SPRING has sprung and the knowledge of its appearance can avoid local battle through another winter as the sky gets lighter you can see the suns warmth upon you and witness the greenery and growth of nature. However, for the majority of farmers, winter was a disappointment with rainfall below average in most regions including inland areas of the Great Southern.

It was one of WA’s driest winters on record but forecasts for the region having it tracking to be a standard spring which is good news. For residents, if they haven’t already, it’s time to prepare the garden for a variety of flowers and seedlings with the current four seasons in one day conducive for growing. And get the children and grand-children involved – research the best growing points, prepare the garden areas, take a trip to get the soils and get dirt under your fingernails for a good cause.

Then, in a few months, harvest your fruit and vegetables, planted next to a colourful flower display, for tasty and healthy meals. Spring into it.

Ian Bracke
Zaktor

New Beginnings

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Cross-cultural ecology

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Intuitive farming

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Farm-to-plate

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Raising farming’s profile

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Front Cover: Photography by Francesca van der Horst.

On the Land – Spring 2020

TIRMING has proven to be the essence of everything this year, and luckily for PhD student Susannah Cramp, her travel timing has been perfect.

Originally from the UK, Ms Cramp found herself in regional WA to undertake further environmental science studies. A mere three weeks before international borders shut down, allowing her to commence and continue the studies she had been so eager to get to.

Currently participating in fieldwork and research in Albany with the University of Western Australia, Ms Cramp reflected on how she got to where she is today with On the Land.

“I’ve always loved the outdoors,” she said.

“Hiking, being in nature... I’ve always been interested in how animals work and how they interact.”

Ms Cramp completed a conservation degree at University College London and soon took an interest in going on exchanges to Perth and then Albany.

She described the South West as a biodiversity hotspot and was keen to explore it further.

“What’s so interesting about this course is that it looks at how humans interact with the environment; all the stories are really interesting,” Ms Cramp said.

There’s also very little documented in terms of ecological knowledge incorporated into conservation, so I think it would be cool to continue building a cross-cultural ecological hub.

Ms Cramp has chosen to study the cross-cultural ecology of granite outcrops.

In particular, Ms Cramp is focusing on lizard traps in the Two People’s Bay area. Her project is titled Cross-cultural conservation of ancient outcrops.

A Multiple Evidence Base Investigation of Lizard Traps, an example of Human Niche Construction.

She said there was only one other published research paper about the topic and hoped her paper could expand the documented knowledge of lizard traps as well as incorporate Indigenous knowledge.

A lizard trap is defined as a slab of granite propped up by low dry stone walls to make a cavity behind them.

“People might just think, that’s just a rock and lake, but what they don’t realise is that they are taking an artefact,” Ms Cramp said.

“Ms Cramp said that if you lack in that care of country, it’s such an incredible place and I’m really grateful to be here.”

Ms Cramp will spend the next three to four years embarking on field trips, interviewing people and learning more about the cross-cultural connections and signficance of lizard traps and their surrounding landscapes.

On the Land – Spring 2020

Words: Ashleigh Fielding
Photos: Susannah Cramp & Ashleigh Fielding

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Mr Hoadley was one of the first WA producers to make natural wines, a trend that reached dizzying heights at the end of the last decade. The Denmark winemaker bottled his first pet nat in 2015 before expanding his range to a selection of five by 2018.

For the uninitiated, pet nat or petillant naturel (French for sparkling natural) is an ancient method of production where the wine is bottled without any preservatives before primary fermentation is complete. These sulphur-free wines had broad appeal in the inner-city wine bars and trendy wine bars in Melbourne and Sydney before exploding in popularity across the rest of Australia.

“I never thought natural wines or pet nats would become as popular as they were,” Mr Hoadley told On the Land.

“When I made my first one, I heard about those styles, but I thought they were,” Mr Hoadley told On the Land.

“I just started making them to experiment. I hadn’t tried any pet nats or orange wines when I made my first one. I heard about those styles, but I never thought natural wines or pet nats would become so popular as they were,” Mr Hoadley told On the Land.

“Working for Castelli, I got to see the breadth of the region and the way so many varieties perform so well.”

“Starting out as a side project, La Violetta now supplies some of the best wine bars and restaurants across the country.”

“Unlike many family-run winemakers, Mr Hoadley doesn’t own a vineyard. Instead, he scours the Great Southern each year in search of grape varieties with a ‘special character’.”

“Working for Castelli, I got to see the breadth of the region and the way so many varieties perform so well.”

“I’m just glad I found a way to fulfill the really creative part of winemaking.”

Words & photos: Michael Roberts

On the Land – Spring 2020

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A 5 ONE of the oldest authentic farmers markets in WA, the Albany Farmers Market has grown and flourished from its humble beginnings 18 years ago to a wide-ranging and seasonal market serving the Great Southern community.

Founded in April 2002, the market was born of necessity as local growers found an unexploited niche for direct farm-to-plate selling.

Founding member, former impressario and past stallholder Howard Shapland said the market was a unique opportunity that a handful of farmers grabbed onto with both hands.

“We didn’t do so much as start it, it’s more being a matter of a group of people being in the right place at the right time and seeing an opportunity that we could do for them,” he said.

“I saw a small beginnings, but we could see the potential. At that time horticulture was in a bit of an indulgence, there were a lot of agricultural towns losing their populations and it wasn’t that bright, but the farmers market just came at the right time to expand or diversify into a local market.

“The focus on supplying fresh, local produce direct to customers was an essential aspect of the market from its inception.

“The first market had about seven stallholders and the response from the public and locals was amazing, so I really jumped on it,” Mr Shapland said.

“It was a reciprocal thing, so it just really grew from there. We had quite a variety of stalls in those days. We had wildflowers and mushrooms, two or three vegetable growers and organic bermuda and all sorts of things.”

Co-owner of Summer House Supplies, Malcolm Traill had similar memories of the Albany Farmers Market as one of the last founding members to still be involved in the market from its inception.

“When we first started it was very low-key and in a different location, back on Aberdeen Street. So it took a little while to get going and get the word around. But the farmers market just came at the right time to expand or diversify into a local market.

“The focus on supplying fresh, local produce direct to customers was an essential aspect of the market from its inception.

“The first market had about seven stallholders and the response from the public and locals was amazing, so I really jumped on it,” Mr Traill said.

“It’s been a fantastic journey. The direct contact with customers and providing them with the freshest produce possible is my favourite thing,” he said.

“People come to expect.”

“They’ve been long-term vegetable growers in the district and they’re teaching us how to do everything and introduced us to all the people of the market and helped us.

“So we were lucky that at the time we had a lot of local farmers and local chefs and so the whole thing took off.

“Mr Mostert said while taking on the project had its daunting moments, the new experience and customer interaction has made it all worthwhile.

“1It’s been a big learning curve, especially because the marketing side of things is different,” he said.

“But I love having interactions with the customers and being able to share fresh, healthy products with them and knowing they really love it and are keen to come back week after week.

“It’s the satisfaction that you’re supplying a product that really’s well received.”

The market has also given space for producers to experiment with their produce and receive direct customer feedback.

Scott and Nicole Clements of Pureganics Pure have been milking cows and sheep on the north side of the Porongurups for the past eight years.

Mr Clements said being involved with the market every week allowed the pair to bring new flavours and inspiration to their customers every week.

“I’ve been at the markets for five years. It’s been fantastic. We can trial new ideas and introduce new flavours because you get such honest feedback about what customers want,” he said.

“It’s grown from where we were both working full-time elsewhere and trying to work with the sheep but that has slowly progressed. So now we do still do contract work but now do full-time and have a few people that help us out.”

Mr Shapland hoped to see a bright future for the Albany Farmers Market with locals and tourists alike continuing to support the farming community.

“It’s been a fantastic journey. The direct contact with customers and providing them with the freshest produce possible is my favourite thing,” he said.

“They’ve come to understand how much is involved in trying to grow a product and get it to a retail situation because it’s not a matter of just planting it and picking it, you’ve got the weather and all sorts of things you’re fighting against.

“We need to keep promoting the positives of supporting local farmers and local produce.”
WHILE a number of local events were cancelled once the COVID-19 pandemic hit home, preparations remained intact for a livestream 20—producer forum, co-hosted by Stirling is Close Partners (SCP) and the WA Producers’ Co-operative (WAPC).

The research and development forum was put on hold while WA Producers’ Co-operative (WAPC) remained in full swing for Livestock Forum, which aired a couple of months ago.

They were accepted into session four of Australia’s Farmer Warrior, which aired a couple of months ago.

The sisters were lucky to attend the Perth Tryouts after they had completed it earlier than expected.

Ms Varley reached the second heat and Ms Smith made it to the semi-final.

“I'd been doing sneaky training behind Chani's back,” Ms Varley, who stayed on the family farm, laughed.

Filming was conducted months before the show hit television and keeping it quiet was a funny secret to keep.

“I hate trampolines now!” she laughed.

Words & photo: Ashleigh Fielding
Art and Craft of Brewing

WHAT do you do when you’re done with the corporate life? Start brewing beer of course.

Husband and wife duo Brian and Julie Fitzgerald are amongst a small cohort of Western Australian brewers who have distanced their day jobs in recent years for a life working with hops and yeast.

After an “epiphany” trip to Belgium in 2006, the Fitzgeralds were inspired by a beer culture that was nothing like they had experienced before.

“We were bitten by the quality, the history, the passion – the fact that when you would go to any restaurant, the waiter would tell you the brewery with its own style and its own glassware paired with food,” Mr Fitzgerald said.

“It was everything you have with wine but in a beer world. Brian and I had intended on buying a vineyard in Australia, but we decided to bring this kind of sophisticated product to WA.”

“We saw a huge gap in the market.”

After years of careful planning, Mr and Mrs Fitzgerald started Artisan Brewing in 2014 and haven’t taken a backwards step since.

The boutique Denmark producers recently won a three-peat of trophies at the Perth Royal Beer Awards, taking out best European draught for the third year running.

Artisan’s Quad 2018, an 11 per cent Belgian quadrupel, beat entries from the likes of craft beer heavyweights Pension Brewing to win the coveted prize.

The big Belgian brew, which is full of malt and fresh flavours, continues to bring home the goods for Mr and Mrs Fitzgerald, who compare their European-style beer to a fine wine.

“For us to call ourselves boutique brewers we need to be creating something unique because we don’t want to be like anyone else,” Mrs Fitzgerald said.

“Some people think beer doesn’t age, but if you brew the right type of beer, the barrel ageing allows us to have beers that have been in barrel for five years.”

One of the smallest brewing operations in WA, the Fitzgeralds refer to themselves as “gypsy brewers” because that business model is to make beer in any space that will fill them.

For the past five years they’ve been brewing their craft at Boston Brewery in the southern suburbs, the venue because of their proximity to the breweries weekend to spews in production.

“Boston maintains the environment and we operate in it,” Mr Fitzgerald said.

“That way we get to focus on what’s in the glass rather than worrying about the equipment.”

“It has worked really well. We collaborate and bounce ideas off each other.”

Artisan’s landlords also collected some silverware at the 2020 Perth Royal Beer awards.

Boston Brewing was awarded seven gold medals and three trophies by the judges, who scored each beer on aroma, flavour, appearance, style and technical quality.

Blasta Brewing took home this year’s Champion Beer for its Chablis 5.4%.

“Blasta’s owner Steven Russell quit his day job as a FFO worker to start the Burswood microbrewery.

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“Blasta’s owner Steven Russell quit his day job as a FFO worker to start the Burswood microbrewery.

Working with different yeasts to make his Belgian ales, Mr Fitzgerald said craft brewing is a mix between the creative and the technical.

“Working with yeast is as much an art as it is a science,” he said.

“It is challenging, that’s why a lot of breweries don’t work it out. It’s live and develops over time. It’s a technically challenging style to brew.

“A lot of other brewers just use one yeast and then add different hops or malts for flavour, whereas with us it’s different yeasts. It has personally, it behaves differently from one to the next.

Mr Fitzgerald loves yeast so much he imports it from the United States as a distributor and promoter.

“We aren’t shy about what yeast we use, whereas other brewers keep it a secret,” he said.

“In Belgium you can find hundreds of different strains of yeast and everyone is a little bit different.”

While Australian beer is mainly targeted at a male population, Mr Fitzgerald said Belgian brews were more suited to a broader audience.

“Many women stop drinking commercial beers because they have no flavour, or they are over-carbonated,” she said.

“We try to educate people and bring them along.”

Although Artisan’s production is almost entirely oriented on draught beer, Mr Fitzgerald said the company was looking to expand into packaged goods.

“That’s going to be the big pivot,” he said.

“We’ve wanted to do it for a long time; we just haven’t had the bandwidth.

“Could give us a chance to look at the company and see where we want to take it. That’s our next phase. It’s very exciting.”

“We’ve never harder to be in our business, but we love what we do. We hope what people see in a glass shows how much we are committed to quality.”

“”We need to be creating something unique because we don’t want to be like anyone else.”

Words & photos: Michael Roberts
Unusually heavy August rains saved a lot of the Great Southern’s canola from a dire fate this year. In Frankland River, the crop’s golden glow was particularly stunning.