

LOWER BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY

NEWS BULLETIN

SEPTEMBER 1975

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Next Monthly Meeting; Friday September 12th.
8 p.m. at the Springwood
Red Cross Hall.

Annual General Meeting; Friday October 10th.
8 p.m. at the Springwood
Red Cross Hall.

Frazer Park Excursion

Despite doubtful weather in the week before, and rain immediately after, the weekend itself had ideal weather. Twelve members and friends, plus children, camped at a site overlooking the beach and headlands.

On the Saturday afternoon we walked over the headland and some of the party descended by rope to inspect several sea caves and some of the sea life there.

Next morning we walked around the rock platform to see the various features of that part of the coast. After lunch the August monthly meeting was held on the grass at the campsite. The rest of the afternoon was free for members to follow their own interests:- to the beach, to explore more sea caves, to watch the many birds and look for wildflowers.

As is the case in many such areas, trail bikes have caused considerable damage to the heath country and promoted erosion.

All in all, it was a most enjoyable weekend.

Coming Events

Saturday, Sept. 6th: Bird study drive along Hawkesbury Rd. to Yarramundi. Meet at the Whitecross Rd. junction with Hawkesbury Rd. at 9a.m.. If coming later drive along Hawkesbury Rd. and look out for us.

Friday, Sept. 12th: Meeting, Springwood Red Cross Hall, 8p.m. Rev. Dr. Stockton will be giving a talk on the Aboriginal history of N.S.W., with particular reference to the Blue Mountains. He will be showing some exhibits. Friends and visitors are also welcome to this meeting, which should be an interesting and informative one.

Friday, Oct. 10: Annual General Meeting and Election of Officers, Springwood Red Cross Hall, 8p.m.

Fees.

At the August meeting it was reluctantly decided that subscriptions for the coming year will have to be increased. Despite past increases in postage and other costs, our subscription rates have remained constant for many years. Now postage is about to rise again by an enormous amount and we cannot afford to reduce our limited reserves.

New rates will be:	Ordinary membership	-	\$4-00
	Family	"	- \$5-00
	Student	"	- \$1-00

We ask that all subscriptions be renewed at or before the October meeting.

Near Extinction Risks

Elephant seals are large animals which can weigh up to 3 tonnes. The population of Northern elephant seals around California plummeted from many tens of thousands at the beginning of last century to as few as 20 individuals in the 1890's, due to thoughtless commercial exploitation. Following government protection the population has now built up to about 30,000.

These changes provided a rare opportunity to examine the genetic consequences of a species that comes near to extinction.

Successful adaptation of a species to environmental changes depends on the existence of a rich pool of genetic variations. Most of these variants remain more or less unexploited until an external change gives some kind of selective advantage to them. These variations are a sort of genetic hedge against future environmental changes.

These variations exist in the form of small genetic differences within a particular gene type. A good analogy to this is the motor car, which varies in size, shape and colour, but does basically the same job. A change in the price of petrol or in tax rates may impart advantages to certain types of cars.

Geneticists call this genetic variation "polymorphism". Surveys have shown that normally between 10 and 20% of all genes are polymorphic.

The Northern Californian elephant seals were examined for the presence of polymorphism. It was found that there was no measurable gene variation at all - no polymorphism. The Southern elephant seal, related to the northern species, was also measured for polymorphism. The southern species had not been heavily exploited and it was found that they showed the normal amount of genetic variation.

Genetic uniformity of the northern elephant seal occurred because the mere twenty or so individuals left in the 1890's came from the one small group on a remote island off the Californian coast. The present 30,000 all descended from this twenty.

Apparently genetic variability is not essential for the survival of the species in the short term. However, the northern elephant seals are particularly vulnerable to any future change in the environment, despite their present large numbers.

Control Burning.

Burning of bushland to reduce the hazard to residential areas at times of high fire danger is a matter of considerable controversy. In the Blue Mountains this is a particularly vital question, as the wrong decision could either ruin the bushland or cause unnecessary loss of life and property. The real answer is likely to lie in finding the appropriate timing for any burning, the optimum interval between fires, and the amount to be burnt at any one time.

The Society has set up a committee to study all relevant information on controlled burning and then to formulate a policy on this. We would welcome any comments from members on this.

BIRDS IN YOUR GARDEN

In the previous issue Mick wrote about our experiences in attracting honeyeaters to the garden. Now it is my turn to describe other ways of encouraging birds to visit your garden.

Firstly, I would emphasise that if you have a cat please do not try and attract birds. Cats are a bird's worst enemy and are always killers, no matter how well fed. Secondly, the birds we are trying to attract are native birds, not sparrows, starling, Indian mynahs, etc. With the spread of housing and destruction of the bush, these introduced pests are spreading rapidly and, being strong and aggressive, are driving the native birds away. They also attack the nests and young of native birds. Every sparrow or mynah that we feed is taking the place of a native bird.

One of the best ways of attracting native birds is, of course, by planting a native garden. This, to my mind, is the only sort of garden to have. The plants benefit the birds, by providing them with food and shelter. Most native birds are insectivorous and are used to finding their food on native trees. Those flowers with a good supply of nectar, such as grevilleas, hakeas, callistemons, etc. will attract many birds apart from honeyeaters. Silvereyes, satin bower birds and parrots are among those attracted to the flowers, although I could wish that the crimson rosellas would leave some flowers on my grevilleas. The parrots also love the seeds of many acacias and come in droves when the Christmas bush seeds are ripe. The small birds, wrens, thornbills, silvereyes, etc. will be happiest in thick shrubby bushes where they feel safe from predators, while the magpies and peewees like to stalk about in the open, generally with an eye on the kitchen door! It would take far too long to describe all the plants suitable for a "bird garden" so once again I would refer you to Barbara Salter's "Australian Native Gardens and Birds" which we have found invaluable.

Water also has its place in the garden. Most birds enjoy a bath, especially in the hot weather. There should be cover close by for the protection of the smaller birds, and ideally a pool deep enough for the honeyeaters to dive in. We often sit quietly for ages watching the birds bathe, the honeyeaters diving in and out, the crimson rosellas just sitting and splashing, and the little wrens and thornbills hopping in and out twittering when all the bigger birds have finished.

Many birds can be attracted by supplies of cheese, seeds, meat, etc. but we have never been able to leave food out as we have too many Indian mynahs. We did try putting out seed for the parrots but the magpies ate it as soon as we put it out and the crimson rosellas did not show the slightest interest so we gave up. We do

not see many king parrots here although many people in Glenbrook feed them successfully.

However, we have an assortment of other birds which we feed by hand on meat or cheese. The kookaburras, of course are always around and we have helped rear at least four families. The last two years our "kookas" have reared four young ones and we like to think that we have helped. There are usually a few magpies about and they often become very cheeky. We have one at the moment who pecks at the kitchen door when he is hungry. We are woken every morning by a pair of young grey butcher birds who are always hungry. We have found that they will eat cheese or even toast if no meat is forthcoming, but were very surprised to see them trying to drink out of the honey feeder. Their beaks did cause them some trouble though. At various times we have also fed thrushes and peewees on cheese but they have currently deserted us.

As our native garden grows we are hoping to attract more of the small bush birds and with luck, they may even nest in the garden.

We feel that a native garden is of benefit in many ways. The plants supply the birds with food and shelter. The birds in turn keep the plants free of pests. This benefits you. There is less gardening to do so more time can be spent in watching the birds.

- Jill Dark.

EASTERN ESCARPMENT PRESERVATION ?

Last month saw the gazettal of IDO 26, which gave us the decisions of the Minister for Planning & Environment on the future of the eastern escarpment. The decisions are a disaster, crown land between Lapstone and Glenbrook remains residential as does most of Yellow Rock estate and areas round Hawkesbury Lookout. In addition a large slab of previously non-urban land behind Mt. Sion Park, and running down almost to Lennox bridge becomes residential.

Although the gazettal of the IDO means that formal objections are no longer possible there is one further method of approach - the minister can be asked to vary the development order.

I strongly urge all members of the society to write to the Minister for Planning & Environment asking him to vary the IDO in any one or all of the designated residential areas.

- Mick Dark.

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11th October 1975
Write Sir John Fyfe.