

Friends of the National Arboretum Canberra – 2021 Annual General Meeting

Guides' Report from National Arboretum Canberra (late submission)

The Guides' Report is being provided as an addendum following the Friends of the National Arboretum Canberra 2021 AGM. NAC wishes to formally acknowledge the importance of Friends of the National Arboretum Canberra and each guide's much valued support throughout the year.

Over the 2020-2021 financial year the Guiding team has seen many changes. The National Arboretum Canberra updated operating procedures to help oversee staff and visitor safety regarding the COVID19 pandemic. The Arboretum also introduced new COVID19 safe guided visitor experiences.

- During the March-May 2020 COVID19 lockdown all onsite volunteer activities were temporarily ceased. On return to site Guides went above and beyond their duties in supporting new visitor activities and ensuring people's safety was maintained onsite.
- Prior to the introduction of the 2020 Ngala bus tours, consultation was undertaken with Guides to adjust existing guided activities to best complement these new Ngala bus tours, as well as improve compliance with COVID19 health advice:
 - Terrace Talks were rebranded 'Welcome Walks' to attract local/repeat visitors with different walks on the hour visiting parts of the Arboretum close to the Village Centre
 - Welcome Walks were advertised as drop in only events with limited capacity and a QR code was created to capture visitor COVID19 contact tracing details.
 - Forest Walks dates were changed from Wednesday, Saturday and Sun to Monday to the new dates of Saturday and Sunday to capture peak recreational visitation periods.
 - Forest Walk changes to meet COVID19 regulations included: reducing visitor tour capacity from 20 people to 8 people; tour bookings with a nominal fee were introduced to help ensure contact details were recorded and to help improve visitor attendance rate (monetary value to activity); a portable microphone was made available for tour guides to better project their voices and to help support social distancing; and a QR code was introduced to collect contact tracing details for people at the tour.
 - Long Forest Walks, where possible, were linked to existing community themed events to help attract new audiences. Some community tour theme examples included: National Eucalypt Day, Canberra Tree week, World Nature Conservation Day, etc. These tour capacities were reduced from 25 people to 12 people and a nominal tour fee was introduced.
 - Ngala bus tours, kindly sponsored by the Friends of National Arboretum Canberra launched on Wednesday 9 September 2020. Paid tours run at 1.30pm every Wednesday to Sunday (plus Monday public holidays) and bookings are essential. A bus COVID19 safe plan was introduced and all visitors were encouraged to use the special QR code to capture COVID19 contact tracing details.
- When the Ngala bus tour is operated by volunteers, there is a driver and guide rostered together. We are extremely grateful to all the volunteers and guides who operate the Ngala bus tours for the public. To become a Ngala bus tour driver requires a health check, the ability to obtain a Public Bus

Driver licence as well as a Ngala bus induction. The induction includes agreeing to follow Standard Operating Procedures that enables Ngala bus tours to run safely. Guiding on the Ngala bus also requires a bus induction and signing separate Standard Operating Procedure documentation. Since our initial training for volunteer Ngala bus Drivers and Guides, we have had additional volunteers help with the delivery of Ngala tours. We are very fortunate currently to have 24 staff and volunteers trained to either drive or guide the Ngala bus.

- While launching the Ngala tours during a pandemic was challenging given reduced travellers and concern about gathering in enclosed spaces, we saw strong visitor participation in Ngala tours from March 2021. This was supported by increased promotion and placement of Ngala brochures across tourism destinations across the Canberra region. Unfortunately, a very wet July impacted participation in Ngala tours.

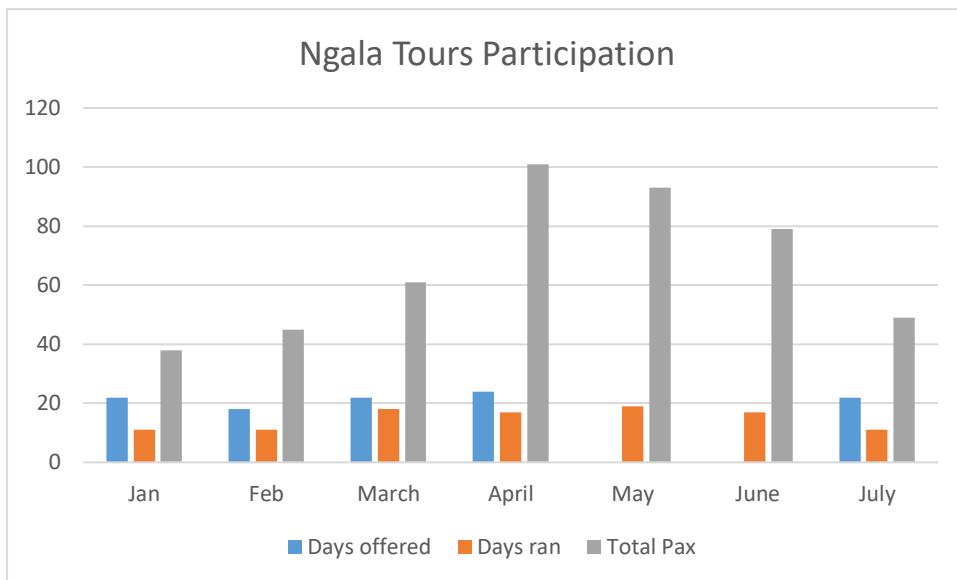


Figure 1: Summary of participation in Ngala Discovery tour for year to date.

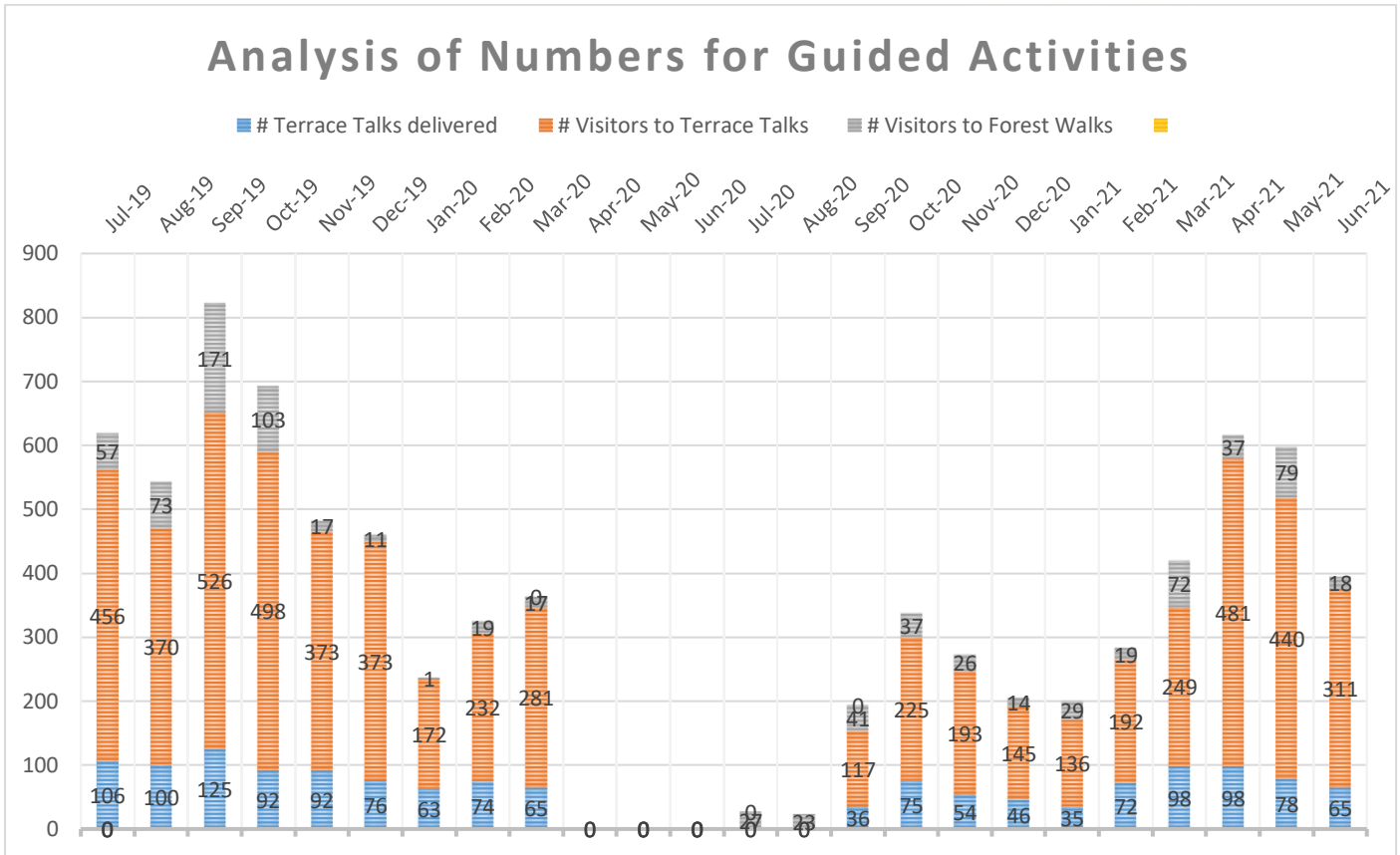


Figure 2: Last two financial years data for Terrace Talk/Welcome Walk data, punctuated by the 2020 lockdown

The following key dates illustrate important changes to our onsite operations, both ceased activities and reintroduced activities with increased safety measures. They also show Guides’ resilience as we adjusted to varying ‘new normal’ over time.

Daily operations in the Village Centre has changed dramatically since March 2020, and we thank our team of Guides who have helped us to make incremental changes to improve operations. The increased visitor check in requirements for COVID19 contact tracing was a large adjustment. I’d like to again thank our Guides who have supported the Arboretum and Visitor Services staff in multiple ways over the past year. We’d also like to thank Guides who have come forward with suggestions, questions and great new ideas regarding the process of improving onsite systems and practices.

Key dates:

- 23 March 2020: ACT COVID19 lockdown enacted.
- 30 May 2020: Staged reopening of Arboretum buildings and activities after lockdown
- 6 June 2020: Village Centre guide concierge shifts returned to support visitors
- 12 July 2020: Forest Walks offered with new safety measures in place
- 1 September 2020: Welcome Walks launched with new safety measures in place. A staged return of three visitor daily tours (not six visitor daily tours) offered in the mornings. Guide concierge shifts in the afternoon were offered to complement advertised tours.
- 9 September 2020: Ngala bus tours launched with increased safety measures in place.

Volunteer hours basic snapshot:

Volunteer Activity	January 21	February 21	March 21	April 21	May 21	June 21	Half year summary - sub total YTD
Bonsai	437	476	464	359	476	388	2600
VIP Coach Tour	-	-	9	4.5	-	1	14.5
Concierge Village Centre	15	39	21.5	25	12.5	26	139
Forest Walks	10	11	6	11	21	8	67
Long Forest Walks	-	2.5	3	2	13.5	0	21
Ngala bus tours	22	32	42	31	48	30	205
Welcome Walks	82	88	72	82	84	80	488
Working bees	-	220	286	290	152	142	1090
Discovery Kitchen Garden (not including fig picking and processing)	73	77.3	88.8	119.7	71 plus 2 market stalls (76.5 + 63 hours)	71	640.3
Total summary hours	639	945.8	992.3	924.2	1017.5	746	5264.8

Figure 3: This table details the total hours spent by volunteers on each activity

The table above showcases Arboretum volunteers have continued to excel as an essential element of the National Arboretum, contributing a total of over 5,000 hours (not including some of the behind the scenes work done by the Harvest Group, First Garden Club, Cactus and Succulent Society, Friends National Arboretum NAC Book update, Warm Trees, meeting attendance amongst many others!)

Trends in Volunteer Facilitated Programs

Ngala Tours:

It can be clearly seen from Figure 2 there been a steady increase in Ngala bus tour bookings from January 2021 through to April 2021. From 2020 to 2021 we have seen an Ngala bus average increase of 21 guests per month.

It is also worth highlighting that on the 26th of March 2021 the Ngala Bus was so popular that two tours were provided on that day to accommodate guests.

This should be seen as a testament to the Ngala bus Guide's and bus driver's excellent presentation and skill set, as well as the continued Ngala bus tour marketing promotion.



Welcome Walks:

Village Centre Welcome Walks have shown a large visitor number increase in comparison to last financial year when COVID-19 prevented many tours from running. However, we have seen visitor numbers increase since January 2021, showing a total increase of 308 guests per month from January 21 to April 21. We publicly acknowledge the tremendous Guides' effort in accommodating this visitor increase, as we slowly return to a temporary state of normalcy following COVID-19 during 2020. The Welcome Walks continuously received high praise from visitors and many Guides have reported guests joining two or three of their morning talks/walks!

Forest Walks:

Not only have the Long Forest Walks been extremely successful (with the last two tours selling 15 from 15 tickets available and 12 from 15 tickets available, but our weekly Forest Walks have also been popular with around 30 guests each month, showing an average growth of 14 per month.

ENDS.

14 September 2021