

Volunteers give wetlands a helping hand

by Robyn Phillimore



Volunteers have long played an important role in helping to protect some of WA's special places — from major national parks to local bushland areas.

One such group has contributed countless hours to the upkeep of the Brixton Street wetlands.

A large number of wetlands within the Perth metropolitan area have been destroyed or significantly altered by clearing or landfill. In fact, 97 per cent of the Swan Coastal Plain has been cleared for agriculture or housing. As a result, many of the plant communities associated with these wetlands have become rare or even extinct. Nevertheless, some plant communities still occur in a small, 19-hectare remnant near Brixton Street in the Perth suburb of Kenwick.

The Brixton Street wetlands lie 20 kilometres south-east of Perth near the base of the Darling Scarp. This small remnant forms part of the Greater Brixton Street Bushland, which contains around 127 hectares of vegetation. The reserve occurs on the winter-wet flats of the Guildford clays.

Brixton Street wetlands support a very rich flora, with more than 300 different species of plants. This is equivalent to more than 20 per cent of Perth's flora in only 0.005 per cent of the area. The wetlands also contain some rare plant communities known as threatened ecological communities, some of which were featured in the article, 'Threatened plant communities of the Swan Coastal Plain' (see *LANDSCOPE*, Spring 1996). They include rich herblands that cover the winter-wet claypans; herb-rich shrublands on clay flats; and marri woodlands on the higher ground where



the soil is well drained. The wetlands also provide habitat for numerous birds, mammals, frogs and reptiles.

Saving the wetlands

In 1992, The Friends of Brixton Street Wetlands was formed. They persistently lobbied government agencies to recognise the significance of the wetlands. As a result, the wetlands were saved from the effects of development. The group consisted of members from the Waterbird Conservation Group, the Wildflower Society and concerned members of the community. Later, a management committee, represented by the Friends, the Wildflower Society, the Department of Conservation and Land Management and the City of Gosnells, was formed to take on the active management of the wetlands, and

continues to meet about twice a year to discuss management issues.

The Friends have put countless volunteer hours into managing the wetlands and providing information to the public. Working with the department's Swan Coastal District, the group has erected fences and signs, planted seedlings, removed rubbish and begun a program of weed control, all of which was made possible through numerous grants (such as National Heritage Trust grants) obtained by the group. The Friends group also coordinates regular guided walks and 'working bees' in the wetlands, and conducts displays in shopping centres, schools and libraries.

The Department of Conservation and Land Management is committed to ensuring that the conservation values of the Brixton Street wetlands are maintained. In recent times, staff from the department's Swan Coastal District and the Western Australian Threatened Species and Communities Unit (WATSCU) have assisted in managing the wetland by providing land planning advice and some operational measures such as fencing and firebreaks. Recently, staff from the district, in conjunction with the Friends group, built a lookout so that the public could view the numerous species of plants and animals that inhabit the site without impacting on the bushland. A Fire Management Strategy for the site was also developed



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Top The delicate flowers of early Nancy (*Wurmbea dioica*).

Photo - Greg Keighery

Centre Volunteers examine the weed watsonia in the Brixton Street wetlands.

Photo - Kate Brown

Bottom The viewing platform.

Photo - Jiri Lochman

Inset The striking blue tinsel lily (*Calectasia grandiflora*).

Photo - Marie Lochman

Above The threatened plant Keighery's eleocharis (*Eleocharis keigheryi*) grows in the wetland.

Left Looking across Brixton Street wetlands.
Photos - Greg Keighery



Above Brixton Street Observation Area. The incline at top left leads to the observation platform, which was built by staff from the department's Swan Coastal District, in conjunction with the Friends of Brixton Street Wetlands.
Photo – Marie Lochman

Right Small isolated populations of the weed *Spartina* were removed by hand.
Photo – Robyn Phillimore



by WATSCU, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders. This plan aims to help maintain the high conservation values of the site through controlling fire frequency and using fire-control methods that promote the best regeneration of the bushland. The department also prepares Interim Recovery Plans for threatened ecological communities to help guide their future management. These plans outline the most urgent actions needed to reduce threats to communities. Funding has been provided by sources such as the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) and Wetland Conservation Funds.

Weeds

Another major threat to the native flora and to the plant communities of the Brixton Street wetlands is invasion and competition from bulbous weeds, such as *Spartina*, *Watsonia* and *Ficaria*. Options for controlling these weeds, which grow closely among native plants

in a wetland situation, are limited. The Environmental Weeds Action Network, in conjunction with the Friends and the department, undertook a three-year, NHT-funded program to conduct research on methods of controlling some of these weeds, set up a bush regeneration demonstration site, and make management recommendations for weed control. Under this project, dense infestations of weeds were sprayed with chemicals and small isolated populations of weeds in undisturbed areas were removed by hand.

The Brixton Street wetlands are not yet vested in the Conservation Commission, so management of the wetlands remains the responsibility of all the area's stakeholders. However, the department will continue to facilitate

meetings with the stakeholders and assist the Friends group wherever possible.

The Friends of Brixton Street Wetlands are to be congratulated for their tireless work and commitment to the area. Their work is a great example of community support for the environment and of the positive changes that volunteers are able to make.

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