



COVID-19 is impacting all of our lives.

To remove one small concern, the Society is extending all memberships by three months. That is, no memberships will be due for renewal for the time being.

For further information, please contact our Membership Secretary, Ross Coster, on membership@bluemountains.org.au

2020 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society's 2020 Annual General Meeting was impacted by COVID-19. The virus's rapid spread meant that holding our traditional AGM would not be providing a duty of care to our members.

The Society was faced with either deferring the AGM or conducting it another way. As we can use any technology that gives each of our members a reasonable opportunity to participate, the Management Committee (MC) decided to conduct the 2020 AGM online. This was done by inviting members to register to vote on the motions that were to be proposed at the AGM. We then sent each member, who had registered to vote, a ballot paper containing these motions. The motions, as detailed in the March Hut News, were:

- the adoption of annual accounts
- the appointment of an auditor
- determination of the structure of the 20-21 MC
- changes to the Constitution.

All motions were accepted. All nominations for positions on the 20-21 MC were accepted as there were no multiple nominations for a position. Tara Cameron was elected President.

We say farewell and thank you to Christine Davies (Newsletter Editor), Don Morison (2nd VP), Jeanette Robertson (Admin Officer), Judy Smith (Threatened Species Officer) and Di Shanks (Katoomba Airfield Officer). (The irrepressible Lachlan Garland (President) and Kerry Mills (NP & WH Officer) had stepped down during the year.)

We welcome Caroline Druce (Admin Officer), Susan Crick (Newsletter Editor), Valda Low (Social Media Officer) and Alan Page (2nd VP).

You will find the President's, Nursery and Land Use Reports on our website, together with our revised constitution and details of all our officer holders (also see page 4).

THANK YOU CHRISTINE!

Special thanks is given to Christine Davies for her 24 years as Newsletter Editor. Christine's contribution has been outstanding and her ability to put together a diverse and engaging publication will be sorely missed. Christine became a life member of the Society in 2015.

[Surely this delightful image of Christine wasn't taken when she started editing the Hut News!]



2019/20 Greater Blue Mountains Bushfires

The 2019–20 bushfires across Australia have been devastating. Their extent, duration, timing and ferocity has been unprecedented.

Here in the Blue Mountains the extent of the fires has greatly exceeded any previous recorded fire seasons. Over 80% of the Blue Mountains National Park has been impacted with 63% partly or fully burnt. In the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area of over one million hectares, over 68% has been fully or partly burnt and over 122 million mammals, birds and reptiles have been impacted.

The Society's website now has a webpage that contains a detailed analysis of the bushfires and their impact on the Greater Blue Mountains - including maps, an assessment of areas burnt and the loss of wildlife. This analysis was prepared by Peter Smith. Initial information on recovery and What You Can Do is also there, plus some articles on fire-fighting written by Ian Brown.

We have also gathered credible articles and provide links to these.

You'll find our bushfires webpage here: <https://www.bluemountains.org.au/bushfires.shtml>

The NSW Government has commissioned an independent inquiry into the 2019-20 bushfire season to provide input to NSW ahead of the next bushfire season.

The Society has made a submission to the inquiry that you will find on our submissions webpage: <https://www.bluemountains.org.au/submissions-2020.shtml>

Our submission includes twenty recommendations that range from the obvious (action on climate change, funding for NPWS, and increased resources for fire-fighting); to considerations on methods of hazard reduction and fire-fighting; to much needed research and surveys into biodiversity and threatened species and communities.

Contributors to the submission included Peter & Judy Smith, Ian Brown, Ian Baird, Margaret Baker and Madi Maclean.

I commend this submission to you.

Alan Page,
2nd Vice-President.



Gypsy Lady flying over the Three Sisters during the Ruined Castle Fire



Old Man Banksia (*Banksia serrata*) regrowth

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When Bob Brown was in Katoomba late last year, I asked him what we should do about the logging in the Tarkine. He replied 'Go there! See it for yourself and then you'll know what to do'. So in February my friend and I did as Bob said, and drove out to the Tarkine/Tarkyna, a vast area of 447,000 hectares in north western Tasmania which is an Aboriginal cultural landscape of incredible biodiversity including rainforest, eucalyptus forests, wetlands, button grass plains, rivers, cave systems, and massive sand dunes.

We wove our way through the tall forests of Tarkyna until we found the large signs pronouncing 'Forest protection in action' and 'Come in for a cuppa'. The Sumac blockade is situated a couple of hundred metres along a side road that was built to give loggers access to a coupe of old growth forest. A coupe is an area mapped out for logging by Sustainable Timbers Tasmania. The destruction wrought by the clear felling operation at the entrance to the coupe is apparent: fallen trees, massive stumps, sparse regrowth. The purpose of the blockade is to prevent the road from being further progressed into the coupe and thereby stop any more logging in this area.



We were heartily welcomed, briefed on the purpose of the blockade, and offered a tour of the proposed logging coupe. We were taken past the disturbing section of clear fell into the rich, cool and profoundly beautiful forest, where we encountered immense towering trees that were standing long before colonisers wreaked destruction in Tasmania. The forest is a diverse ecosystem that provides habitat for many species.

The Sumac blockade which is supported by the Bob Brown Foundation is well set up with a crew of skilled, committed and extremely well organised protestors. We learned about the non-violent direction action principles of the camp and it was emphasised that this includes not engaging in verbal, or physical abuse or damaging objects such as machinery and equipment. At the entrance to the forest, a car dubbed the Sumac Cadillac is bolted into the ground and attached to a tree sit high up in one of the gigantic trees deeper in the forest. There is always someone in the Cadillac attached by a lock on device and a person in the tree sit at all times. There have been two attempts to remove the blockade so far, both in October, 2019. The police and emergency services evicted the protestors, but they reassembled and have been left alone since then. There were two arrests on two separate days and they were both in tree sits.



I spoke with the camp coordinator while we were there. Colette is a veterinarian from Tasmania who has been actively involved in protests and action for about 20 years. She was at the Sumac blockade because she strongly believes that there shouldn't be any logging of old growth or native forests in Tasmania. Colette said: 'If Sustainable Timbers Tasmania looked after existing plantation estates it would provide all their needs instead of being reliant on old growth logging for saw logs, speciality timbers, veneer logs and the most prolific type of log they pull out is for woodchips. The big trees aren't useful for saw logs, they're really only useful for woodchips because most of the really old ones have a cracked centre and they aren't conducive to logs or veneer. The really big trees are too huge for them to manage, but they don't leave them in the ground, they usually make a decision that they are a risk to the logging contractors on the ground and they will fell them and leave them lying in the coupe. The big trees here are 300-500 years old and are mostly *Eucalyptus delegatensis* – Gum topped stringybark and *Eucalyptus obliqua* known as messmate stringybark or Tasmanian oak. Only about 40% of the trees are used for anything, and 60% of what is cut down is left on the ground and then usually around Easter each year, they'll burn it and the Tasmanian skies are full of smoke and very red sunsets because of the burning of all the coupes'.

Colette said 'I'd like people to know that we have endangered species living in coupes proposed to be logged in the next year and there's nothing that we can do to stop the logging despite knowing they are living here. The forestry industry is exempt from the Endangered Species Biodiversity Conservation Act so the primary cause of endangering them (Sus Timbers Tas) is exempt from that protection offered to them. For example spotted tail quolls and Tasmania devils live in dens in this forest, as well as endangered plant communities and orchids, giant freshwater crayfish, masked owls and wedge tailed eagles.

I've spent a lot of time working with wildlife, in particular the Tasmanian devil which has the devil facial tumour disease. This disease is very fast spreading and it kills devils quite rapidly. The disease is here in the Tarkine but it's the last corner of Tassie to become infected with the disease and it hasn't decimated the population yet.

I asked Colette 'What can people do?

She replied 'you can come and visit us, contact your local politicians and ask what their perspective is on logging the Tarkine, contact Tasmanian politicians, write letters and opinion pieces to the newspaper, inform people about what's going on. Keep this issue alive.

Read more at https://www.bobbrown.org.au/takayna_tarkine



THE NEXT HUT NEWS

**DEADLINE:
18 APRIL 2020**

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A Blue Trail Special

© *Christine Davies and Don Morison*

The Blue Trail Special series encourages people in NSW, particularly in bushfire and drought affected regions, to visit each other's districts and be customers for each other's industries during our recreational time.

4. Big Sky Odyssey

The term "Big Sky" makes me think of the optical and radio telescopes which for so long have functioned well in NSW, relatively free of the interference to pursuit of astronomy affecting more densely populated areas. It makes me think of the vast spaces which first Australians and immigrants have occupied with our cultures and stories, sadly not always harmoniously. And it evokes the inspiring cloud formations, electrical storms, occasional appearances of red dust and sunny blueness of daytime in our state's interior.

Contemplating a multi-day trip, starting in the friendly town of Coonabarabran, it won't take long to reach the Siding Spring Observatory, our nation's premier optical and infrared astronomical facility. Another 30 minutes drive away are the towering sandstone spires and domes of the Warrumbungles National Park.



Whitegum lookout, Warrumbungles National Park
(source: nationalparks.nsw.gov.au)



Dome of the Anglo-Australian Telescope Siding Spring Observatory near Coonabarabran. (source: abc.net.au/news/2019-09-14/the-new-skymapper-telescope)

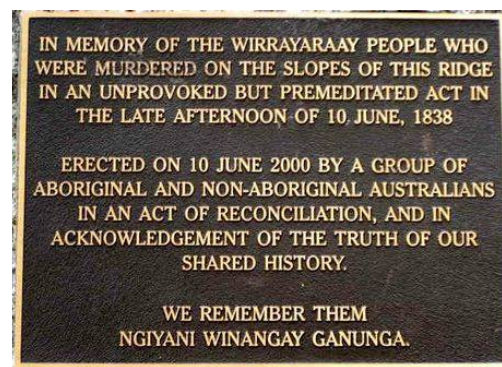
Falling in with the Castlereagh Highway, you visit a series of small towns from the sheep era. Gilgandra was the starting point of the "Coo-ee March" military recruitment drive in 1915. Coonamble features in Darcy Niland's classic novel "The Shiralee" about a single father in the outback. You pass Walgett en route to the intriguing opal mining settlement of Lightning Ridge. Side trips on this stretch can include the interestingly named Come By Chance, whose main annual activity is a race meeting, and Brewarrina, site of a fine example of indigenous fish traps on the Barwon River.

To the east, several locations offer the experience of bathing in the natural warm waters of artesian bore baths. Burren Junction has the most picturesque example but the largest installation is at Moree, which was an important stop on Charles Perkins' 1965 Freedom Ride on behalf of indigenous rights.

On a back road into Narrabri, you pass batteries of radio telescopes and the town is also the gateway to the awesome and geologically significant Mount Kaputar National Park. This odyssey finishes at a sombre but very important place in Australian history. The massacre of more than 20 indigenous people at Myall Creek near Bingara was just one of many such incidents but it was the first time where the non-indigenous perpetrators were punished (by hanging). Descendants of both perpetrators and victims came together in peace to mark the opening of the memorial.



CSIRO Australia Telescope, near Narrabri
(source: visitnarrabri.com.au)



Myall Creek Massacre memorial inscription.

Post-fire recovery of a garden Wollemi Pine

Words: © Margaret Baker

Photos: © Heather Bray

There was much relief when we heard the news that the last precious stand of Wollemi Pines in the Wollemi National Park had escaped incineration by the huge Gospers Mountain fire. Following the discovery of *Wollemia nobilis* in 1994 by David Noble it was thought that these very ancient trees had survived by being in a cool, damp canyon protected from large or frequent fires. So how did the 100 or so adult trees escape a blaze that burnt out 512 000 hectares from October to February in 2019 – 2020? The rescue mission that saved the trees from extinction was a well-planned, painstaking fire-fighting effort by NPWS and RFS staff.

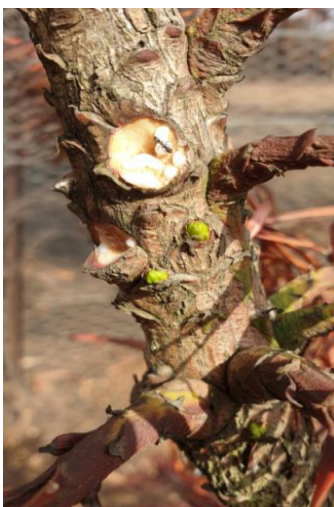
What happened to Wollemi Pines that were growing in gardens impacted by the fires? Whispers of survival started to filter through. The first to reach me came from my friend Heather who excitedly sent photographs of the Wollemi grown by her daughter Michelle. This tenacious plant that had been struggling through the drought was resprouting following the transit of the ferocious Grose Valley fire through Michelle's family property at Clarence on the high plateau east of Lithgow on 21st December 2019.

Michelle's Wollemi was just two metres away from the fire; it was not burnt but it was badly scorched and subsequently lost most of its branches and leaves. It had been growing in a large pot that cracked in two after the fire and had to be quickly transplanted into a large hole in a shady spot near the house. The sandy soil of the area was supplemented with a load of native plant potting mix. Rainfall continued to be absent for the rest of December and temperatures remained in the mid-to high 30s. A bucket of water every day held the plant in a state of suspended animation.

By mid-January Clarence had received about 30mm of rain and tiny green buds appeared on the trunk of the Wollemi and at its base (photo 1). Six new branchlets formed near the terminal end of a secondary lateral trunk (photo 2) and as with the basal shoots (photo 3) they continued to grow rapidly. Within a week apical branchlets were evident on the main trunk (photo 4). A further 200mm-plus of rain through late January and into mid-February encouraged the expansion of early growth areas and new epicormic shoots emerged on the 1.2 metre tall trunk. Growth has remained steady.

Post-fire regrowth of *Wollemia nobilis*

Wollemi Pines in ravine habitats bear the scars of bushfires. Re-growth from such fires may be different to responses from the scorching of garden plants. In the wild the Wollemi mainly recovers by coppicing, the production of secondary trunks from the roots close to the base of the parent tree.¹ Axillary growth does not occur along the trunk; instead the tree will drop entire branches leaving it almost bare. The subsequent few epicormic shoots have been observed to produce secondary trunks rather than branches. The Clarence Wollemi appears to be growing new branches however. This is interesting as the meristematic tissue that can differentiate into new growth is close to the surface of stems and is easily damaged by fire.² The thin corky bark would offer better protection from scorching than from burning. Resprouting can also occur from unburnt leaf axils near the end of a shoot³ as in photos 2 and 4. So scorching is survivable at least for a garden Wollemi, but protection is needed from intense or frequent fires for these plants to thrive.



ENDNOTES:

¹ Benson, J. in Salleh, A. 2002, 'Fossil Tree in Bushfire Zone', ABC Science online

^{2,3} Burrows, G.E., Offord, C.A., Meagher, P.F. & Ashton, K. 2003, 'Axillary Meristems and the Development of Epicormic Buds in Wollemi Pine', *Annals of Botany*, 92 (6) pp.835-844

Australia's first Chief Environmental Biosecurity Officer

© Chris Whiteman

Environmental biosecurity has become increasingly more important for the protection of our indigenous flora and fauna. In October 2018, the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture which has primary responsibility for managing Australia's biosecurity, including managing biosecurity risk to Australia's environment has established an office of Chief Environmental Biosecurity Officer (CEBO), with Ian Thompson being appointed to this role. He is the primary representative and advisor to the Australian Government on environmental biosecurity risks. This is a national leadership role like that of the Chief Veterinary Officer, Chief Plant Protection Officer and Threatened Species Commissioner.

Historically biosecurity (or the old quarantine service) had been skewed towards the agricultural sectors with environmental agencies not owning up to the problem.

To address this institutional problem, and with the goal to make environmental biosecurity a priority equal to agricultural biosecurity, lobbying from the Invasive Species Council and the 2017 Craik independent intergovernmental review of the national biosecurity system, recommended creating a new environmental biosecurity position to provide 'national policy leadership'. From that the CEBO was born with the following strategic duties.

- ensures environmental biosecurity issues remain central to discussions
- works with government, industry, communities and environmental groups to protect Australia from pests and diseases that affect the environment
- takes a strategic and transparent approach to national environmental biosecurity preparedness, prevention, surveillance, diagnostics/identification, response, communication and investment
- works closely with the Department of the Environment and Energy and the Threatened Species Commissioner.

Pests and diseases pose a significant risk to our environment, communities and way of life. They also threaten our economy, including our position as an iconic tourist destination.

The costs are significant. For example, red imported fire ants have the capacity to cause havoc in our environment and would cost an estimated \$1.5 billion per year if they became established.

With the recent high impact bush fires, increases in overseas tourism, uncontrolled land clearing such as that at Boddington Hill and the building of an international airport just a few kilometres from the national park, areas of the Blue Mountains are increasingly susceptible to pests and disease, particularly threatened species such as the Wollemi Pine.

Recently the CEBO has released a national priority list of pests and diseases with the potential to affect Australia's natural environment. Included on this list are diseases such as *Xylella* (*Xylella fastidiosa*) which has the potential to infect hundreds of native plant species, Ramorum shoot dieback and leaf blight (*Phytophthora ramorum*), new strains of Myrtle Rust and pests such as invasive ants: red imported fire ant (*Solenopsis invicta*) and electric ant (*Wasmannia auropunctata*), Giant African snail (*Achatina fulica*) and Formosan subterranean termite (*Coptotermes formosanus*). Also included is the emerging fungal disease, White Nose Syndrome of bats (*Pseudogymnoascus destructans*) which was first recorded in New York in 2006. It has caused the death of more than 5 million bats across North America.

Just as agricultural agencies have developed on-farm biosecurity plans aimed at keeping farms safe from pests and diseases (signs warning visitors to farms of biosecurity procedures are becoming more common), environmental biosecurity guidelines and procedures for the community, tourist entrepreneurs and environmental workers should be established.

References and Further information:

<https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/environmental>

<https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity/environmental/priority-list>

<https://invasives.org.au/>



Women and men of the past built the foundations of modern-day Blue Mountains environmentalism. Their stories can inspire us.

It's our turn now!

© Christine Davies and Don Morison

7. Wilf Hilder (1934-2011)

One day at the arrivals hall at Sydney Airport, among the hundreds of meeters and greeters watching the human inflow, was a middle-aged man in full boy scout uniform with hat, short shorts and great legs. No boring little name sign for this man. His important overseas guest would have no trouble recognising his Australian host, Wilf Hilder.

Among the other organisations whose past members would remember him are the Masonic Lodge, the Warragamba Walkers, the Coast and Mountain walkers and several where he served as President including the Sydney Bushwalkers, the Nordic Ski Club, various bushwalking confederations and the Bicycle Federation of Australia (nominated by Don Morison in 1981).

Despite this affinity for hierarchies, Wilf is affectionately remembered for his recurring defiance of bureaucracy. Michael Keats writes of an instance when, after one of Wilf's many excursions into the Warragamba catchment, Sydney Water officials brought him to a hearing. In his defence, Wilf politely explained all of the transgressions by developers, sewage dischargers, miners and others which had escaped prosecution, adding that he could authoritatively brief the media about the inconsistent approach to catchment threats, if he chose to do so – all charges against Wilf were quickly dropped.

Very few people have contributed so much to others' experience of the Greater Blue Mountains natural areas as Wilf. He coined the term "pagoda" to describe one of our most beloved landforms. He campaigned successfully for the legal Katoomba to Mittagong bushwalking corridor through the catchment area. When the mapping coverage of NSW, especially the mountains, was being improved, he suggested hundreds of new quirky place names. He toiled tirelessly, in collaboration with Jim Smith, to restore historic walking tracks, Lindeman Pass in the Jamison Valley being one of the most famous.

Millions have benefited from his actions and many alive can still remember walking with him. Always a lover of an unofficial place name, Wilf would appreciate that some of his comrades bestowed the name "Wilfs Waters" on a little stream on the Kinderin Track at Mount Victoria.



Wilf at the reopening of Bruces Walk

Blue Mountains walking tracks badly affected by bushfire and flooding

© Jim Smith

Is Govett's Leap lookout safe?

Those people who enjoy walking on our historic constructed tracks in the Blue Mountains will be saddened to see the huge amount of damage done by the bushfires, followed by flooding rains. Leura Cascades, parts of Prince Henry Cliff Walk, and Charles Darwin's walk sustained major storm damage and will be closed for quite some time. When I visited Govett's Leap lookout I was shocked to see the extent of fire damage to the clifftop tracks all the way from Pulpit Rock to Evans Lookout, and that all the Grose Valley tracks are no longer accessible from there. While looking at the blackened scenery I noticed a Swamp Wallaby hopping along the tourist walking tracks towards the Govett's Leap Falls and a Cunningham's skink sunning itself just below the lookout. I hope these, and the many other creatures of the Grose Valley, and other fire affected areas, are finding enough food.

The tree that grew for many decades at the lookout had been fire-damaged and was removed. While I was standing beside the stump, I noticed that part of the main Govett's Leap lookout area was only being held up by a drystone wall resting on a section of metal. This has probably been there since the enlargement of the lookout in the late 1930s, but this rather precarious-looking foundation of the lookout has only become obvious now that the ferns and other vegetation that concealed it have been burnt away. I was also concerned to notice that the lookout railings' upright posts, especially to the right of the stump, are only secured by about 20 to 30 cm of soil in some places on the other side of the railing. The sandy soil on the other side of the railing appears to be held together only by the roots of plants. If this is washed away, the lookout railing may become unstable. If it collapses it could affect the dry stone walling which is holding up part of the main lookout. I feel that the lookout should be closely inspected by the National Parks and Wildlife Service for stability.



Gardens of Stone Visitors Map

The Visitors Map is full of suggested walks and trips. It is in full colour, 60 by 85 cm in size, and covers the entire Gardens of Stone region at a 1:100,000 scale, making it ideal for planning your next trip to the area. You can buy a map on the society's website at:
www.bluemountains.org.au/GoS_VisitorsMap.htm

Do you own or know of a Wollemi Pine that was scorched or burnt by the recent fires?

If so Margaret Baker would like to hear its story from you. Please contact her on:
emjaybaker@ozemail.com.au

BLUE TRAIL QUESTION 5 – Can you enjoy a natural walk close to Oberon?

Oberon is a base for some of the state's best tourist experiences, including day trips to Jenolan Caves, Kanangra-Boyd National Park, Evans Crown and Mayfield Gardens (one of Australia's finest privately owned cool climate gardens).



A section of the Rail Trail

But is it possible to pop out from your digs at Oberon for a short visit to the natural environment? In fact, there are several sites with potential. Although New South Wales has agonised over emulating Victoria and New Zealand to provide bicycle pedestrian trails on disused railways, for quite some years Oberon has had five kilometres of good quality "Rail Trail". It veers eastward from Lowes Mount Road, a few hundred metres north of the old railway station (now a museum). Multiple native trees and a restored signal box are visible during a walk to the site of Hazelgrove Railway Station. But access to the private property north of Hazelgrove would enable visiting a much better quality native forest.

Further stands of fine old Eucalypts and clumps of granite boulders are visible approaching the trout fishing spot on the shores of Fish River Reservoir (on an unsealed road running east from the road between Oberon and Black Springs). Some of the most attractive native trees near the Fish River Dam are on both sides of Jenolan Street, approaching the dam picnic area itself. At this location, you can also walk along the dam wall and short sections of the foreshore.

A most attractive natural area walk begins at Shakespeare Close, Oberon. This is the Blenheim Forest trail system, a project involving Rotary and Oberon High School. The trails wind down across a creek and through natural forest flanking one of the pine plantations.



Flowers at Mayfield Gardens



Granite rocks by the Fish River

This "Blue Trail" is a collective description for sites in the western Blue Mountains that arouse natural or cultural interest or both. Most are only a short walk from roads or vehicular tracks. One day, a high quality walking path may link them. Sections of the Blue Trail featuring the western Blue Mountains can be found in past issues of Hut News: www.bluemountains.org.au/hutnews.shtml. The full Blue Trail is being added at simplyaustralia.net.

Does your child know more about dinosaurs than dugongs?

Perhaps they're reading the wrong books.

(An extract from *The Conversation*, 4 March 2020)

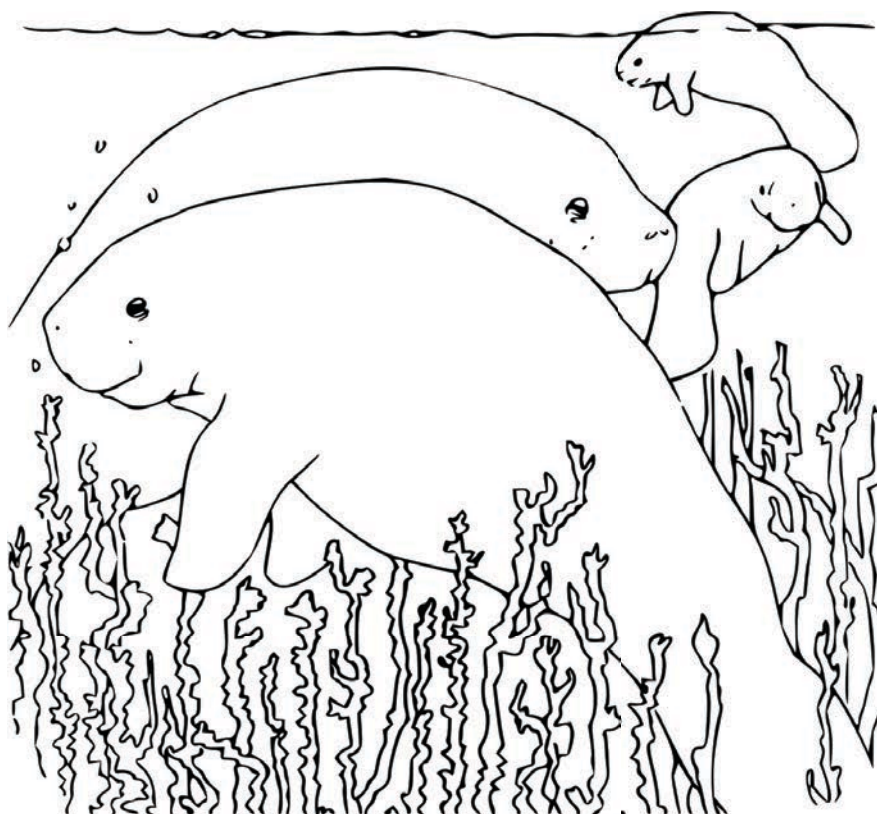
Ecological awareness shouldn't be confined to experts in the field. Creating an informed community that values Australia's unique species and ecosystems is fundamental to nature protection. This includes getting young people excited about the environment. Storytelling can play a crucial role in this – helping children learn about the natural world and its challenges.

Australia is home to more than one million species, many of which are found nowhere else. Tragically, it also has the fourth-highest level of animal species extinction in the world.

To fix the mistakes of the past, and prevent those of the future, it's important that young people become more knowledgeable about Australia's environment than previous generations. Storytelling can do this. It imparts information, nurtures emotional connections with natural places and allows us to reimagine our world.

Indigenous cultures, including in Australia, know the power of stories. For tens of thousands of years they have used oral storytelling to transmit information to future generations, keeping natural history alive.

As children, many of us learnt about Australia's plants and animals from spending time outside in the garden or bush. But these days many kids have little or no access to nature.



For this reason, exposure to ecology through storytelling is particularly important. But often, Australian stories can get drowned out ... books featuring animals are dominated by introduced or overseas species: dogs, sheep, pigs, rabbits, bears, donkeys, cows and hippopotamuses.

Scientists miss great opportunities to communicate their stories to the public when they publish only in academic journals. And some authors are keen to write stories about environmental issues but lack the scientific background. (How do you bring these together?)

Through story, ecologists can give children the knowledge to care for our landscape and its irreplaceable plants and wildlife, and the hope of knowing they can make a difference.

Read the full article: <https://bit.ly/32QbyMg>

NURSERY NOTICE

The nursery will not be selling any plants at any markets until August due to the COVID-19 virus. Customers wanting to purchase 40 or more plants can email plantnurseryBMCS@outlook.com outlining their requirements.