

## Shire Reserve #5273 - “The Dawn Atwell Nature Reserve”

Notes provided by Greg Warburton for SWAN field day at Toodyay, 26 August 2017

During 1995 the Toodyay Naturalists' Club Inc. (TNC) began an ambitious task of surveying reserves within the Shire of Toodyay that were vested with the Shire. Many of the reserves were ill defined, some had become appropriated into private land and very few were the subject of any management. Most of the Reserves were severely degraded with significant infestations of weeds and excessive fuel loadings. One particular Reserve that was identified was Crown Reserve 5273. This Reserve was 59 ha in area featuring a range of mostly pristine vegetation types including Banksia woodland in the western section. The Reserve had the purpose as a “camping” and was used by off-road vehicle operators and as an area for dumping rubbish.

TNC member Frank Turnbull lived opposite the reserve and took a keen interest in identifying the flora and fauna within it. Over a number of years he compiled an impressive list of 180 botanical species including a Declared Rare Flora (DRF) an Orchid, *Thelymitra stellata*. Among the fauna listed was *Dasyurus geoffroii* (Chuditch).

With the species list and letters of support from the Wildflower Society of W.A., Department of Environment and Conservation the Toodyay Naturalists' Club met with Shire staff in early 2007 to put forward a compelling argument to change the vesting of the Reserve from “camping” to “conservation”. The request sat with the Shire for two years with no action forth coming. Frank Turnbull left the district and the Reserve 5273 project lost momentum. Then, in 2009 two TNC members including Botanist, Jacqui Lucas began further botanical surveys in the reserve to augment and verify the work by Mr. Turnbull.

In the meantime Reserve 5273 caught the attention of World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-Australia) as a potential demonstration project for the Southwest Australia Ecoregion (SWAE). This globally significant region is recognised as a “hotspot” for bio-diversity with a high number of unique species and on-going threats to their survival. Through the Commonwealth “Caring for Our Country” funding scheme money could be potentially sourced to allow certain rehabilitation and protection work to proceed. Importantly, it would allow for the writing of a management plan and recommendations for the Reserve. There were a number of surveys and working bees within the reserve with WWF staff Carla Swift and Helena Mills and members of the Toodyay Naturalists' Club. Shire Councillor, Bethan Lloyd took a major part of the process to prepare the Management Plan and change the reserve's vesting.

A Draft Management Plan was completed by April 2011 and made available to Toodyay Shire Staff and Councillors. It was essential that council to vote in favour of changing the Reserve's vesting from “camping” to “conservation” because without the change the project would be deemed invalid as a recipient of the CFOC funding. At the April meeting of Council a vote in favour of the change was cast.

At a subsequent meeting of Council a motion was presented that the Reserve be named the “Dawn Atwell Reserve” in honour of founding Club member, conservationist and Toodyay identity of the same name. The council voted in favour of submitting a request to the Geographic Names Committee for approval.

When the name change was finally approved by the Geographic Names Committee working for WWF commenced work began on the design of two interpretive signage panels. With agreement on the final design passed by the TNC Committee an order was placed with a local sign maker. By early September of 2011 the panels plus additional signage were installed along with a picnic table funded by a community grant sometime later.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 2011 at an official ceremony organised by the Toodyay Naturalists' Club the Dawn Atwell Reserve was announced. This occasion represented the culmination of much of work by TNC members and has imparted a level of protection and value for the Reserve not previously recognised. The TNC and the Toodyay Shire continue to manage the reserve for conservation and bushfire safety. The community value the reserve for passive recreation and nature appreciation.