

# FRIENDS OF PERRY LAKES NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2026



**PlantFest**26  
See Page 8 for Save The Date



## Message from the Chair

Walking around the lakes this summer has been a pleasure compared with last summer. It has been so pleasing to see higher water levels and the birdlife associated with them. The revegetation around the lakes is also having a positive effect. Over the last few weeks, I have seen quendas making use of revegetated areas around West Lake, including a juvenile that ran from under one of 'Tony's logs' into a revegetated area on the west side of the lake. We can all be proud of the role that Friends of Perry Lakes has played in achieving these results but there is still much to be done.

The quendas that are spreading around the Reserve have 'moved in' from Bold Park. As Perry Lakes Reserve and Bold Park are contiguous, if not continuous, ecosystems, I believe that concept should be promoted with a long-term view of making changes in the Reserve that will encourage, and possibly facilitate, more wildlife to move between both areas.

With the weather cooling, weed control and revegetation with native plant seedlings will become a larger part of our activity. I hope that all members will consider taking part in these activities and I look forward to discussing our previous and future contributions to the management and development of Perry Lakes Reserve with you.

The committee is still working towards increasing member numbers and is currently considering ways in which membership can be enhanced. Our new secretary, Caroline Mitchell, will be dealing with membership issues and can be contacted if any arise. We are also planning enhancements to our education and social programmes. Members are welcome to contact me, or any other committee member, if they have suggestions about how membership of FoPL could be enhanced.

Martyn French - [chair@friendsofperrylakes.org](mailto:chair@friendsofperrylakes.org)



Martyn French  
Chair

### STRATEGIC PLAN

Our reserve is managed by the Town of Cambridge under the Town of Cambridge's Perry Lakes Management Plan 2021-31. To read this plan visit [this link](#).

### GET IN TOUCH

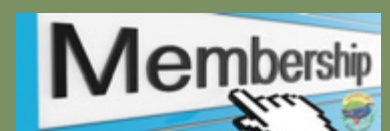
Follow or join all our sites and like, comment and share our posts. As always your questions and comments on any post are welcome. See page 10 of this newsletter to have your say on our future communications.



## Membership special

As we approach the end of our membership year (30 June 2026), we're offering a special deal for everyone who renews or joins from 1 May 2026, your membership will take you through to 30 June 2027.

Members enjoy free entry to educational talks and nature walks, complimentary catering at weeding and planting events and many more benefits. To join follow [this link](#).



**26/27**  
**Memberships**  
**On Sale 1st May**

## Message from the Science Officer

Water levels in Perry Lakes have varied more in the last year than at any time in the past 50 years.

East Lake dried completely (to about 2.5m above sea level) in early 2025 when in previous years it had been maintained over summer by groundwater pumped into the lake by the Town of Cambridge, or by groundwater dewatering during the construction of Eden West's basement car park. In September 2025 it peaked at 4.39m after the wettest winter in 30 years and substantial inflow from West Lake.



West Lake almost dried in January 2025 and reached 4.41m in September 2025. This was due to a combination of the relatively wet 2025 winter and pumping of water from the Herdsman Main Drain (HMD). Once levels in West Lake exceed 3.85m, water flows into East Lake via a balance pipe between the lakes. This flow is most common in late winter and spring but re-started in late March 2026 after 70mm of rainfall and pumping from the HMD raised West Lake. As a result, water levels in the lakes are high this April and the chances of either lake drying is low, despite the Bureau of Meteorology's forecast of unseasonably hot and dry conditions for 2026.

Citizen Scientists have been able to estimate the water balance of each lake – that is the quantity of each inflow and outflow. This has been made easier by the installation of continuous water level recorders in both lakes by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation.

FoPL has also been carrying out water quality measurements at 8 sites in the lakes since June 2025. We later purchased a meter that can detect phosphate levels above 0.1 mg/L, which is 67% higher than the maximum desirable level for water in lakes. While not ideal for long term phosphorus monitoring, it detects levels that should trigger remedial action to mitigate the heightened risk of a toxic algal bloom.

High water levels in West Lake on 30th March 2026 and a pelican indicating the likely presence of carp.



VISIT OUR [WEBSITE](#) FOR THE LATEST INFORMATION

## Message from the Science Officer (cont)

The phosphate levels in the HMD have risen since 2019 and are now often above the trigger level of 0.06 mg/L. If the average HMD water concentration is 0.1 mg/L, then about 33 kg of P is added by the HMD water each year. If it is twice that (i.e. 0.2 mg/L), which was the reading on 12th April 2026, it would be 66 kg/y.

One option to remove P is to harvest living Typha bulrushes or Azolla water ferns. They contain about 0.5% P on a dry weight basis so to remove 33 kg of P would require about 6.6 tonnes dry weight be removed each year. On a wet weight basis, this would be about 20 tonnes. If this is infeasible, other methods may be required to remove the P from the water (e.g. clays which have been modified to fix P; crushed limestone added near the inlet to help remove incoming P).

The Citizen Science effort will be enhanced using funding by a Community Stewardship Grant. This will enable more water quality samples to be analysed and communicated via an enhanced website.



Photo courtesy of Harrison Osgarby

### Help us build a picture of birdlife at Perry Lakes

We're looking for locals to join a new bird survey group and it might just change the way you see Perry Lakes.

There's a difference between walking past the lakes and really watching them. When you're surveying, you slow down. You start noticing which birds are feeding where, whether the reed beds are busy, whether familiar faces from last month are back again. It's the same park – but you see it completely differently.

Over 83 bird species have been recorded at Perry Lakes Reserve, but we still have gaps in our knowledge - whether certain birds are breeding successfully, how numbers are changing over time and season. That kind of consistent, local knowledge is exactly what good reserve management depends on.

We're putting together a small group of regulars to help fill those gaps. About 40 minutes a month, at a time that suits you. No experience necessary - just a genuine interest in the place and a willingness to show up. Everything you record goes into our citizen science program and feeds directly into how the reserve is looked after.

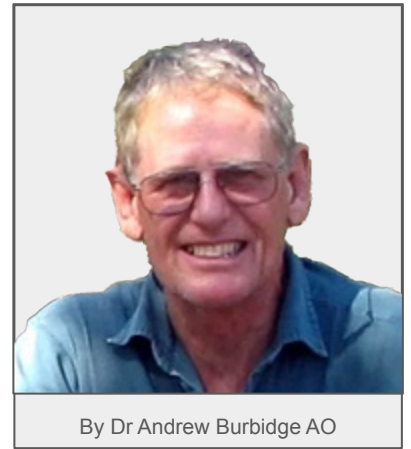
Scan the QR code to register your interest or click [here](#).



## Message from the Wildlife Officer

By Dr Andrew Burbidge AO

As summer and autumn progress, it's usual for Swan Coastal Plain wetlands to reduce their water level and even dry out. West Lake is rising, with rain and the input from the Herdsman Main Drain increasing water levels such that the balance pipe between the lakes is flowing. East Lake water levels are also rising but not as quickly. Neither lake dried over summer this year.



With water shallower than in late winter, more wading birds have been arriving and feeding in both lakes. Australian White Ibis, Great Egrets, Nankeen Night Herons and White-faced Herons are all present, at least some of the time. Duck numbers increased – this is typical of late summer as inland wetlands dry.

The major recent change in waterbird species has been the presence of Australian Pelicans, Little Pied Cormorants and Little Black Cormorants, all feeding on the carp that have established from eggs that came in with water from the Herdsman Main Drain. These three species of waterbirds were rare previously at Perry Lakes. Carp are an introduced species and feed by sucking soft sediment from the bottom of the lakes into their mouths, where food items are separated and retained and the sediments are ejected. This habit often leads to a suspension of sediment and nutrients in the water where carp are feeding. It also reduces the availability of food to native species.

Later in the year we will attempt to help Oblong Turtles nest closer to the lakes, by raking leaf litter and small braches from suitable sandy places. Logs have been positioned, mostly on the lake side of the paths around the lakes. Research has shown that when looking for a nest site, turtles may nest when they come up against an obstacle. If we can get turtles to nest near the lakes, rather than walking up to 500 m or more looking for a nest site, it will reduce the probability of road deaths and attack by foxes, ravens and dogs. Yet another reason why dogs should always be on a lead at Perry Lakes.



**Left** - Nankeen Night Heron has recently been spotted in the lake.

Photo courtesy of Ian Stewart. Follow Ian on Instagram.



## Message from the Works Coordinator

Activities over the last quarter have included weeding and mulching across all revegetation sites plus some watering of young plants in the 2025 planting area. Our volunteer watering supplements the fortnightly watering which Town of Cambridge (ToC) has provided but which appears insufficient to keep many plants alive. ToC has agreed that weekly watering of recent plantings would be better and this is planned for next summer.

The fantastic effort of our volunteers has kept the weeds at bay (at least for the moment!) and so for the Whole Group Weeding morning in March we took time out for a walk-and-talk covering water levels and quality, bird activities and an overview of the revegetation programme – followed of course by an excellent and well attended morning tea.



By Tony Harding

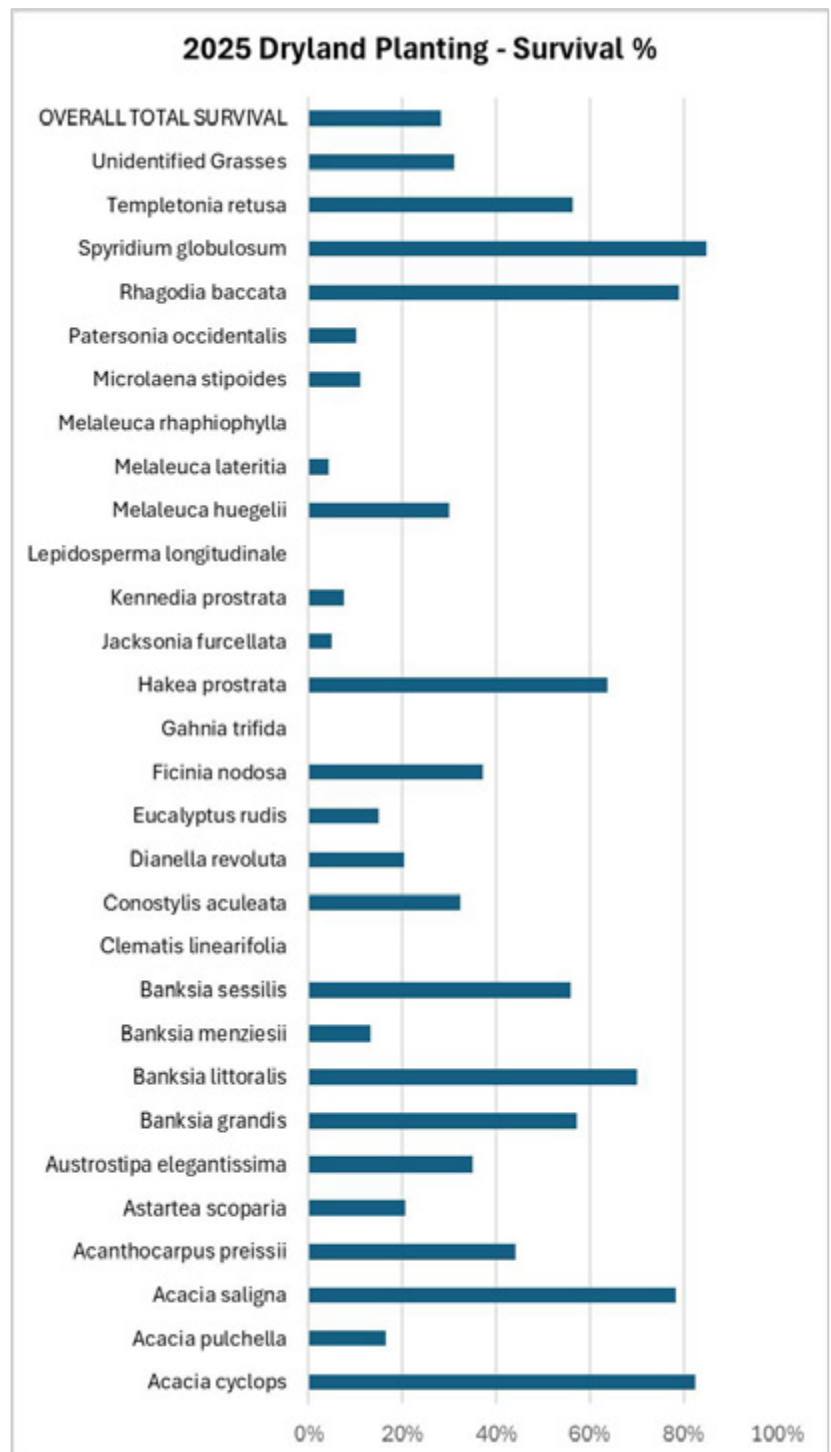
A survival count of the 2025 planting has been completed with dryland planting (away from lake margin) showing an overall survival of ~30% but with rates varying drastically between species; eg. ~80% survival for species such as *Spyridium*, *Rhagodia*, and *Banksia littoralis*, to <20% for species such as *Acacia pulchella*, *Banksia menziesii*, and *Patersonia occidentalis*. Unfortunately, our 2025 wetland planting (mainly sedges) at the lake edge has largely been inundated by high water levels with most plants drowning. Learnings from this are (i) to better predict lake levels and (ii) select taller plants which can better keep their heads above water.

While the drowning of sedges and the overall dryland plant survival of 30% is a setback, the 2025 planting still looks promising and will fill out in months and years to come.

A graph of the survival count is shown to the right.

The consequence of this survival variation will be dominance of hardy species such as *Rhagodia* and *Acacia saligna* and while this achieves impressive revegetation cover, it means the flora-diversity is somewhat restricted in relation to the original extensive plant list.

This survival count will be useful to guide future plantings in the way of improved care of sensitive species as well as particular plant selection.



## Message from the Works Coordinator (cont)

Discussions are underway with ToC regarding the next batch of 5,000 plants for winter 2026 planting. It is proposed the main FoPL Planting Weekend will be held on the Saturday and Sunday mornings of 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> June so mark this in your diaries for another PlantFest session down at Perry Lakes!

Visitors to Perry Lakes will have for some time noticed the large number of fallen tree limbs and the consequent sound of buzzing chain saws and woodchippers during clean up. Right now there appears no clear explanation why so many limbs are dropping.

ToC generally woodchip these to provide mulch for revegetation areas and across the Reserve but, after discussion with ToC, some of the larger logs have recently been retained as "habitat logs" to provide shelter, habitat and nutrient-return as they eventually rot. Look out for these on the edge of some of our revegetation areas when you next walk through the park!



By Tony Harding

### LOOK THE PART AND PROTECT YOURSELF



Perfect for any rugged outdoor activity, we have new stock of our high-quality and rather stylish work shirts, available in mens and womens sizes. Each shirt features a beautifully embroidered FoPL logo and plenty of zippered pockets.

Order via our website or the form on this [link](#).

### First session of the year and we're off to a great start

Sunday 19 April, our weeding group was back at Perry Lakes for the first time in 2026. It was a good turnout with familiar faces, welcome new ones and a morning that reminded us why this work is worth doing.

Weeding might be one of the quieter parts of what we do, but it makes a real difference. Clearing invasive plants gives our natives the space, light, and soil they need to get on with growing and each session makes our Reserve a little healthier.

The highlight of the morning? That would be Nina, who arrived, assessed the situation, and got straight to work - no fuss, no hesitation, just gloves on and weeds out...before taking control of the barrow brigade. If that's not the spirit of Friends of Perry Lakes, we don't know what is.

As usual we followed the session with a free morning tea back at The Shed.

Thanks to everyone who came along. Our next session date will be Sunday May 17 and further details will be posted [here](#) and on our socials shortly - we'd love to see you there.

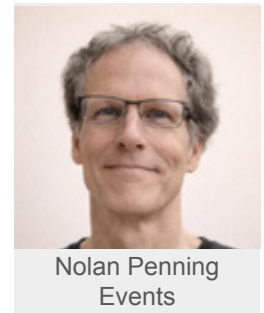


(Above) Weeding is fun for the whole family and Nina joined us to prove it and (below) A very happy group of volunteers with a job well done.



## Message from the Events Officer

Our major focus in the coming weeks will be PlantFest26, where we'll come together to plant thousands of native seedlings. This is a real community effort that has a huge impact on the park, and with more than 16,000 plants already in the ground thanks to your involvement, every weekend like this directly improves our Reserve.



To get you in the mood, you are invited to a Pre-PlantFest revegetation and rewilding information evening at the Cambridge Bowling Club on 25 May. This is an opportunity to hear on the ground stories from people who are making a positive impact on the environment. Further information below.

# PlantFest<sup>26</sup>

**Save the date!**  
**Saturday June 6**  
**and Sunday June 7,**  
**2026**  
**Our most popular**  
**event returns**

Join us on the weekend of June 6th and 7th at Perry Lakes Reserve for PlantFest26. This year we are looking to build on the success of PlantFest25 and if you've attended one of these events, you'll know better than most what these annual planting weekends mean for Perry Lakes.

There's something quietly rewarding about putting a plant in the ground - knowing that what starts as a small seedling in your hands will one day provide shelter for a quenda, a perch for a honeyeater, or a little more shade along the lake's edge. This year we're adding another 5,000 native seedlings to the 16,000+ our community has already put in the ground, and we'd love you to be part of it.

Join us after the Saturday planting for our famous morning tea and on Sunday stay on for a delicious sausage sizzle (vegetarians catered for). So bring a friend, enjoy the company, and help us make PlantFest26 our biggest yet. Registration details coming soon at [friendsofperrylakes.org](http://friendsofperrylakes.org).

## Pre-PlantFest Members' Evening Monday 25 May

Before we get our hands dirty in June, join us for a special members' evening exploring what revegetation and rewilding look like at very different scales and latitudes. Katja McNeil will share the story of her family's [Lemonade Valley](#) project in Kellerberrin - a 200-hectare native carbon farming and revegetation project in the Central Wheatbelt - while Tony Harding brings a perspective from the other side of the world with his rewilding work in Northumberland. Nolan will then round things off closer to home, reflecting on what's been achieved at Perry Lakes and Bold Park and what the future could hold.

Doors open at 6.15pm, the bar is on us, and we'll wrap by 8.30. This is a members' event, but if you'd like to come along and aren't a member yet, you're welcome to join on the night - please [\[RSVP here\]](#).



## Message from the Communications Officer

Thanks to the Community Stewardship Grant from NRM, we're embarking on a significant upgrade of our digital platforms and there's a lot to be excited about.

### A better membership experience

One of our priorities is redesigning the membership journey from the ground up. You'll get a clearer picture of your benefits and how to make the most of them, renewals will be simpler, and we're working to bring online payments to the platform for the first time.

### A richer, deeper website

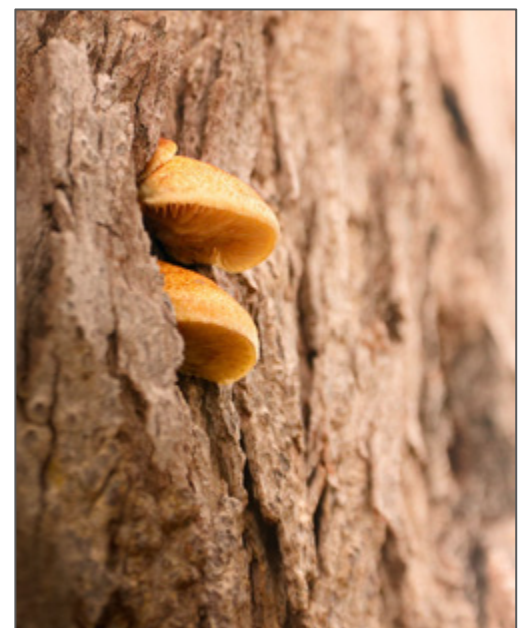
The website is getting a thorough refresh. We want the new site to be richer in content, stronger in supporting our citizen science work, and to tell the story of Perry Lakes and its science more deeply than we've managed before. Expect a fresh look that reflects where FoPL is today and where we're heading.

### The Science Portal

The part we're most excited about is the Science Portal - a dedicated space where all of our monitoring data comes together in one place. Water quality, rainfall, groundwater, bird surveys, fauna observations - all of it, presented in a way that's engaging and accessible for everyone, whether you're a data enthusiast or simply curious about what's happening in your local lakes.

Finally, we have developed our first FoPL Brand Guide, which will bring all our communications to a new design direction. All of this coming soon. If you have questions or ideas, get in touch via: [comms@friendsofperrylakes.org](mailto:comms@friendsofperrylakes.org)

Our Reserve is full of surprises - take a closer look next time you visit. Photos courtesy of [Harris Osgarby](#).



Brett Heil  
Communications

**VISIT OUR WEBSITE  
FOR A TROVE OF  
INFORMATION**

The FoPL website is a valuable resource for information on events, membership, our vision, flora and fauna around the lakes as well as educational videos.

**Visit:**

[friendsofperrylakes.org](http://friendsofperrylakes.org)