite and training centre to Golden Valley has now proved impractical was foreseeable. However I am proud of the respect and thought we gave to the proposal and our genuine efforts to accommodate it.

In August last year we hosted the first of what we hope to be an annual public lecture on a tree topic. Duccio Migliorini, a visiting research fellow at Murdoch University presented to a packed organ room at the Homestead on the subject of *Globalization, Climate & Land Use as Major Drivers of Plant Diseases in Mediterranean and Temperate Areas*. His interesting talk is available on our website.

Over the year there have been unexpected outcomes too. The first is that reservations, for weddings and other events, have almost dried up, there having been only one formal event during the whole year. I am pleased to report that this drought is slowly breaking as we have two booked in for the coming months, both weddings. However clearly we can improve in this area.

The other issue has been the re-think of our demonstration of oil mallees hedges. Planted as part of the Australian Collection in 2003 by the Department, at the time there was a burgeoning new industry for the Wheatbelt but unfortunately the initial promise has faltered, even though these remarkable South West trees are the best biomass energy source *in the world*, and Virgin airlines research has proved are the only renewable biological resource capable of replacing oil as jet fuel, on top of their eucalyptus oil and salinity amelioration benefits. However currently the equipment to harvest the dense rows, as we had planted, is hard to access but this tight lay-out does require frequent cutting to prevent self thinning; so we have decided to reduce the scale and design of the stand. After the first long overdue harvest in May 2018, we will now keep all the species represented but allow them to re-grow as well formed specimen trees. In exchange we have now an empty hectare of blank canvas waiting for new interesting Australian plantings. Wayne O'Sullivan's report on this is loaded onto our website.

Our current Management Committee is a highly talented group. Our secretary Wendy Kurz is a treasure, and has to be the most brilliant secretary in the region! And I am deeply grateful to her personally for taking over some of my work load this past year,

in addition to her regular tasks and steering the new constitution, by now also answering the public emails and keeping the volunteer hours as well as writing funding applications. In the past year we have received \$1250 from the Small Farm Field Day for tree identification materials, and \$1300 from the Forests Products Commission for a brochure reprint, as well as a donation of \$3,000 from a local patron. We also keenly await the outcome of an application for recurrent funding from the Shire.

Our treasurer Tom Benson is not just good at financials – he knows how to manage land and build fences in a rare combination of brains and hands. Wendy Ayers continues to keep up our connections to the heritage of Golden Valley and Yungerup active and remembered, so she has a special place at this table. Meanwhile Andy Sandri magically keeps finding funds at the bottom of an apparently empty departmental purse. Andy thank you for everything, in what is now nudging long service on this project. And Jan Helsham thank you for the exquisite artistic sensibility you bring to this table. Our two newer committee members are Yulia Novikova and Jeff Pow. Jeff is another multi talented find who can wield both words and chainsaws and has a smile that can lift the sometime dry deliberations round this table. Yulia is just getting to know the place, I mean *really* know it. That is because she has a serious interest in the trees themselves. This will prove fundamental to the project in moving forward.

And it is with pleasure that we today welcome brand new committee member Byron Joel who brings a promising background in regenerative farming and a special love for genus *Quercus*.

Our Patron Professor Brian de Garis drops in to help us with tricky decisions when requested and never fails to illuminate such discussions with his wise and surprising insights.

We have two Curators, officially now under the new constitution! Wayne O’Sullivan has been a font of ecological advice and West Australian tree procurement; he has played a fundamental role in our forty year indomitable challenge to convert a bare hay paddock into a reputable collection of diverse Australian flora. Thanks for hanging in there WayneO’ despite the driving!

Then there is Andrew Thamo, without whom, *none* of the above would have been possible. His general tree knowledge is encyclopaedic and his good taste impeccable. His organisation of regular monthly busy bees has made so much happen this past year alone. It is through his genius and dedication in so *many ways* across forty years now that has made possible a nationally recognised botanic garden in little Balingup and much-loved South West public asset; and all on the proverbial smell of an oily rag.

Of course you will have noticed that I have left out one someone from the team; our Deputy Chairperson, Gary Hodge. That is because I have been largely speaking of past achievements. With your endorsement in a moment I hope that Gary will move up to take over as the Chair of our Management Committee and incorporated association. Beginning just in January this year, Gary has provided real leadership to our group through a process of 'strategic visioning'. I believe his personal gifts and his remarkable *Gestalt* methodology may take this Balingup project to a whole new level of resilience, financial resourcing and education and training for the benefit and pleasure of the tree loving public. I am deeply grateful for his energetic commitment to take the project to the next stage.

Of course we are collectively the tip of a community iceberg of volunteers. Thanks to Bernie Kurz we know that in the past twelve months 62 volunteers have donated 2,494.5 hours to the project. (Of these hours some 1,454 were from our committee.) We do not forget former Chairperson Bob Hingston who put so much into Golden Valley over ten years and left late last year, the Merry Men are an essential component, as is Pam Williamson who manages our website so efficiently and attractively; lucky us, and Lizzie Grey who regularly puts out brochures, Rob Mann who donates brilliant photos, the Balingup Visitors Centre who front the public, Lara Bos (our daughter) who does the bookings, the generous assistance of Ian Telfer at WAPRES in the past year for the provision of machinery and operators to convert a wild native abundance into an managed Australian Collection and to Wy Allen and his trusty bob cat that have made such a difference to busy bees. Of course the danger of lists is that you will forget someone important. To those I say please forgive my poor memory.

There is one last but critical thank you that I don't forget. It is to express my gratitude to the Parks and Wildlife Service. Over the past close to four decades I have worked with them as first the Forests Department, then Conservation and Land Management (CALM), then Environment & Conservation (DEC), followed quickly by Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW) and now Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions (PaWS of DBCA). The name has changed five times!! But the spirit of co-operation has been constant. The Department has been rock solid in their support of this community managed arboretum for thirty nine years. They have been the wooden hull of our busy sailing ship. We could not have created this place alone.

When I was in Parliament years ago I noted the trend of regularly lowering of this department's budget with annual State Government cuts this century. This trend peaked in 2014-16 when the total budget was slashed by 10% two years in a row and

fifty biodiversity scientists were lost, as well as hundreds of hours of fire fighting experience locally. I am deeply upset at the gutting of the essential land management capacity of this great department and frankly disgusted that despite our globally significant biodiversity in Western Australia, we continue to underfund and undermine this department's many vital responsibilities. With this backdrop strain under which they work, I am hugely appreciative of their consistent support for Golden Valley Tree Park.

A second long dry autumn in a row this year spelt a further decline in the groundwater levels, out of sight but never out of mind for tree managers. Based on data from piezometers elsewhere, I can speculate that groundwater has dropped 10 meters or more below the uphill sections of the Park since our first plantings in 1981. Personally I remain more committed than ever to the health of our trees growing here through climate change, and new species to come. In particular I am keen to see more oaks planted Byron. As most of you know, I also maintain a serious commitment to the health of our surrounding Jarrah-Marri forests; a public policy area that once again requires a significant portion of my time. So I will step down today after chairing this Committee off and on (mainly on) for nearly forty years, proudly wearing the honour of sharing with Andrew, the current WA top Environmental Volunteers of the year Award.

In standing down from the seat of chair it will release this committee's energy for great new things. Meanwhile I will continue to contribute as best I can on my ongoing Tree Park roles - designing the landscape, keeping the records of plantings and sponsorships, managing the tree maintenance, raising funds through the tree sponsorships, organising the plantings, local co-ordinator and overall "mother of the Park" including baking the cakes for our busy bees....mind you Gary bakes a pretty mean Lemon Sponge!

Thank you all very much for the friendship, kindness and support you have given to me and to the project.