

A greenprint for parks

12 September 2006



Postgraduate students from Flinders are providing some long-term vision for the sterling work of the volunteers who help to maintain and upgrade the State's conservation parks.

Four students from the School of Biological Science's postgraduate Biodiversity courses have recently completed a restoration plan for Scott Creek Conservation Park, in the southern Mount Lofty Ranges.

Biology lecturer Dr Don Driscoll said the 760- hectare park, 30kms south of Adelaide, offered one of the region's most significant havens for native flora and fauna, including 108 threatened plant species.

"It's one of the bigger remnants of natural bushland in the area, and forms an important refuge for biodiversity; it still has numerous bird species that have declined in other areas of the hills," Dr Driscoll said.

The local volunteer body, the Friends of Scott Creek, are involved in a number of revegetation projects that are attempting to reverse and forestall the degradation of the landscape by introduced weeds. Blackberry bushes, in particular, have overgrown stretches of the park's watercourses, displacing the native flora and fauna.

To gain familiarity with the local weeds and a basic understanding of the landscape, the students participated in a number of "working bees" with the volunteers.

The students then selected an area of 25 hectares for an intensive survey, documenting the species of weeds present, the area they covered and whether the infestations appeared to be expanding or stable.

"They have produced a very useful map and report that recommends how best to manage the area. Their report defines the scope of work that needs to be done to get the weeds under control," Dr Driscoll said.

The report's verdict was that the task was "big, but not impossible," he said.

Implementing a five-year plan of eradication by the volunteers would enable most of the weeds to be controlled, but some funding would be needed for contractors to deal with heavy infestations of blackberries and broom along the creek-line.

"It has provided the Friends of Scott Creek with a road-map for fixing up that particular area," Dr Driscoll said.

There are encouraging signs in the sites cleared by the volunteers of blackberries some five to 10 years ago, which now resemble natural tea-tree scrub.

"Quite rare species have been springing back from under the blackberries," Dr Driscoll said. "They're still there - just suppressed or in the seed-bank."

Extending the approach to control the blackberries in all of the park's waterways was estimated by the students to cost \$120,000.

Dr Driscoll said that while volunteers in numerous parks are making some impact on small areas, many groups lack an overview of how much effort is going to be required to reach the

objective of restoring the whole park.

"Projects like this can help to make expectations more realistic," he said.

The project also represented a valuable interaction between the University and the community.

"Rather than just sitting in the office or the lecture theatre learning about restoration, the students are out there doing something useful that can be implemented, and will contribute to restoring these parks," Dr Driscoll said.

CONTACT Friends of Scott Creek <http://homepages.picknowl.com.au/peters/introduction.htm>