



6th October 2009

Attention: Veteran Tree Group

Dear Tree Friends

As I know many of you are aware it has been my intention for almost two years to bring together like minded people in the cause of raising awareness of the importance and value of older (often but not always larger) trees in our urban environment. This circular letter is the first step in what I suspect, based on the experience of similar groups overseas, will prove to be a long journey.

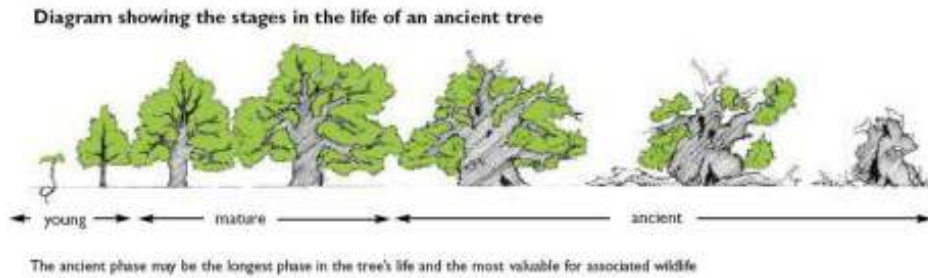
Before outlining what the role and function of the Veteran Tree Group might be, I think it is helpful and important to try to define at least in general some terms and definitions;

What do we mean by “Veteran Tree” and why not call them “Ancient Trees”?

The terms Ancient and Veteran have been somewhat interchangeable in the past, Ancient is used to describe trees that meet the following criteria:

- Trees of interest biologically, aesthetically or culturally because of their age.
- Trees in the final stage of their life (a period that can extend for more than 100yrs).
- Trees that are old relative to others of the same species.





In terms of the trees that we might conceivably be dealing with in Queensland I personally feel that the most appropriate label is Veteran.

A veteran tree can be defined as: ' a tree that is of interest biologically, culturally or aesthetically because of its age, size or condition.'

A veteran tree is a survivor that has developed some of the features found on an ancient tree, not necessarily as a consequence of time, but of its life or environment.

Ancient veterans are ancient trees, not all veterans are old enough to be ancient. A veteran may be a young tree with a relatively small girth in contrast to an ancient tree, but bearing the 'scars' of age such as decay in the trunk, branches or roots, fungal fruiting bodies, or dead wood.

I don't want to fill this letter with superfluous information, things that many of you are very familiar with...*however* I would like to remind you of the unique position that our oldest trees occupy in the wider environment. They are keystone organisms forming the framework that supports the web of interactions making up the fabric of a wider ecosystem.



The Role of the VTG

- **The aim is for the VTG to become the 1st stop for anyone interested in Veteran Trees for whatever reason –**
- Collect and collate information on what Veteran Trees exist within our own local area.
- Provide free access to world's best practice to inform management decisions relating to Veteran Trees.
- Provide direction and guidance for anyone interested in Veteran Trees.
- Forge connections and build partnerships with other organizations and groups whose interests and activities lead them to be involved with Veteran Trees.
- Encourage the retention and protection of Veteran Trees
- Increase and enhance the enjoyment everyone can get from experiencing these magnificent trees first hand.

There are two basic tasks ahead of us;

- The collection and collation of data about Veteran Trees in your area, a process that (based on the UK experience) will go on almost indefinitely.
- The creation of information fact sheets or booklets, covering a wide variety of topics;
 - How to recognise Veteran trees,
 - Estimating their age,
 - Explaining their significance,
 - General advice about their management



Although I live and work in Queensland and my primary focus at this stage is to develop the group within the state, the resources we are developing are not limited to state or territory boundaries. The beauty of the internet is that it can enable global access to resources, and the invitation to contribute to this project is being extended to friends and colleagues who share the passion for Veteran Trees no matter what state or territory they are in.

The Blog and Virtual Meetings

I have set up a Blog site for the VTG <http://veterantreegroup.blogspot.com/> and through this very basic (and free) piece of software, aim to make it possible for each of us to have input into the process of developing the VTG and its resources in a way that fits into our own individual busy schedules.

The Blog site is not going to replace using standard email phone or face to face communication but is intended to augment that. It is a very basic, simple, (importantly at this stage) free! and initial format of what I hope will develop into our version of the UK Ancient Tree Forum <http://frontpage.woodland-trust.org.uk/ancient-tree-forum/>. We are just starting out on the Australian journey.

I suspect (and hope) that we may rapidly need to adopt a more advanced web/blog site but feel that a step by step approach is the most practical one.

Time Frames

I hope that in less than 12 months we will be able to publicly launch the VTG at either next years ISAAC conference or Treenet (both in Adelaide in 2010). Given the desire to have input from all those who want to contribute to development and review of the public materials and collection of the data on our own local Veteran Trees, 12 months seems like a reasonable target.



The Veteran Tree Group is not me; it is all of us as a collective with our shared passion for trees. As a group our specific focus will doubtless change over time, and if the overseas experience is anything to go by, our emphasis will grow and develop to include more and more of the connections between our older trees and the wider environment.

If anyone wants to see what might be possible just visit the Ancient Tree Forum <http://frontpage.woodland-trust.org.uk/ancient-tree-forum/> or the Ancient Tree Hunt <http://www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk/> or indeed any of the partnership web/blog sites.

We won't have the same development path as the UK experience; both our natural forests and our cultural history is too different to their's, however our goals are identical.

Informal face to face meetings are being planned for both the Gold Coast and the Brisbane areas in the next 2 months, before the December holidays. I will advise you all of the tentative dates by email.

Yours amongst the trees

Sean Freeman

Arborist and tree hugger.

Please feel free to contact me by phone or email: Ph 0401 641 586

