

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"



Issue No. 414
June 2023



Are invasive species the biggest threat to biodiversity in Australia and the Blue Mountains?

Andrew Cox, CEO of the Invasive Species Council, addressed members of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society after the Annual General Meeting on 31st March 2023. All who were present that evening found Andrew's speech very moving. He spoke not with anger but with quiet passion and a deep sadness about the effects that invasive species are having on Australia's natural areas and the species that rely on them. But he also offered solutions and hope.

The text of Andrew's talk has been published on pages 4-6 of this newsletter.

Robert's Ranges: A series of photographs of some of the walk locations promoted by Robert Sloss

In 1886, Lady Cecilia Carrington travelled to the Royal National Park with her husband, Lord Charles Carrington, Governor of NSW, and other assorted dignitaries where she inspected and officially declared open the road which bears her name. For many years, Lady Carrington Drive was open to horse-drawn carriages, cars and other types of vehicles. Today it is closed to such traffic, but remains very popular with bushwalkers and cyclists.

The track is an easy 1-2 hour ride or 3 hour walk one-way. The route bypasses many scenic points along the Hacking River, including Gibraltar Rock and Palona Cave. It is popular with bird watchers.



Cabbage Tree Palms, Lady Carrington Drive, Royal National Park.
Photo: Geoff Dernee.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, the Darug and Gundungurra people, and pay respect to their elders past, present and emerging.

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Hope for Soft Plastic Recycling

The collapse of REDCycle in November 2022 has left many of us feeling confused and hopeless about all the soft plastics we accumulate in our household and what to do about it. We try to be creative on how we can re-use soft plastics, but there is so much plastic and not enough opportunities to use them again so we throw them in the bin.

Every year, Australia is making about 3.5 million tonnes of plastic and about 487,000 tonnes of soft plastics were used in 2019-2020 alone.

Soft plastics are notoriously difficult to recycle due to barriers inside the plastic that protects the food from getting spoiled. With REDCycle gone, we are left with no options to recycle our soft plastics but there is hope.

For the past 3 years, APR Plastics, a Victorian Recycling company has been developing a viable solution for recycling and processing end of life soft plastics. APR Plastics has Australia's first technology to process soft plastics into new plastic products. It is a circular process where plastics are broken into small pieces, turned into oil, which in turn will be manufactured back into food grade plastics (1).

The WASTX P1000 machine uses pyrolysis, the process of applying high temperatures under zero oxygen conditions, to break down products. It will process up to 1000 kilograms of plastic per day. One kilogram of plastic waste becomes 850 millilitres of recycled oil (2). Three types of plastic can be processed:

- Low-Density Polyethylene (LDPE),
- High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE)
- Polypropylene (PP)

At the moment APR Plastics has made agreements with a few Victorian councils and have started trialling a soft plastics recycling program for their residents.

The trials are part of the National Plastics Recycling Scheme project (NPRS) with funding support from the federal government. This is Australia's largest industry-led plastics recycling scheme, with a kerb side pick-up, taking hard-to-recycle soft plastic packaging out of landfill and giving it new life (3,4).

The technology is in its early stages but they are hopeful that the program, with support from state and federal governments and NPRS, will eventually be rolled out nationally.

-- **Nathalie Verellen**, Sustainability and Climate Change Officer, and
Alan Page, Environmental Education Officer
(References on page 10)

President's report

We join the Blue Mountains Conservation Society (BMCS) because we love the Blue Mountains. It is incumbent on us to do everything we can to protect this unique and fragile environment. There is an ever-growing list of threats: the rate of extinction of native species; threats of inappropriate development in and near national parks; the impacts of invasive species and climate change.

BMCS has a well-deserved reputation for being an activist organisation that has had many successes in its campaigns to protect the natural environment and to support other environmental groups to do the same.

We need to ensure that, into the future, our organisation continues to bring to the attention of all levels of government and the general public situations that will adversely affect our national heritage AND to argue logically and scientifically for a way to solve these issues whilst, at the same time, valuing the community in which we live. This is what we do well and this is what we must protect.

Our membership and community are an important source of inspiration and support. We welcome your thoughts, ideas and suggestions. Let us know about things you would like to see us do, and outings and activities that would be fun and educational for you and your family. Write to me on president@bluemountains.org.au or bmcc@bluemountains.org.au

At the 2023 AGM, a question was asked about how much of the recently received bequest funding would be used for a paid, part-time coordinator. The outgoing President and the Senior Vice President answered that the new committee, once elected, would make this decision. This answer, given at the AGM, that they did not know the figure, was truthful and not designed to avoid further discussion. The position details are decisions that a new President and a new MC need to make.

The idea of a paid part-time coordinator was proposed late in the term of the 2022/23 management committee. The Management Committee (MC) agreed "in principle" to support "the engagement of a part-time, paid coordinator for a 2-year trial period. The MC also agreed to the formation of a subcommittee to finalise a position description, terms of employment and the recruitment strategy, noting that "this will come back to the MC for approval before recruitment". In March Hut News we flagged to members the intended direction, dependent upon confirmation by the new MC after the AGM.

The new MC has agreed to form a new subcommittee to carry this forward, collect all the relevant information and, in due course, report to the MC. We will also schedule a General Meeting of members so that we may present the proposals in relation to this matter and hear from members about their own suggestions. This meeting will occur after the subcommittee is established and details of the draft proposal finalized.

I thank Phoebe for her letter. The Management Committee is elected to make decisions on behalf of the Society but it is important that members can question, seek clarification and discuss these decisions. Since a small proportion of the membership was at the AGM when Phoebe asked her question of the President, it is appropriate that she raises these concerns again with the new President and MC.

-- Annette Cam

"The Giants" Movie

This recently released feature-length documentary intersperses magnificent photography of various species of large Tasmanian trees with the life of activist and politician Bob Brown. It is environmentally sympathetic and highlights the campaigns to save Lake Pedder, the Franklin River Wilderness and the Tasmanian native forests, in particular. For committed environmentalists, watching this movie is a classic "feel good" experience.

-- Don Morison

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Update on Wentworth Falls zoo/hotel



In the previous update (April Hut News) we reported that we expected the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Development Application (DA) for this development to be lodged by the due date, June 30th. Instead, revised plans have now been lodged with the Department of Planning along with a request for a revision of the Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs), originally issued in March 2021. The SEARs are a list of the issues that must be addressed in the EIS.

The developer has requested the SEARs be amended to reflect the project's change to a Concept Development Application, which allows for a staged development. The first stage would consist of a development application for the 'Concept' and first stage preparatory works only – land clearing, site preparation and construction of internal roads for buildings (including the hotel and carpark) that have not yet been approved. Approval for these would be sought through a later stage development application.

A 'Concept' development application means that the whole development can potentially gain preliminary consent without providing detailed plans except for Stage 1. An EIS covering all the assessments stipulated in the original SEARs will still have to be prepared for the Concept and Stage 1 works, except for an assessment of the proposed new signalled highway intersection. The developer has requested that this be deferred to Stage 2.

The Stage 1 works plan shows that the development footprint has expanded and new attractions introduced, though it is not proposed that these would be included in the Stage 1 works. The new attractions are a 'predators of Australia' exhibit featuring fresh- and salt-water **crocodiles**, dingoes, Tasmanian Devils and lace monitors, located in the south-east corner of the site close to the swamp, and a 'Birds of Australia', emu and cassowary exhibit in the area along the highway in the eastern section of the site.

The Department of Planning is currently consulting with government agencies (including Council) and will likely make a decision by the end of May. If revised SEARs are issued, the developer will have another two

years to prepare and lodge the EIS and DA for the 'Concept' and Stage 1 works. If the Department decides to not issue revised SEARs, and if the developer does not lodge the EIS and DA by the due date (June 30th), the current SEARs will expire and the developer will have to re-apply.

Go to the NSW government's planning portal to see the latest documents (under 'Amendments') and sign up to receive notifications on the development <https://pp.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/projects/blue-mountains-wildlife-and-tourism-development>
For more details and updates see our website <https://www.bluemountains.org.au/croc-park.shtml>

-- Landuse Subcommittee

From the mailbag ...

Grey-headed Flying Foxes in the Blue Mountains

I coordinate a conservation project for the grey-headed flying-fox under the NSW Government's Saving our Species program. Understanding a species' habitat is an important part of conserving a species and, for a flying-fox, roost sites or camps are an important aspect of their ecology.

We're aware of a temporary flying-fox roost that formed in Hazelbrook that made headlines in the local paper some years ago. Apart from that, we're not aware of any other flying-fox roosts in the Blue Mountains despite the species occurring both to the east and west of the mountains and we know flying-foxes are regularly observed foraging in the mountains.

Would your organisation be interested in putting out a call for information to members? We value and respect local knowledge and how this knowledge may be able to assist conservation management.

-- Matthew Mo

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Are invasive species the biggest threat to biodiversity in Australia and the Blue Mountains?

Presentation by Andrew Cox, Invasive Species Council CEO to the Blue Mountains Conservation Society AGM 31 March 2023

A unique and highly susceptible biota

Australia has been isolated from other continents and most of their plants and animals from about 40-50 million years ago when it separated from the Antarctic landmass. This isolation allowed a unique biota to evolve and flourish. It also meant that this biota was poorly prepared for highly effective predators like cats and foxes and aggressive weeds and was extremely vulnerable to diseases from other continents.

The colonisation of Australia was more than the arrival of Europeans. The First Fleeters and the farmers and others that followed brought every animal or plant useful for food production, gardens and companionship. The acclimatisation movement that began in the 1860s was a more deliberate attempt to seed Australia with exotic animals and plants from other continents.

Much of the wildlife introduced to Australia thrived and spread, killing the native animals and taking their food and shelter, displacing native plants and progressively dominating. To make matters worse, these invasive animals and plants arrived mostly without their own natural predators, parasites and pathogens.

Not all introductions were deliberate. There were many hitchhiking animals and plants that arrived with the new settlers and their goods. There were invasive species stowed away in ballast water and the hulls of ocean-going ships, inside the storage vessels carrying the cargo and in the gut of the imported wildlife.

This invasion process has left us with a menagerie of animals and plants that spread across vast areas of Australia. This included rabbits, cats, rats, pigs, foxes, deer, horses, cane toads, starlings, carp, ants, garden plants like the notorious prickly pear and grasses for

grazing animals deliberately introduced by CSIRO. The list goes on. In all we now have 73 environmentally damaging vertebrate animals, 2700 weed species, over a thousand fish and many exotic diseases in our country we have to live with.

The invasion process can be slow or fast. Sometimes an invasive plant may sit in one spot for decades before the right combination of temperature or rainfall allows it to take off and spread. Myrtle rust, a deadly plant disease that arrived in 2010 spread rapidly within months and now covers every state and territory except South Australia. It is predicted to send 16 plants to extinction.

There are plenty more exotic species waiting on our doorstep. Right now, there is a highly dangerous strain of avian influenza killing millions of water birds around the world and Australia and Antarctica are the last remaining continents to be touched.

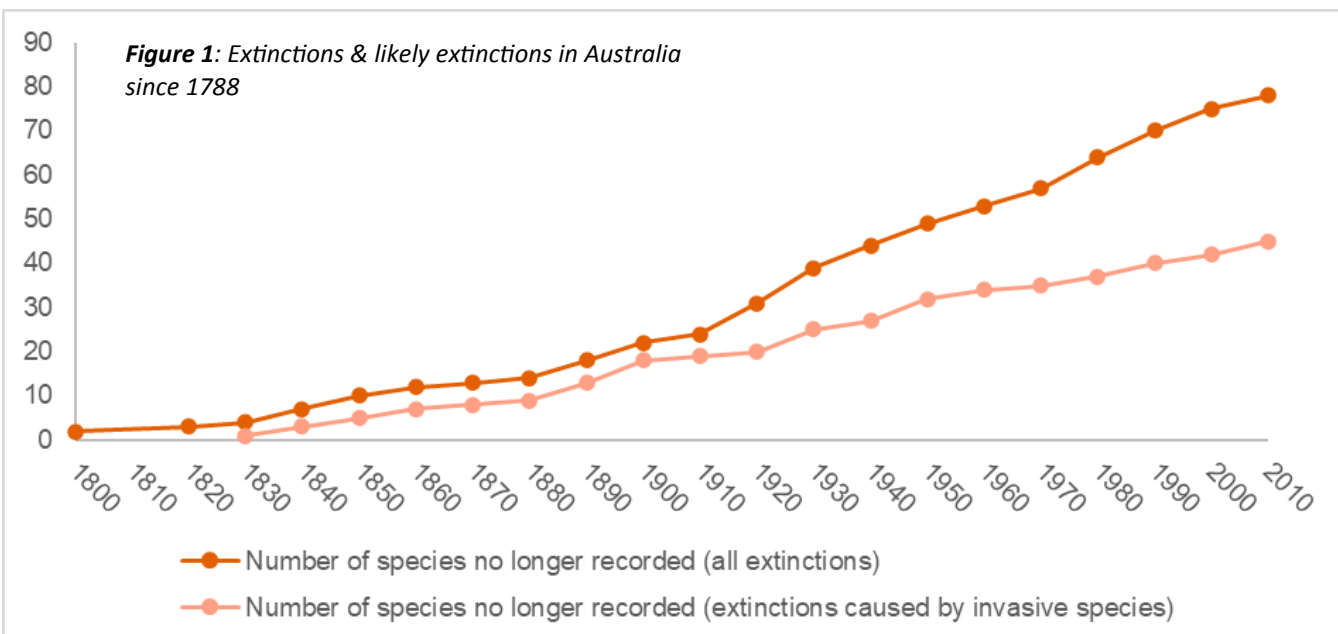
The extinction driver

These invasive species are having major impacts, particularly on our animals. Of the 84 extinct animals and plants to date, the major cause was invasive species for 49, or 58%. In the last 50 years, invasive species were a driver for the loss of 20 of the 50 species recently extinct and 8 species since 2000. Feral cats were a major cause of 25 of the 34 mammal extinctions. For the first phase of extinctions, cats, foxes and rats were the main drivers.

(See Figures 1 and 2)

Invasive species are the highest impact threat to nationally threatened Australia species. Invasive species are recorded as a medium or high impact threat for 43% of all threatened species and 69% of just mammals. Scientists predict that about 100 species are at imminent risk of extinction in the next 20 years. Of those, invasive species are a major driver for 80 of these species, while also significantly, habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation are drivers for 45 species, climate change for 41 species, disrupted population processes for 35 and adverse fire regimes for 31. Many species are subject to multiple drivers.

(Continued on page 5)



Are invasive species the biggest threat to biodiversity in Australia and the Blue Mountains? (continued from page 4)



Figure 2: It took just 35 years for the once common Christmas Island forest skink *Eumeces nativitatis* to be no more. The main culprit was the introduced Asian wolf snake that arrived on Christmas Island in 1982 and rapidly spread across the island. The last lizard was found in 2010, those in captivity died a few years later and it is now declared extinct. Photo: Cal Hogar

My invasive species journey

My invasive species journey began as a teenager while gaining my gold level Duke of Edinburgh Award. The topic for my 4-day expedition from Kanangra Walls to Katoomba was weeds. I carefully named and mapped the weeds I saw along the route and recorded them as a profile.

In my lifetime I have seen many new weeds arrive and major rivers like the Cocks and Kowmung are now corridors for weeds. So too are the Great Western Highway and the railway corridor.

Feral deer are moving into and expanding throughout the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. I have been part of a newly formed Blue Mountains feral deer working group which has a long-term goal to rid the mountains of deer. With deer already in the southern end of the World Heritage Area at Nattai and the

Wollondilly valley, at Kanangra Tops, in the Megalong and Jamison valleys, and at Bilpin, Kurrajong and along the Putty Road, we are slowly losing. We must work harder and smarter if we are to keep our famous rain-forest escarpments and large parts of Wollemi and Blue Mountains National Parks deer-free.

Feral cats already occupy every part of the Australian continent. The millions of feral and pet cats in Australia are responsible for killing about 2 billion animals each year. Each year feral cats kill about 1.4 billion and pet cats 390 million animals. We must act to save our native wildlife, to prevent their suffering from being hunted and killed by cats. It may not be nice, but lethal control of feral cats is usually the only option to prevent this damage. Pet cats need to be contained on an owner's property, just as we already expect for pet dogs, except NSW laws prevent councils imposing this requirement. We are pleased to see Blue Mountains City Council and local State Member Trish Doyle support this change.

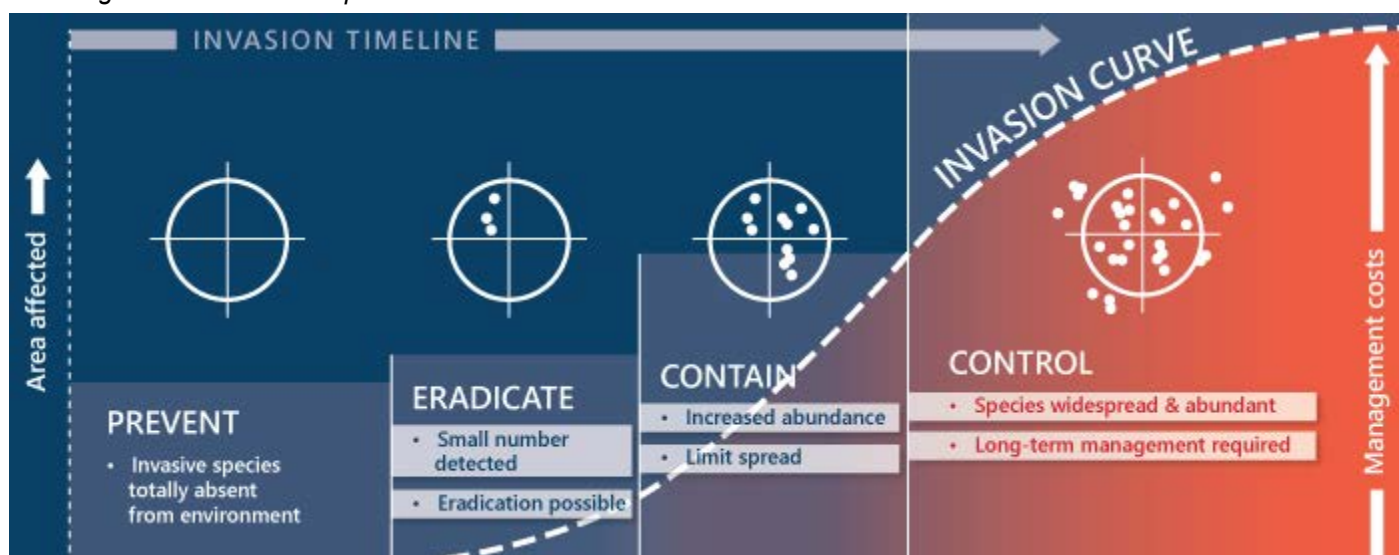
A promising election result

The recent NSW election saw a new Labor government elected. Labor made many important pre-election commitments relating to invasive species. These included: 100 new NPWS pest and weed officers, the creation of an independent Biosecurity Commission, an audit of invasive species and their damage, a review of the Companion Animals Act (that governs cat containment) to ensure it is 'fit for purpose' and the development of a permitted list to prevent the sale of weedy plants in NSW.

Labor also promised to 'look at' repealing the *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act*; 'take action to remove more horses from the park' and ensure there are 'resources available' to deliver the management plan. They agreed to 'work in partnership' with the federal government and other stakeholders to 'stop the spread of feral deer, control or eradicate populations, and protect significant sites from impacts'. They will also introduce a \$10m 'good neighbour program to tackle weed and pest infestations on government land neighbouring private property'.

(Continued on page 6)

Figure 3: The invasion curve that shows the different management response to an invasive species, depending on the stage of its arrival and spread.



Are invasive species the biggest threat to biodiversity in Australia and the Blue Mountains?

(continued from page 5)

How the Invasive Species Council is tackling the problem

The Invasive Species Council was formed in 2002 in response to the book *Feral Future* by Tim Low that opened people's eyes to the damage caused by invasive species and the poor efforts at addressing the problem. It's a donor-funded independent body that tackles all invasive species – plants, animals and diseases moved by humans – that harm the environment.

The invasion curve is a key tool to strategically address the growing impact of invasive species. Tackling invasive species before they arrive is the most efficient and often the only feasible option. Once a species establishes, a rapid response to eradicate it is the next best thing. If a species is allowed to spread due to poor surveillance or unsuccessful eradication, containment is the next best option to slow or halt its spread. If allowed to spread to its full potential range, the impacts are in perpetuity and management must focus on protecting key assets. Investments in smart techniques or tools such as biocontrol may offer relief.

Implementing these strategies at the national level means building an effective biosecurity system through stronger laws, policies and institutions that prevent new species invading Australia, nip invasive species in the bud and abate Australia's worst invasive threats. This must be supported by investment in biosecurity research and innovation and the creation of invasive-free islands. Similar style programs can be developed at state and local levels.

What you can do

Here are a few things you can do to make a difference:

- 1. Strategic weed and pest control.** Use biosecurity and invasion curve thinking and best practice control tools and practices.
- 2. Surveillance and citizen science.** Look for unusual new plants/animals, notify biosecurity authorities and use tools like iNaturalist that auto reports new outbreaks to biosecurity agencies.
- 3. Adopt good hygiene.** Come clean, go clean when you visit the outdoors.
- 4. Support the Invasive Species Council** – see <https://invasives.org.au/> for more information.

Letters to the Editor

Society Bequests

I respect and appreciate Phoebe Coster's letter to Hut News opposing the use of Bequest Funds to provide a part time worker.

For many years I countersigned any request for use of bequest funds and always scrutinised them and asked questions if concerned. I don't know why this role ceased as there was no communication.

However I concur with the felt need to employ someone to help with advocacy work. Many committee members are ageing and often keen younger members need an income and can't serve in more than a limited capacity.

-- **Katriona Herborn**

I read, with interest, the letter from Phoebe Coster which appeared in May Hut News. I believe she is correct in questioning the proposed employment of a part-time assistant. I believe that the donors of such a large sum would like to see something significant in return.

Like Phoebe, I believe that a callout to the members for assistance would result in many offers of volunteer time. I believe the money should be set aside for large projects, with a budget for each.

The Nursery relocation will be a considerable expense, given that the land has to be paid for by an ongoing lease. The entire infrastructure has to be moved and reassembled in its new position and watering systems set-up, green houses and hot houses as well. It seems to me that the Nursery has the potential of being an ongoing source of revenue for the Society. We cannot rely on people dying with sufficient funds to leave bequests in their wills.

Secondly, the Society could republish an amended "Living Near the Bush" booklet as a priority. During my term as membership secretary, between 2001 and 2007, I received numerous emails and letters of congratulations on that little book. The booklet was a wonderful resource when there was not much information circulating about how to live in harmony with the surrounding bushland.

Thirdly, I believe that money should be set aside for large projects, with a budget for each, and a paid employee when necessary. Some major developments could have a devastating effect on the Blue Mountains if they were to go ahead. A successful campaign may require a huge budget to promote the Society's objections and gain public support. The campaign may include strategies like public meetings with interesting speakers (who may require reimbursement), media advertisements in local and national media, gaining advice from experts, sometimes legal action is necessary.

I do ask that the new Management Committee reconsider their commitment to an employee and use the many and varied skills of a large membership.

-- **Elizabeth van Reyswoud**

Hi Christine, Just wanted to say that I'm really enjoying this month's "Hutnews". Some great articles!

-- **Diana Levy** (May 2023)

a rainbow -

I zoom on through the shower,
double lane highway

Continued ... another letter on page 9)

Members! We want to hear from you. Please consider contributing content for Hut News. The deadline for July Hut News is 15th June. hutnews@bluemountains.org.au or enquiries to Christine 4787 7246.

Hut News Archive -- Ross Coster

Some years ago Alan Page arranged to have all the old newsletters of the Katoomba and District Wildlife Conservation Society, the Upper Blue Mountains Conservation Society, and the Lower Blue Mountains Conservation Society, scanned to PDF file and published on our web site. You can look through this amazing archive here: <https://www.bluemountains.org.au/hutnews-archives.shtml>

In more recent years Phoebe Coster has been re-typing the earliest Newsletters so that they become searchable, and can be used for copy-and-paste of content. So far Phoebe has re-typed 62 Newsletters, which I have proof read, and our Web gurus (Alan Page and Andrew Solomon) have appended to the original scanned files.

When you have the time, have a look through the archive, you will find articles of great interest, some amusement, and some anger at how the issues we fight today were in play all those decades ago.

In this edition of Hut News, we have reproduced an article by R.T. Compagnoni about the underlying structure of our beautiful Blue Mountains, as seen from Beauchamp Falls at Blackheath.

BEAUCHAMP FALLS

Are you coming with me on the walk scheduled for 16th January 1986? If so I hope to share with you thoughts coming through the eyes of a student of geology. The local geology relates in many ways to that around our Hut (the Conservation Hut, Wentworth Falls).

From Evan's Lookout we see the uplifted peneplain with the summits of Mts Bank, Tomah, Wilson and Hay preserved by basalt flows during the Tertiary Period. Beneath are the dramatic Banks Walls which give their name to much of the sandstone cliffs we see.

Many of the walls show near horizontal breaks where shale layers interrupt. These layers tell a story. Beneath the walls talus slopes conceal the Permian-Triassic boundary and carry fallen rocks to the bottom of the valleys. In the valleys the creeks meander with ridges appearing to push the creek now from one side, now from the other.

I have mentioned a peneplain and the meandering of the streams suggests to me that these streams existed prior to the uplift. As the land rose gently – an epeirogenic uplift – pre existing streams increased their gradient and their flow and cut down at a rate approaching that of the uplift. So where is the immense amount of rock which once filled the valleys of Govett's Leap Creek, The Grose River and many another streams?

From Evan's Lookout steps lead down a cleft and the track winds over a talus slope, into a not so steep upland valley plentifully filled with *Eucalyptus oreades* and, on my reconnaissance, ablaze with waratahs. This valley is the haunt of lyrebirds which are frequently seen and heard in performance. One environmental scientist has suggested that these lovely creatures contribute to hillslope erosion. The track enters a narrow cleft – no doubt cut by the stream thorough an enlarged settlement crack or maybe a joint. At the foot of the first steps is a large rock overhang cut into red claystone. This indicates how weathering by water, wind or other agents readily operates into soft claystones and ultimately brings down overlying rock by exposing a settlement crack and leaving the rock without support. These beds are those of the Mt York claystone and are 90-100 metres stratigraphically lower than similar beds, the Wentworth Falls claystone which tops many of the cliff-lines in this area but is not evident at Evan's Lookout. The band of Mt York Claystone separates the overlying Banks Wall Sandstone from Burra Moko Head sandstone beneath.

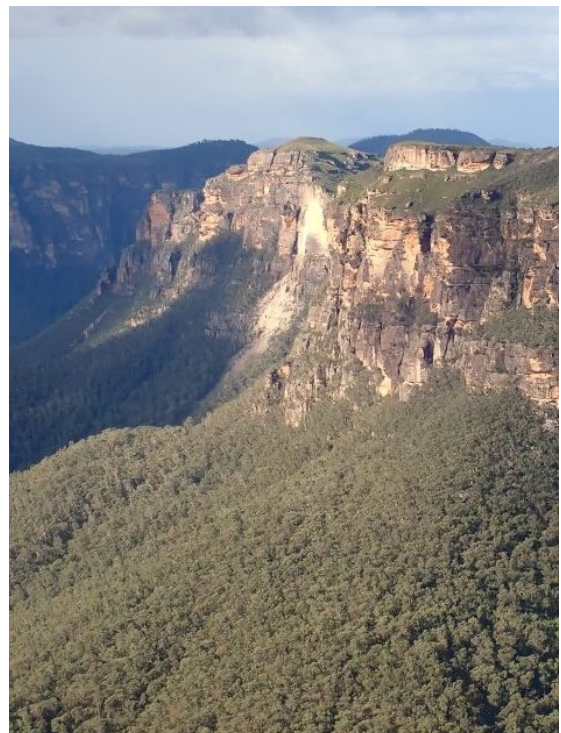
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Water continues its melodious but destructive way down the cleft carrying as it goes sand grains, shale grains, leaves and twigs. The grade of the stream is not dramatic as it is controlled by the height of the knickpoint over which it flows at Beauchamp Falls. On reaching the top of the Falls we will have passed through the whole of the Burra Moko sandstone – some 100 metres – and the rim rock of the Falls is cut into rocks of the Caley Formation, the lowest beds of the Triassic Period.

As the stream from Evan's Lookout enters Greave's Creek, freshly emerged from the slot valley of the Grand Canyon, a slightly wider, gentler valley takes us to the top of the Falls and here our lesson unfolds as the cliff opposite reads like a blackboard. We will see the Katoomba coal seam – about 220 million years old and generally looked on as the top of the Permian Period rocks. Overlying conformably are the Narrabeen Series of the Triassic Period which extended from 220 to 180 million years before the present. The lowest Triassic beds are of the Caley Formation – its component strata of sandstone and shale delineated. Above the Caley Formation are two members of the Grose Formation, Burra Moko Head Sandstone and Mt York claystone in ascending order but the usually prominent, upper member of the Formation, the Banks Wall Sandstone, is not here evident.

I have deliberately omitted defining some of the terms I have used as their omission from this note will no doubt stimulate discussion on our walk. Further, and more important than a confusing list of bed names are a very well set out series of settlement cracks in the sandstone, underlying shale or claystone beds, undermining of the sandstone beds and the subsequent breaking off of great sections of sandstone to leave vertical cliffs. In short, here at the mouth of the hanging valley of Greave's Creek, is an explanation in parvo of how our scenic cliffs are formed and, with a little thought, relatable to the view from the Hut.

--R.T. Compagnoni



The gold of the cliff-faces. Photo taken at Evans Lookout by Christine Davies, 2023

Paroo Darling (Peery) National Park Bird surveys

Part 1: *Update on bird surveys April 2023*

-- Annette Cam

The Paroo-Darling National Park is on the land of the Paakantyi (or Barkindji) people. It is made up of seven properties acquired by the NSW Government between 2000 and 2003. The park is 178,053 hectares in size and is located about 117km north of Wilcannia. The Paroo floodplain, Nocoleche Nature Reserve and Carrawinya National Park are one of Birdlife Australia's Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) and my husband, Graham, is the guardian of this area for Birdlife Australia.

Graham and I coordinate this bird survey work in a voluntary capacity with NSW National Parks and Wildlife and Birdlife Australia.

The section of the Paroo Darling NP we work in is the northern section which contains the former properties of Peery Station, Arrowbar Station and Mandalay Station. Peery and Poloko Lakes and their associated wetlands form part of the Paroo Overflow. These wetlands, together with Nocoleche Nature Reserve, form the Paroo River Wetlands Ramsar site. The park also includes active artesian mound springs which are considered to be the rarest landform in Australia.

Despite having an average annual rainfall of between 200-300mm, in both 2022 and 2023 the surveys were interrupted by rain which closed the gravel roads in the Darling Shire preventing access to and around the park. However, it is great to see the rain and the amazing wildflowers and bird life that follows. Lake Peery itself has a lot of water at present, and hence thousands or tens of thousands, of birds visiting. Most of the water entering Lake Peery comes from rain that falls much further north, in south-western Queensland and north-western NSW. The generous rainfall over the past few years has been a real boon to both flora and fauna.

Our small bird survey team has conducted surveys over three periods, April 2022, August 2022 and April 2023. We use the 2ha 20 min +



500m method and record incidental sightings of raptors and rarely seen species as well. Surveys start at sunrise and generally we finish by midday. Our plan is to conduct these surveys twice each year in Autumn and Spring. Summer gets too hot!

There are nineteen recorded vegetation communities in the Peery section of the NP.¹ They include eucalyptus and Leopardwood woodlands, mulga and eremophila shrublands, saltbush and bluebush low shrublands and mixed herblands. Our survey sites are set in the different vegetation community types in the park which will help us understand how these different communities are used by bird species.

So far over our three surveys, we have a bird list of 105 bird species for the Peery section of the park, and we expect this list to increase over the coming years.

In April 2023, we visited Peery Lake to survey the water-birds there; it is difficult to access most of the lake because the ground near the lake edge is very soft on the western side and the sand-dunes and rocky hill formations make access very difficult from the eastern and southern side. However, even from the small area we could access, we managed to see thousands of pelicans and Great Cormorants as well as numerous species of waders and other migratory water birds.

The wildflowers after rain are spectacular – carpets of colourful flowers as far as the eye can see! And the night skies are dark with grand views of the Milky Way. This year there was a multitude of parrots, particularly in the eucalyptus woodlands bordering the creeklines, some of which still contained large pools of water. It is a beautiful place to visit and in which to work.

¹ <https://bit.ly/PeeryLake>

IMAGES:

(Top) Young emus at Peery Quarters, Paroo Darling National Park.

(Left) Mound spring in Lake Peery, Paroo-Darling National Park. These active artesian mound springs are considered to be the rarest landform in Australia.

Photos by A. Cam 2023



Thought-provoking New Zealand 3: Breeding on southern shores



During a privately organised March 2023 trip to New Zealand by Thursday Interpretive Nature Group members, we were able to observe some unfamiliar bird species and find out about the people who encourage these species and installations they have created. The South Island of New Zealand is the largest landmass between Australia and South America but has only one million residents. Among those are people tremendously dedicated to the welfare of birds of the South Pacific and Southern Oceans.

Northern Royal Albatross: The Royal Albatross colony at Taiaroa Head is the only mainland breeding colony of Royal Albatross in the world. Our afternoon's package tour enabled us to observe these birds soaring over the Pacific. From our small tourist launch, rocking gently on the waves or plummeting into troughs near the shore, we could see them waiting for thermals to lift them up to the steep slopes where their hungry young were in nests on the ground.

The Northern Royal Albatross is one of the World's largest seabirds with a wingspan of three metres. It has a very restricted range and is currently listed as Endangered. The population worldwide is estimated at 17,000 mature individuals, with about 99% of the total population on the Chatham Islands. They breed every second year. Only 25 pairs breed each year at Taiaroa Head.

Later, we travelled by road to their sanctuary, which is fenced to protect the area from predators such as stoats. From the Royal Albatross Discovery Centre we climbed a steep pathway to the observatory where we could see the young albatross at close quarters. The young albatross' progress can be observed by live Webcam 'Royalcam' - Go to <https://albatross.org.nz/>

Antipodes Island Parakeet: The Antipodes Island Parakeet is endemic to the Antipodes Islands of New Zealand. It is one of only five ground-dwelling parrots in the world. The introduction of mice that compete with them for food was a threat to their survival on the Antipodes Islands until the mice were successfully eradicated from the islands in 2016. Unusually for parrots, they sometimes prey upon other birds, a trait shared by another New Zealand parrot, the kea.

We were able to see Antipodes Island parakeets in their enclosure at the Te Anau Bird Observatory, high in the Lake Country of Fiordland. It is a pity for even a few of these beautiful creatures to have to be enclosed. Balanced against that is the need for humans to learn everything we can about species that are at risk of being lost.

During our visits we were acutely aware that some of Australia's recent species losses have been of species endemic to islands (see figure 2, page 5).

Images: Northern Royal Albatross in flight (Marilyn Kraus)

Antipodes Parakeet sign, Te Anau Bird Observatory (Jenny Miller)

Albatross Nest on windswept Taiaroa Head (Christine Davies)

Text by Christine Davies.

Letters to the Editor (more on page 6)

I very much enjoy reading Hut News reports of what the Society is doing. Some issues have particularly interested me.

Development in natural areas: It is enlightening to read how issues and conservation campaigning have evolved over time. The "supreme connection" of Aboriginal people to their country is commented upon. Perhaps the time has come to engage with and consult with Aboriginal people, for example, around the management of fire.

Decision not to raise the Warragamba Dam wall: No doubt this will come up again as developers desire to build on the floodplain and some politicians oblige them. Enough lives have been lost to flood waters in that area. In earlier times, at least six members of my family were washed to their deaths.

Society bequests: It is very welcome news that the Society has received bequests to support it in its work. I see this as a wonderful opportunity and support Phoebe Coster's proposal to invest it to give the Society ongoing income to enhance and perhaps expand the Society's work in a way that is satisfying to all members.

-- Nuala Gattenhof





Bushland home threatened

-- Jim Smith

Some residents of Fletcher Street, Fitzgerald Street and Valley Road Wentworth Falls, near the Conservation Hut, have been complaining about traffic issues created during high tourist visitation periods. Overcrowding of streets and safety concerns are particularly noticeable during autumn.

In a recent Blue Mountains City Council business paper (26 April 2023, page 108) one of the suggested solutions is to "Turn the triangle of land between Fitzgerald/Fletcher/Valley Road into a roundabout ..."

I feel that the Blue Mountains Conservation Society should object to this possibility as the triangle of land, although small, is a good remnant of the original vegetation and topography of this area. There are about 40 mature Peppermint Gum trees and many species of native plants and shrubs including orchids. The small number of weeds around the sides of the triangle could easily be removed. I have seen birds' nests there, Gang Gang Cockatoos feeding on gumnuts, honeyeaters sipping nectar from the Banksia and Mountain Devil flowers. A Satin Bower Bird has had a bower in this bush for some 20 years. Frogs breed in the natural gutter on the eastern side which is protected from drying out by overhanging tea trees.

I feel that it would be vandalism to turn this small oasis of nature into more "tar and cement". The wisest naturalist I ever knew was Isobel Bowden (1908-1986), who lived further down in Fletcher Street. She often spoke to me about the harm that was being done to natural drainage, soil moisture levels and the environment in general by the proliferation of hard surfaces impervious to rainfall. Just before she died she said to me "We can't afford to lose one more tree".

Let us make sure that we do not lose the trees and other species that live in the 'triangle' just because they happen to be living near an area popular with tourists.

Source of image: Google Earth Street View.

New Parliamentary Secretary congratulated

Society President, Annette Cam, has congratulated Blue Mountains State MP, Trish Doyle, on behalf of the Society following Trish Doyle's elevation to the role of Ministerial Secretary. Trish Doyle will be assisting the Minister for the Environment, the Hon Penny Sharpe, in various aspects of Ms Sharpe's portfolio.

The appointment of Trish indicates Premier Minns' recognition of our Local Member's longstanding interest in issues within the environment portfolio. In 2019, Trish was chosen by the Save Kosci movement to present a petition of more than 12,000 signatures associated with the threat from feral horses to endangered species in the Snowy Mountains. The electorate most affected by the feral horses was, at that time, represented by the former Deputy Premier John Barilaro. During a debate, witnessed by dozens of Trish's constituents, Trish reminded Mr Barilaro that the cultural mythology that has been cited to keep the horse threat expanding was based on a poem entitled "The Man from Snowy River", not "The Horse from Snowy River".

Trish Doyle has been one of the Parliament's most passionate advocates in saving the ecology and Aboriginal heritage threatened by dam raising, promoting the conservation of the Gardens of Stone and questioning the impacts of the previous State Government's approach to the Great Western Highway. Trish is a member of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society and has met regularly with the Society's representatives.

Trish regards the former Local Member and Environment Minister, now Wilderness Australia Chair, Bob Debus, as a very important mentor in her career.

-- Hut News Team

Hope for Soft Plastic Recycling (from page 1)

References:

- (1) <https://www.aprplastics.com.au/how-it-works-1>
- (2) <https://wastemanagementreview.com.au/plastics-into-oil-at-apr-plastics/>
- (3) <https://www.afgc.org.au/food-and-grocery-industry-supports-closing-the-loop-on-soft-plastic-packaging-with-new-recycling-trials>
- (4) <https://www.afgc.org.au/industry-resources/national-plastics-recycling-scheme>



BUSHWALKING:

Enjoy the bush, learn about the Blue Mountains natural environment and find out why bushwalking has been a popular pastime in the Blue Mountains for more than 100 years. Our bushwalking convenor is Doug Nicholls dougnicholls@bigpond.com, phone 0455 850 735.

Walks are graded and generally suitable for walkers of average fitness but may vary in degree of difficulty. Participants need to be aware of their own capabilities and can discuss with the bushwalking convenor, group coordinator or leader.

Underneath is a brief summary of walks and leaders for this month. **Check our website <https://www.bluemountains.org.au/bushwalking.shtml> for a detailed walks program and program changes.**

MONDAY LEISURE WALKS: Short day walks 3-5 hours. Bring morning tea, lunch and adequate water.

Coordinator: Keith Dorrian 04111 62345.

keithdor53@hotmail.com

June 5 **Mt Victoria Falls Rd, Ikara Head, Girraween Cave,** Mt Victoria Station 8.50, Wayne Read 0429 021 296

June 12 **Monarch's Birthday, No walk**

Jun 19 **Bowtells Bridge Megalong Valley,** Blackheath N/hood Centre 8.40, Lyn Bevington 0432 352 850

Jun 26 **Start near Bells line of Road to Wilkinson Hill and Jinki Ridge.** Mt Vic Stn 8.40, Wayne Read 0429 021 296

July-3 **Nature Trail Wentworth Falls, via Edinburgh Castle Rock and Lilian's Bridge with optional walk to Empress Falls.** Wentworth Falls Stn Carpark 9.30, Car Pool, Kathy Husselbee 0422 209 812

TUESDAY FITNESS WALKS: Coordinator: Susan Nicholls (4754 1516 suerosn@bigpond.net.au).

Jun 6 **Rail to River** (Chatswood) G2/7K, Judith 0419780640.

Jun 13 **Peggy's Pool (Faulconbridge)** G3/8K, Doug 0455850753.

Jun 20 **Callan Park & Iron Cove Bay** G1/7K, Roger 0449902774.

Jun 27 **Darks Common & The Bluff (Glenbrook),** Ken 0417514534.

THURSDAY PLEASURE WALKS are 2-3 hours and are conducted at a leisurely pace. Coordinator: Beverley Thompson (4757 2076 denfenella12@bigpond.com)

Jun 15 **Ngula Bulgarabang Regional Park, Katoomba.** Meet Katoomba Stn 9.30am. Take lunch. Carpool. Bronwyn 0418 261 327. Gr2.

Jun 22 **Evans Crown with lunch at Tarana Pub.** Mt Vic Station 9.50am. Carpool \$7. Tracy 0434 362 611. Gr2.

Jun 29 **Greenwich Point.** Meet top escalators Central Station 9.30am. Take lunch. Maurice 0402 402783. Gr1.

Jul 6 **Lawson Cemetery and old golf course.** Cnr Waratah/ Cleveland Sts 8.45am. Take lunch. Keith 0411 162 345. Gr1.

Jul 13 **Red Gum Park and Genevieve Fire Trail, Bullaburra.** Cnr Boronia Rd/GWH 8.45am. Take lunch. Libby 4759 2969. Gr2.

SATURDAY WALKS: Usually a full day, longer walk at a faster pace. Coordinator Harold Thompson 04090 10736, Harold.thompson@bigpond.com).

Jun 10 **Jinki Ridge.** Harold 0409010737, Mt Vic Stn 8.30am. Gr 3. 8km. Map Mt Wilson

Jun 17 **Mt Hay and Venus Tor.** Geoff 0497638033. Mt Hay Rd, Leura School 8.30am. Gr 3, 8km. Map Mt Wilson.

Jun 24 **Thor Head to Valhalla Hd via Asgard Ck.** Harold 0409010737. Mt Vic Stn 8.30am. Gr3, 10km. Map Mt. Wilson.

Jul 1 **Blue Burra Korain via Victoria Falls.** Harold 0409010737. Mt Vic Stn 8.30am. Gr3, 8km. Map Mt Wilson

Visit the Saturday walks facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/bmcslongerbushwalks?fref=nf>

From the mailbag ...

Saving the Franklin - a new ABC podcast

I'm a producer with the ABC and am getting in touch about the latest podcast series from the ABC: *Saving the Franklin*. We think the Blue Mountains Conservation Society's members would love this story – it's all about communities coming together to win a fight for the environment!

This six-part podcast, the third season of ABC's Dig podcast, is a cracking story about the fight 40 years ago to save Tasmania's last major wild river from being flooded by a dam. It's a classic David v Goliath story; a bunch of passionate environmentalists go up against the all-powerful Tasmanian government and Hydro Electric Commission.

This story has such resonance in the current climate we find ourselves in today. You can see the story's legacy in everything from the fight over Adani mines to the existence of the Greens party, and young people's new tactics in environmental protest actions.

At a time when so many people are looking for hope in the face of climate change, host Jo Lauder has looked back at this battle to find out: in a fight for the environment, what does it take to win?

You can catch all six episodes at <https://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/dig> *Saving the Franklin* is also available on Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

-- Amelia Mertha, ABC Audio Studios

How to Join the Society

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society is an incorporated voluntary organisation of more than 900 members. Our goal is to protect, conserve, and advocate for, the natural environment of the Greater Blue Mountains. You can become a member. Join online at www.bluemountains.org.au/joining.shtml or phone 0490 419 779.

Membership includes our monthly newsletter, Hut News, by post or e-mail (or both).

Blue Mountains Conservation Society Planning and Development Resource Kit

Do you want to take action on an environmental issue in your neighbourhood or the Blue Mountains more broadly? Do you want information about the laws and procedures relating to development and environmental protection?

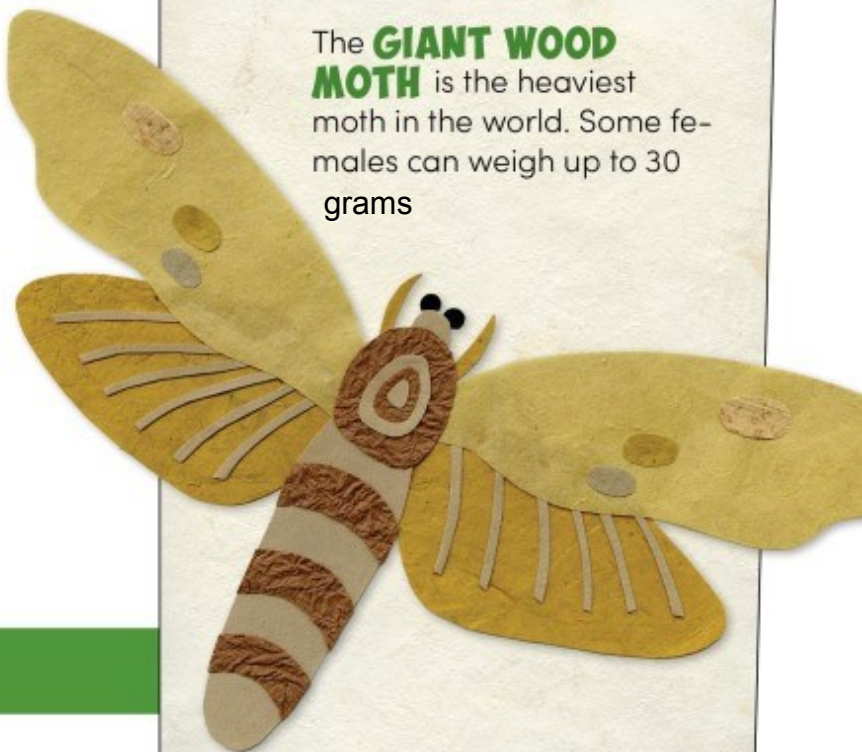
Find out what **YOU** can do! Go to the Planning and Development Resource Kit:

www.bluemountains.org.au/pdrk-welcome.shtml

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INSECT

The **GIANT WOOD MOTH** is the heaviest moth in the world. Some females can weigh up to 30 grams



DUNG BEETLES are the world's strongest animal! A dung beetle can pull 1,141 times its own bodyweight. That is the same as a person pulling six full buses!



SPINY LEAF INSECTS

can emit an odor that smells like peanut butter and vinegar. This helps them avoid predators.



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Ingrid Hess is a cut-paper artist. Download Ingrid's finished artwork (published in the online version of Hut News) and one to colour (published in the printed version of Hut News).

Collect the pages as they appear in Hut News.

<https://bluemountains.org.au/documents/hutnews/archive/wild-image-LETTER-I-.pdf>