

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"



Monthly meeting: Friday 24 June, 7.30 pm at the Conservation Hut, Wentworth Falls
Screening of the Documentary: The End of Suburbia: Oil Depletion and the Collapse of the American Dream

We will soon enter, or may in hindsight find we already have entered, a period of world history where the ready availability of oil is falling yet demand for this very resource is growing faster than ever. This will mean an end to the cheap oil that over the last 60 years has become the mainstay for the car and road oriented way of life so typical of many developed nations, including Australia. The changes this oil depletion will bring will be both far reaching and rapid.

The "End of Suburbia: Oil Depletion and the Collapse of the American Dream" presents an at times confronting and challenging view of what some of these changes might be, with a particular focus on the critical need to immediately start building environmentally sustainable local communities. While the documentary is hard hitting it really is a must see wake up call for all who are concerned with the direction our society, now so influenced by the American model, is taking.

After the showing of the documentary there will be a discussion session to consider what all this means for Australia, NSW, and the Blue Mountains community. There is a rocky ride ahead and we all need to start trying to fix it now. So come along, bring a friend, and watch this challenging documentary. If you've already seen it, then see it again and bring someone who hasn't! And take to heart the quote from Thomas Hardy at the documentary's outset: "If a path to the better there be it begins with a full look at the worst."

GOOD NEWS! Federal protection for our Blue Mountains swamps

On 29 April, 2005, the Society's management committee was ecstatic to receive a letter from the Federal Minister for Environment and Heritage. Addressed to our former Threatened Species Officer Ian Baird, it announced that our Temperate Highland Peat Swamps on Sandstone (known locally as hanging swamps) have been included in a listing under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999* as not merely vulnerable, but **ENDANGERED!**

This is a MAJOR victory for the Blue Mountains environment after a long campaign to protect swamps and a nomination first to the State Government then to the Commonwealth. One can imagine the joy that this announcement brings to the Blue Mountains Water Skink, the Giant Burrowing Frog and the Giant Dragonfly and a host of yet unearthed peat fossils that inhabit the swamps. But that joy can scarcely compare with that of our own Land Care Officer **Lyndal Sullivan** and the author of the nomination **Haydn Washington**. Lyndal, along with colleagues within and without the Society, has been battling to achieve this listing for over six years and her account of the struggle is recorded for posterity on page 3 of this newsletter.

It is a wonderful record of a patient

and ultimately exhilarating campaign in which you have all, not only those named by Lyndal, by your attitude and membership played a part. This is the beginning of a new era, when we have a new weapon to wield in our fight for the right of these 12,000 year-old unique ecosystems to live and flourish.

Temperate Highland Peat Swamps on Sandstone listed for protection under the EPBA Act are defined as temporary or permanent swamps in the Blue Mountains, Lithgow, Southern Highlands and Bombala Regions and include both sedge and shrubs swamps. The listing recognises the restricted distribution and vulnerability of this ecological community. It aims to prevent their further decline and assist community and land manager efforts towards recovery. Activities which are likely to have a significant impact may now be referred to the Minister for assessment. These will include urban development, dams or groundwater bores, grazing, mining generally and peat mining.

View Department of the Environment and Heritage (AGDEH) (2005F) Information Sheet on Temperate Highland Peat Swamps at <http://www.deh.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicshowcommunity.pl?id=32&stat> or get a copy from the Society at the next general meeting.

Nursery news

Have you noticed all the honey-eaters in your garden recently? Then why not put in some nectar producing plants to entice them to stay longer?

Our Lawson Nursery (Cataract Street, off Livingstone Street and behind Mt. Hay Technology) is open on Wednesday mornings and we have a variety of *Banksias*, *Correas*, *Grevilleas*, *Hakeas* etc. which the birds love. Tubestock is just \$2.50 each and, additionally, there are weekly bargains as low as \$1.

Our Blackheath facility is currently being renovated and will re-open in August. Watch for opening specials. Enquiries to Kevin Bell (Ph/fax 47876436, kbell@pnc.com.au)

Submissions re Parklands

by Virginia King

The proposed development of 84 dwellings in Govett's Leap Road, Blackheath, known as "Parklands" is back in Council with a new D.A.

The former D.A. was rejected by Councillors in February because the majority of the sewage was to be tankered away daily. The new D.A. proposes onsite sewage treatment, with dispersal onto the ground. LEP 1991 requires any on-site sewage treatment to satisfy Council on environmental and health grounds. But the technical report within the D.A. uses evaporation data from Bathurst to assess the site's suitability and fails to consider the low temperatures and regular rainy days in Blackheath which would make the system unworkable.

"Parklands" is a sloping site, just above Pope's Glen Creek, a tributary of the Grose River, and as the D.A. also fails to exclude the environmental buffer zone from the dispersal area, the river system risks being polluted. In addition, small-scale sewage treatment plants are notoriously prone to failure and are vulnerable to poisoning when household chemicals like bleach are put down the sink. The inevitable solution to system failure would appear to be tankering.

After the lack of community consultation over the former "Parklands" D.A., Council is now organising a public meeting in Blackheath to inform residents about the proposal (watch the Gazette and village posters for details). The D.A. can be viewed in Council offices in Katoomba and Springwood and at Blackheath Library.

A local action group - BRAID, Blackheath Residents Against Improper Development - is a sub-committee of RAID Inc., the dynamic lower mountains group. **BRAID is asking all concerned residents to make submissions to Council: "Parklands" File No: X05/0412. Closing date is June 24.**

**"Hut News", the newsletter of
Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc.**
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Greenfleet – a worthwhile contribution!

If you drive a car then you are probably concerned about its carbon emissions adding to greenhouse warming. The ideal solution is to get rid of the car and simply walk or ride a bike, but for many of us, car usage remains unavoidable. So what can be done? A partial solution is to have trees planted on your behalf to offset your car's carbon emissions. Greenfleet, a non profit organisation, undertakes such planting and to date has planted approximately 2 million trees. The BMCS management committee believes that members should consider this program by looking at the Greenfleet website (www.greenfleet.com.au) and, hopefully, participating. At an annual cost of approximately \$40 for the planting of 17 trees in environmentally damaged countryside, you would be making a worthwhile contribution.

This said, you should still remember that car use involves more than carbon emissions. For instance, considerable amounts of finite resources are used to power and lubricate cars, and to construct them and the roads they run on. So signing up with Greenfleet should not blind you to the urgent need for communities with efficient and extensive public transport and good bike paths!

Win for western woodlands

Conservationists across the state have welcomed the decision by the NSW Government to protect 348,000 ha of western woodlands in the Brigalow Belt South and Nandewar bioregions. The decision will vastly improve the prospects of the threatened plants and animals that rely on these pockets of remnant woodland.

The end to major iron bark operations and protection of most of the last stands of those iconic woodlands in the region is also a welcome step. Glossy-black

Cockatoos, Barking Owls, and many woodland birds and mammals need large old Ironbarks and other hardwoods with big hollows to raise their young in. There is a generous financial package for the timber industry and the firewood industry has an exit offer.

Congratulations to everyone who participated in this important campaign and to the NSW State Government for this decision. Our western woodland plants and animals now have substantially more protection. (More information: Western Woodlands Network, National Parks Assn, western@npansw.org.au)

Welcome to new members

Peter and Marina Abke, Malabar
Elizabeth & Donald Hutchison, Katoomba
Sue Lange, Katoomba
John W Evans, Blackheath
Cassandra Primavera, Lawson
John van der Have, Faulconbridge.

Saving Radiata Plateau

The Save Radiata Plateau Group has continued to gather signatures from the public. Lee Rhianon of The Greens formally presented these petitions with over 1500 signatures to Parliament on 24 May, 2005. BMCS previously forwarded several hundred cut-out slips to the Premier asking him to take action on behalf of his Government. Surely Bob Debus, Bob Carr and the Blue Mountains City Council must recognise that saving the Plateau from even limited development is of critical concern.

Members of the Society and many other good citizens that signed the petitions and slips want this land to be in Public ownership, not just for themselves, but for the enhancement of the National Park and World Heritage Area and the preservation of the escarpment's integrity. All it needs is money! And not all that much when the budgets of the NPWS, the BMCC and the Federal Government's financial commitment to the World Heritage area are considered. But still there is inertia!

To break this inertia the Society has offered the State Government a donation of \$50,000 towards the purchase of the private portion of the Plateau. This may not seem much to the affluent, but it is four times the Society's annual subscription income.

For comparison, the State Government's income is ~\$40 billion and the NPWS has a budgeted expenditure of ~\$294 million. Even your local Council has an income of ~\$80 million with an environmental budget of ~\$17.5 million. And what the Federal Government has available for its numerous purposes doesn't stand thinking about! All we ask is that between them they scrape together sufficient money to buy the critical hectares.

We are asking Bob Debus as the local Member and Minister for the Environment to follow our example and take the lead in brokering a solution where each 'government' organisation donates the 'spare change' from its multimillion-dollar budget. Our Council would surely see value in such an approach and Kerry Bartlett would have the chance to thank the electorate that returned him.

Federal Government cuts funding to advocacy groups

For many years the Federal Government has provided funding to regional and umbrella groups such as the Nature Conservation Council of NSW and its counterparts in other states through the Grants to Voluntary Environment and Heritage Organisations (GVEHO) programme. At \$85,000, GVEHO provided a major source of funding for NCC and has provided \$4,000 support for BMCS for the last few years. Without notice and 10 months into the 2004/05 financial year, the level of grants has been capped at \$10,000 per recipient and will be provided only for "on-the-ground" activities such as tree planting; advocacy groups such as NCC have been specifically excluded from funding, maybe because the government does not want them to publicly criticise government policy.

We are writing to Blue Mountains federal member Kerry Bartlett pointing out that NCC is the NSW community's voice on environmental issues and as such should be publicly funded.

BMCS members' letters reinforcing this view will doubtless demonstrate to Mr Bartlett that public opinion is against this change.

You can write to Kerry Bartlett at 186 Macquarie Road, Springwood, or fax 4751 7495

Newnes park proposal

Newnes Plateau is the last unprotected part of Myles Dunphy's 1932 Greater Blue Mountains National Park proposal. It has been subjected to coal mining for many years, but now the Department of Planning, Infrastructure and Natural Resources has flagged the entire plateau for sand mining. A draft Departmental discussion paper has identified a 500 million tonne resource of construction sand on the Plateau. Unless a vigorous campaign is launched, Newnes Plateau could become a giant sand pit.

The Hon Craig Knowles, the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, currently has legislation before Parliament that would see environmental protections swept aside to allow developments like major sand mining operations to proceed with limited opportunities for public comment and review.

The Colong Foundation for Wilderness and Blue Mountains Conservation Society are working together on a park proposal that seeks to better protect Newnes Plateau, the Airly-Genowlan Mesa in the Capertee Valley and other parts of the spectacular Gardens of Stone area.

On Sunday 3 July a site inspection has been organised to introduce members to some of the many conservation values of the Plateau (see the weekend walks guide on page 4).

Federal protection for our unique swamps

by Lyndal Sullivan

It has been a long time since February 1999 when BMCS first decided to investigate the feasibility of getting hanging swamps listed as a threatened community under the NSW *Threatened Species Conservation Act, 1995*.

Advice from the experts was that we couldn't win this one – while swamps were under severe threat they weren't "endangered" because there were lots of them in the National Park. However we were not going to be deterred, we thought it worth trying and we could use any refusal as a lever for future change in the legislation.

The BMCC Management Committee appointed Haydn Washington, who had successfully proposed a community under the Act, as a consultant to prepare a nomination. Tracey Austin offered her previous work, the 1984 mapping of hanging swamps in the Blue Mountains outside of the Park. Peter and Judy Smith had done extensive mapping for BMCC and identified distinguishing species in a later project for the community. The Biodiversity Project also had data on swamp species.

There were a number of complex issues to resolve in order to satisfy the criteria of the Act, then discussion centred around how to define the community most likely to be successfully listed and of course most vulnerable to loss. Should the

community be defined only as button grass swamps (sedge swamps), or should it be the broader category Blue Mountains Swamps, which would include both sedge and shrub swamps? The broader category was selected.

The next four months were spent collating information and seeking comments from local 'experts'. Society Members were asked through Hut News, a monthly meeting and personal contact to name the 'lost swamps' they knew of. Bessie Bramston and Eugene Stockton were among those who gave first-hand accounts of where the swamps were. We compiled a total of 29 locations of swamps completely destroyed or degraded.

The nomination was submitted in October 1999, with an impressive array of maps supplied with the assistance of NPWS and Blue Mountains City Council staff and we continued to collect data on other swamp locations.

In July 2000 the NSW Scientific Committee advised that there was currently no provision in the NSW Act for the recognition of vulnerable communities, and suggested that we pursue the new Federal legislation which had such a provision – *The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, 1999*.

The Society then decided to follow two courses of action: firstly to nominate the swamps under the new EPBC Act, and secondly to start a campaign to change the NSW Act to make provision for vulnerable ecological communities. After some revamping of the documentation, Haydn submitted our nomination to the Federal Government (Environment Australia) in Oct. 2000.

In March 2001, after many phone calls, we were told that a preliminary assessment had been completed, but additional mapping was needed! Horror, our maps had gone astray, and it was not easy to get more copies of large maps... But we did – again with help from NPWS and extra work by Haydn (who had by now well exceeded the amount of work he had been paid for). In the meantime the Society had contacted Bob Debus asking for changes to the NSW Act to make provision for vulnerable ecological communities. Bob gave his support to protecting the swamps by NSW legislation. We had also gained the support of other conservation groups at the NCC State Conference in October 2000 and NCC subsequently made representation to the NSW Government.

During mid-2001 there was community concern about the damage being wreaked on swamps in Lawson by trail bikes. Residents not only approached Council for action, but also made overtures to the Federal government to provide some protection for the swamps. This was an important boost to our nomination. In November 2001 Society members briefed BMCC Councillors who unanimously voted to support our nomination. BMCC staff subsequently submitted an excellent supporting submission.

In March 2002 the EA website invited public comments on the proposal to list Blue Mountains Swamps as Vulnerable. Unfortunately no one in the Blue Mountains community knew about it until days before the closing date – it wasn't advertised in the local paper. We negotiated an extension of time, and wrote a press release for the *Gazette* asking for local support. Some twenty-five submissions resulted, including those by well-known local experts like Bill Holland, Eugene Stockton and Margaret Baker.

In February 2003, we hosted a one day visit from the Federal department, showing them a carefully selected sample of both our sound and degraded swamps. Ruth Ley's muffins sustained us all through this gruelling ordeal! There were promises that we would be notified by July 2003. Many emails and phone calls later got no response.

An informal meeting with Minister David Kemp took place in October 2003 at the NCC conference, and again promises resulted in no action. In September 2004 (just before the Federal Election!) several members of Consoc Management Committee spoke about the nomination with the newly-appointed Minister, Senator Ian Campbell. The Minister's reaction was encouraging.

On the State front, an amendment to the Threatened Species Conservation Act, 1995 was passed in October 2002 to allow vulnerable ecological communities to be listed under the Act and give at least some token recognition, if not protection. But there are still no mechanisms in place to deal with nominations. **We had almost despaired of Federal response when that letter dated 29 April 2005 arrived from Senator Campbell revealing that the BLUE MOUNTAINS SWAMPS had been listed as ENDANGERED under Federal legislation. The long saga had had a happy ending after all!**

National Tree Day

The 10th annual National Tree Day is on Sunday July 31st and Schools Tree Day is on Friday July 29th. Organised by Planet Ark with backing from Toyota and AMP Foundation, last year's Tree Day saw 250,000 volunteers plant over a million wildlife-friendly native trees at 3,200 sites across Australia.

Call the Planet Ark Tree Day Hotline on 1300 88 5000 to get involved or visit www.planetark.com/tree_day

Poetry of the Blue Mountains

John Low and Deb Westbury will be reading their poetry at Woodford Academy on Saturday 18 June between 11am and 12 noon. Entry cost of \$5 includes the poetry reading and a tour of the historic inn buildings. Refreshments will be available during the day. Enquiries 4759 1129.

MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES

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Broken Hill and beyond

by Christine Davies

In May 2005 fourteen Society bushwalkers travelled by train to Broken Hill and then with local tour company Tri State Safaris to Silverton, Mutawintji National Park, White Cliffs, Menindee and Kinchega National Park. Our guides/drivers/chefs/carers were John and Lance who share an immense knowledge and love of the area.

I was distressed by the overgrazing and degradation of the country but enthralled by its beauty and character – the expanses of the saltbush plains, the colours of the soil, the magnificent River Red Gums which line the dry creeks and the Darling River, the beautiful sunsets and sunrises, the endless horizon and sense of space.

Most amazing is the hydrology. It doesn't rain much in the arid zone but many broad creeks and floodways cross the roads. They were all dry, and are usually so, but during rain they flood and the roads are impassable. Flood waters in the Darling come from rains which fall on the western slopes of the far-off Queensland ranges. These flood waters spread far beyond the river's banks and high into the River Red Gums. Just imagine the transformation!

But it hasn't rained in the arid zone for four years. Vast areas of the Darling River flood plain are overgrazed and have been reduced to dust, bones of starved sheep and cattle lying bleached on the sand and the saltbush eaten back into the hardwood by feral goats. At Wilcannia the mighty Darling is reduced to a blue-green-algae-infested puddle. Too much water is taken out during these dry times by upstream irrigators who have been given licences to do it.

We saw emus, kangaroos, flocks of galahs settling in the trees overnight and taking off in the early morning. We saw lots of Wedge-tailed Eagles which are thriving on the ravages of the drought. We visited Mutawintji Aboriginal site and saw hand stencils and learned about Aboriginal culture and bush medicine from our Aboriginal guide Lance. A shimmering mirage beside the distant White Cliffs of that opal mining town looked like an ocean inlet. (White Cliffs was once under the sea, the opals formed in an ancient marine environment.) Waterbirds abounded where we camped at Menindee Lakes.

It seems that the roots of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society have a connection with Broken Hill.

John Buki, the man who was perhaps most significant in starting the original Katoomba and District Wildlife Conservation Society as it was then named, was a Hungarian professor of linguistics who migrated to Australia in the 1950s. He was sent initially as a railway ganger to Broken Hill and was appalled that white Australians seemed to have no interest in or knowledge of

BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY BUSHWALKING GROUP

Our bushwalking group provides a range of activities. Membership of the bushwalking group is available to members of the Society. For further information contact the Activity Coordinator (listed) or Bushwalks Conveyor Bob van Reyswoud. **Cost of insurance and affiliation fees for bushwalkers of \$15 per member.**

Monday Leisure Walks: Usually 'Short Day' walks of 3-5 hours suitable for walkers of average fitness. Graded Medium, i.e. can include some short rock scrambles or some short section off track. Bring morning tea and lunch, plus carry at least 1 litre of WATER, 2 litres on warmer days.

Jun 13 Red Hands Cave. Aboriginal site. Meet 9am railway commuter car park, Glenbrook. ☎ Ron 4757 1526.

Jun 20 Leura Forest. Return by Scenic Railway or Scenicender. Meet 9am railway commuter car park, Leura. ☎ Norah 4757 4058

Jun 27 Paradise Pool. Secluded mountain pool. Meet 9am cnr. Woodford Ave and Great Western Highway, Woodford. ☎ Jock 4758 6346.

Jul 4 Rose Bay to Watson's Bay. Heritage track in Sydney Harbour N.P. Meet 9.30 top of escalators, Central Railway. Lunch at Doyles. ☎ Mary 4758 6918.

Thursday Pleasure Walks: These easy to medium grade walks are conducted to suit the walkers on the day. Times given are approximate. Slower walkers are catered for and on longer walks there is an option of a slower group to complete a section of the walk. Phone the contact for any enquiries about the program, starting times and

Jun 16 Castle Head Lookout, Narrowneck. Walk along ridge to lookout via firetrail and bush track. 5 km return. Meet 10am Gearins Hotel Katoomba. ☎ Joan 4782 2218.

Jun 23 Darwins Walk, Wentworth Falls. For this walk it is essential to phone up by 7 pm on June 22 to confirm if walk is on. Meet 10am at the car park near the clock, W.Falls village. ☎ Simone 4757 3416.

Jun 30 Bus trip to Mt Annan Botanic Gardens. All day trip. Cost for bus and guide at the Gardens \$10. Entry cost: Friends free, Seniors \$3.30, Concession \$2.20. Picnic and BBQ areas available. Depart Katoomba depot 8.30 am with pickups along the highway. Bookings required. ☎ Simone 4757 3416.

Jul 7 Riverside Walk in Hartley area. Drive to Cox's River crossing for easy walk along river bank. Meet 10am Mt Victoria Station ☎ Marie 4787 1257.

Aug 25 Bus Trip: Visit Cattai National Park near Windsor. Historic farm on Hawkesbury River, bushwalks through native vegetation. Cost for bus \$10. ☎ Simone 4757 3416. Attend two Thursday bus trips and get the third one free.

Weekend Bushwalks: Always discuss with the contact if the walk you would like to do is medium/hard or hard, before attending. If this is your first walk, or you are in any doubt, discuss with the contact or Bushwalks Convener Bob van Reyswoud, 4757 2694, email mcreysw@bigpond.net.au

Jun 11 (Sat) Narrow Neck To Taros Ladder. Medium. Meet Gearins Hotel, Katoomba 8.30am. ☎ Bob 4757 2694.

Jun 18 (Sat) Ruined Castle. Meet Gearin's Hotel, Katoomba 8.30am. ☎ Bill 4759-1692

Jun 25 (Sat) T3 walking Track. Mountain Lagoon. Wonderful views of the Colo Gorge. Medium. Meet Mt Victoria station, 8.30am. ☎ Bob 4757 2694.

Jul 2(Sat) Lockleys Track - Du Fours Head - Yardley Cave - Walford Gully across the tops to Lycon Rill - Rocky Points Ravine and return to the Pinnacles. Distance 12 km, approx 6km off track with 2 steep ascents and descents - possibly part exploratory - plenty of scrambling and maybe some wet feet. Medium/hard/exploratory. ☎ Jim 4758 6009.

Jul 3 (Sun) Newnes Plateau. Full day park proposal inspection by car. Birds Rock, Wolgan Falls, Temple of Doom. Meet Mt Victoria Station 9am. Car Pool. Medium. ☎ Keith 9299 7341. (See Page 3).

Sundays: There are no vacancies in our Plant Study Group. Anyone particularly interested please ring Liz on 4757 2694.

Wednesday Walks. These are continuing every week. We are sending out the information by email, or you can phone Bob on 4757 2694 if you want more information.

the native environment and to take no care of it and not to value it. That was what fuelled his commitment to start teaching people about it in the hope that it would lead them to appreciate it.

Broken Hill today is a "City of the Arts" but proud of its mining history. Galleries outnumber pubs. Revegetation projects have calmed the dust which used to blow through the town. Public parks and gardens and street trees are watered with recycled water. We met with members of the Darling River Action Group who want to persuade State Government to reduce the damaging and unsustainable extraction of water from

the Darling River under the licences it has issued.

I would love to go back after rain, when the land "blossoms". Imagine the transformation! What a beautiful country we live in – if only we could learn to take better care of it and value it.

Recommended reading: Kinchega National Park Plan of Management, section 3 - Historical overview (pages 12-47) www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/npws.nsf/Content/Kinchega_cmctp

"Four Ways: National Parks from Broken Hill", R McAllister, Chapple Street Press.