

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"



National Parks under attack – Public Meeting planned

In September, the NSW Government is planning to change National Park and Wilderness laws to greatly increase privately funded development and accommodation in our national parks. There will also be an amendment to the Game Bill, with the Shooters Party pushing for hunting in national parks. (See Brian Marshall's report on page 6).

It is clear that National Parks and nature conservation is under attack. There appears to be a tidal wave of political pressure upon park managers to expedite the removal of precious 'green tape' that currently protects our national parks. Four separate accommodation developments have been proposed for national parks in the Far South Coast's Tourism Master Plan, an 800 bed development has been approved at Perisher, and holiday cabins are proposed in the Arakoon State Conservation Area (despite strong opposition from local tourism businesses). Furthermore, the Government was considering supporting legislation to allow hunting in national parks during the June sitting of parliament, but backed away at the last moment due to public outrage. We are concerned that this could change in September!

BMCS is going to run a **Public Meeting in late August** to STOP the NSW Government from changing the National Parks Act. We need to send a strong message:

National Parks are for NATURE. Visitors and tourists are welcome, but not hunting or eco resorts.

Full details will be in the August Hut news. Please contact Tara if you are willing to help organise this event. (email) domtara@bigpond.com or phone 4751 1130.

July Monthly Meeting

The Grey-headed Flying-fox is a recognised keystone species for the long-range pollination and seed dispersal of native trees, and its conservation is vital for the health of diverse ecosystems. The Grey-headed Flying-fox occurs primarily along the eastern coastal plain from Bundaberg in Queensland, through NSW and south to eastern Victoria

Historically, Grey-headed Flying-foxes had a greater range in Australia and numbers were estimated as being in the "many millions". Habitat loss and other factors have greatly reduced their numbers. The species has been listed as a Vulnerable Species under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995. Culling by orchardists is a recognized threat. Current rates of mortality will render flying-foxes functionally extinct within a few decades (prior to species extinction) and undermine the conservation of native plants and the wildlife that relies on them.

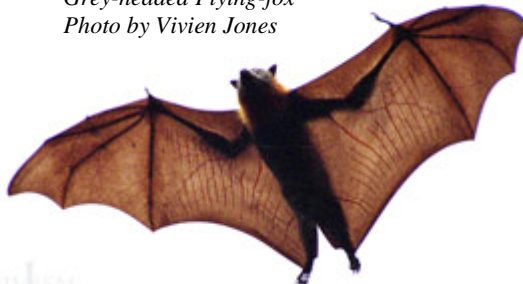
The NSW Department of the Environment and Climate Change (DECC) issues licences to orchardists whereby a maximum of 50 flying foxes can be killed per licence but tagging programs have found as many as 168 killed and wounded flying foxes after a shoot, with more up in the trees. Almost a third of the wounded took some hours to die.

The problem with the DECC licensing, yet again, seems to be non-compliance and a Department without the resources to monitor compliance. The RSPCA is campaigning to have shooting banned. It is possible to protect orchards with nets. Victoria does not issue licences and Queensland has stopped shooting flying foxes because the practice is "inhumane". The Blue Mountains Conservation Society is one of 60 organisations supporting the campaign to ban the shooting of flying foxes in NSW.

Vicki Lett and Dr Peggy Eby will be the July Monthly Meeting Speakers to tell us all about this. Vicki has been a wildlife carer for 22 years. She is a life member of Blue Mountains WIRES and currently an active member of Hawkesbury WIRES. Dr Eby is a respected Ecologist, working in research for more than 20 years. She is a member of DECC's Flying Fox Consultative Committee and was a member of a similar committee for the Sydney Botanic Gardens.

The meeting at the Conservation Hut on Friday 31 July starts at 7.30 pm.

*Grey-headed Flying-fox
Photo by Vivien Jones*



From the President . . .

I am sure that many of you will have seen the media coverage of the Cox River water pollution and our legal action against Delta Electricity. This follows the hard work of volunteers in the Lithgow Region Subcommittee as reported back in Hut News, December 2008. [See page 5 for a full report](#)

On a lighter note, we had a lot of fun and interest at our Winter magic stall this year. We signed up new members, promoted the Sustainable Living Competition and gathered signatures on our petition against development in National Parks.

The highlight was the water model and taste testing run by students from Katoomba High school. As part of the 'Drink Tap Water' campaign, the students asked people to drink a small amount of bottled and tap water, then state their preference. Most people had no preference, with the remainder fairly evenly split between bottled and tap water. This proves that taste is no reason to choose bottled water! The campaign highlights the environmental impacts of bottled water. A big thank you to the students for their enthusiastic participation. **Tara Cameron.**

Waiting for your call ..

Last month we advertised for a volunteer who has the ability and time to help our Administration Officer in the office at Wentworth Falls for a half day or more a week. So far, there has been no response! Don't be shy. Please contact Rob Baigent on 4759 3104 or email

robbaigent@iprimus.com.au

Blue Mountains Conservation Society Monthly Meeting
7:30 pm, Friday, July 31, 2009
Conservation Hut, far western end of Fletcher St. Wentworth Falls.
VISITORS ARE WELCOME.

"Hut News", the newsletter of
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HUT NEWS EDITORIALS

The deadline for the next issue of Hut News is **22nd July 2009**

MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES

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BUSHCARE GROUP

Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group meets second Saturday of each month, 9am till noon. Tools and gloves are available. Bring a drink, a snack and a hat. New members are always welcome. Phone Karen on 4757 1929.

New Park for Cranebrook

Carmel Tebbutt the NSW Environment Minister and Peter Garrett the Federal Environment Minister have announced the acquisition of the 181 ha former Air Services Australia site at Cranebrook by the NSW Government. The NSW Dept of Environment and Climate Change (National Parks and Wildlife Service) has purchased the site for \$17.5 million from the developer owner, IFC Capital Ltd. IFC paid \$15 million for the site in 2004.

"This land is an essential part of the green corridor that stretches from the former [defence] site through to the base of the Blue Mountains," said the federal Environment Minister, Peter Garrett. The state Environment Minister, Carmel Tebbutt, said the new park would contain about 10 per cent of remaining Castlereagh Swamp Woodland.

This victory is largely due to the people of the western suburbs and others who emailed and wrote to the politicians and lobbied all levels of government to stop the development of the site. It is possible to get good outcomes for the environment!

Nursery News

Kevin Bell, Nursery Manager

In her *Loose Feathers* article in the last *Hut News*, Carol Proberts described the importance of Banksias as a winter nectar source for honeyeaters.

If you would like to support our feathered friends through the difficult cold months, why not plant some of these attractive plants in your garden? Our nurseries have all the four species (*B. cunninghamii*, *ericifolia*, *marginata* and *spinulosa*) described in Carol's article as well as other local Banksias, *B. penicillata* and *paludosa*, which, similarly, honeyeaters find attractive.

Another genus of plants good for attracting nectar-loving birds in this season is *Correa* and we offer two species, *Correa lawrenciana* (the Mountain *Correa*) and *Correa reflexa* (the Common *Correa*), both of which bear attractive tubular flowers amidst lovely green foliage.

One of the best nectar-producing plants is the familiar Mountain Devil (*Lambertia formosa*) which flowers mostly in Spring and Summer but occasional flowers appear through Autumn and Winter attracting competition between honey-eaters and parrots who also relish the flowers.

In further articles through each season we will highlight those plants suitable for attracting birds so by having a range of species in your garden you will be rewarded by constant visits from a variety of birds. I have numerous bird-attracting plants outside my kitchen window and it's amazing how watching

birds just seems to make washing-up easier.

While food is essential for birds so is water and having a constant and suitable source of fresh, clean water is important to keep birds coming back to your garden. You should place the source of water well out of the reach of cats so birds will feel safe. By providing several bowls of different depth you will encourage bathing for all sizes of birds which is a fun thing to watch.

Although our nurseries are currently closed over winter, when we open again in August we will have all the species above and more for sale. Remember members pay only \$2 for tube-stock and we can grow plants to your request. A species list is on our web-site. Come and visit us at Blackheath on Tuesday mornings, at Lawson on Wednesday mornings and at the Lawson Magpie Markets every 3rd Sunday of the month.

Planet Ark National Tree Day

Grab your shovels, it's tree-planting time! National Tree Day on 2nd August 2009 is an opportunity for all Australians to take a positive and active role in helping protect our environment. By planting native trees and shrubs, we can help to combat climate change, provide food and shelter for our wildlife and beautify our surroundings.

Last year over 300,000 volunteers planted 1.2 million native trees and shrubs at 3500 sites around the country. Everyone is encouraged to get on board with Planet Ark and help in 2009. For more information, call 1300 88 5000 or visit treeday.planetark.org.

Environmental Notes

by David Hall

■ Less than 3% of plastic bags are recycled each year leaving around 97% in circulation. In an effort to reduce the use of plastic shopping bags in supermarkets, the Victorian Government and the Australian National Retailers Association agreed to trial the application of a 10c levy on single-use plastic bags in 17 participating supermarkets in Victoria last year. More than \$35,000 was raised throughout the trial for local environmental projects and a 79% reduction in plastic bag use.

■ The Cork Industry believes it is part of the climate change solution. In Australia, around 65% of Australian wines have screw caps. Only New Zealand has a higher percentage use. The problem with that is that screw caps emit 24 times the carbon emissions of cork in its life cycle that includes transport and packaging. It seems that the Wine Industry could get by with a much smaller percentage use of screw caps given that the USA Wine Industry uses only 10% of screw caps in its production.

CLIMATE CHANGE: LETTER OF THE MONTH CAMPAIGN

Keep Calm and Carry On

Dear Members,

This month the Letter of the Month is from us to you.

On Saturday 13 June we attended the National Climate Emergency Rally in Sydney, with about two thousand other people. There were a number of familiar Blue Mountains faces in the crowd, - thanks to those folks for making the effort.

However, **in a city of over 4 million people, the turnout was deeply disappointing.** Our political leaders had clearly expected more, as there were mounted and foot police in large numbers. On the same day, the editorial in the Sydney Morning Herald was headed ***The World is Feeling Climate Change Fatigue.***

On Wednesday 17 June, an article headed ***Coal-fired Power Gets Boost*** reported that the NSW Budget is allocating \$205 million for the expansion of the state's second largest coal-fired power station, and that NSW carbon emissions are predicted to rise over the next year by about 1.5 million tones.

We both went into a pretty bad space, really questioning our original belief that we could influence our political representatives, when clearly the only people they are listening to are the Greenhouse Mafia, the coal lobby. We were ready to give up.

Then we remembered a book we had come across five years ago when we first started this letter writing campaign. It was called [Doing Democracy](#) by Bill Moyer, and it described the **8 stages that movements for social change go through on their road to success.** All the great social change movements can be seen to have moved through these stages – the abolition of slavery, women's franchise, the U.S civil rights movement - to name a few. All took many years to ultimately achieve their goals, establishing rights and values we now take for granted.

We found this information very comforting in those early days, five years ago, when there was so little public awareness of climate change, and no political acceptance. It gave us a sense of perspective about what we were part of, what we were doing. We were then in Stage 2.

It has given us some comfort again now, in Stage 5. More importantly, it has given us the resolve to keep on doing our bit, giving BMCS members the information you need to know about our political leaders' response to the great threat of climate change. It is through this wider community awareness, and the natural responses of drought, bushfires, sea level rises and food shortages, that we will move on to Stage 6

We need to understand this stuff, to be able to keep on going in the face of seeming failure after so much effort. **Because we need to keep on going.**

Climate change isn't going to go away, and its effects are going to be devastating for millions if not billions of people, not to mention the natural systems that sustain us. The sooner we as the voting public can out-influence the vested interests of the Greenhouse Mafia, the less devastation there is likely to be.

Robin Mosman and Rosemary Lathouris.

Eight Stages of the Process of Social Movement Success

1. Normal Times. A critical problem exists that violates widely held values, but the powerholders support the problem. The public is unaware of the problem and supports the powerholders. The problem/policies are not a public issue.

In this instance, our problem is global warming; the widely-held value is our belief that our governments will act in the best interests of all Australians to deal effectively with this problem. The powerholders (governments and vested corporate interests) support policies which are not only contributing to the problem, but are making it worse.

2. Failure of Official Policies. Some members of the public become aware that government policies violate their widely held values. Some local opposition groups form. They start to do research, become better informed.

3. Ripening Conditions. Recognition of the problem grows. More active local groups form. 20% to 30% of public opposes the powerholder policies.

4. Take Off. A trigger event leads to dramatic non-violent actions/campaigns. *In Australia "An Inconvenient Truth" and the Stern Report were significant triggers.* The problem is on the public agenda. Nonviolent actions are repeated around the country. *(Walk Against Warming, "Clean Energy for Eternity" human signs).* 40% of the public opposes current policies.

5. Perception of Failure. The public see their goals unachieved as powerholder policies remain unchanged. Despair, hopelessness, burnout. Movement seems at stalemate.

6. Majority Public Opinion. Majority oppose powerholder policies. The problem and policies are shown to affect all sectors of society. Mainstream citizens and institutions become involved. The problem is on the political agenda. Powerholders promote the public's fear of alternatives (eg loss of jobs in coal industry).

Re-trigger events happen, re-enacting Stage 4.

(these are now most likely to be natural disasters, drought, bushfires, coastal inundation, food shortages).

7. Success. Large majority of the public oppose current policies and no longer fear alternatives. Powerholders change policies but try to make minimal reforms, while movement demands real change

(eg renewable energies to replace coal, energy efficiency, an end to coal exports).

8. Continuing the Struggle. Community leaders extend successes and oppose attempts at backlash, while promoting a paradigm shift in public perception.

Walk Against Warming 2008
Tens of thousands of
Australians joined together last
November in a walk for
renewable energy and a safe
climate future for our children.
This child was one of 15,000
who walked in Sydney.



Mt Vic Bypass: the wheels turn slowly! by Brian Marshall

From reading the BMG (17 June, p19, "Hartley Valley residents oppose RTA corridors"), you might have difficulty differentiating between improving the Great Western Highway's (GWH) safety between Mt Victoria and Lithgow, the objectives of the Hartley Highway Action Group (HHAG), the issue of 26m B-dubs crossing the 'sandstone curtain', the rejected option of a route across Newnes Plateau, the again-rejected Bells Line of Road Expressway (BLoRE), and the preference for more heavy freight to be transported across the mountains by rail. This is not least because the interests of some organizations are promoted through confusion. So let's recapitulate!

The Federal Government's Central West Needs Study (CWNS) recognised the need for limited and incremental improvements for safety (along Bells Line of Road) and efficiency (in the case of rail-freight) over the next 20 years. It nevertheless rejected the notion of the BLoRE becoming a principal east-west artery for heavy freight (at least until 2033 when another evaluation might be implemented). It similarly rejected a

major upgrade of rail-freight infrastructure (also to be re-visited in 2033). Consequent upon these rejections, the CWNS found that the upgraded GWH should remain the principal east-west artery over the next 25 years.

BMCS believes that improved rail-freight infrastructure would provide a more sustainable response to peak oil and climate change. It put this view to the CWNS and it remains a basic principle of BMCS' *'Transport Policy'*. Thus, BMCS deplors the lack of governmental commitment to rail as the principal form of freight and passenger transport between the Central West and Sydney, but fully supports rejection of the BLoRE.

Improvements to safety (alignment, grade and speed restrictions) that have long been creeping up the GWH (e.g., currently through Lawson and Wentworth Falls, and then from Katoomba through to Lithgow) are fundamental to an upgraded GWH. By regulation, the RTA must meet design criteria that enable the currently-embargoed 26m B-dubs to cross the

Mountains. A widespread community movement aims to retain the embargo. BMCS is part of this movement on social grounds and environmental principles, but BMCS distinguishes between achievable retention of the mountains-wide embargo, and localised ('nimby') opposition to GWH safety measures.

Not surprisingly, the HHAG, Blackheath Action Group and many in Mt Victoria oppose GWH-upgrading where it impinges on their communities. Similar debates have attended such upgrading from Lapstone to Katoomba. The affected communities inevitably cite safety issues in advocating expenditure on 'rail' versus 'highway' and opposing 26m B-dubs. They are also concerned with heritage and environmental issues in their particular valley and parts of the Blue Mountains. Without denying or detracting from the values of these areas, the agenda becomes increasingly clear when all four of the RTA's corridors are rejected and re-investigation of a Newnes Plateau route is advocated; this being despite the latter's magnificent

(Continued on page 7)



DRINK TAP WATER!
Bottled 'springwater' takes water from swamps.
'Springwater' is groundwater that healthy swamps need.
so...leave the water in the ground to keep endangered swamps alive and healthy!
PLEASE DO NOT DISPOSE OF THIS BOTTLE...RE-USE IT!

Blue Mountains Conservation Society
www.bluemountains.org.au ph 02 47571872

In 2009 Australians will consume 250 million litres of bottled water and sales are increasing by 30% per annum. Students at Katoomba High School are doing something about this and encouraging people to choose tap water instead of bottled groundwater.

The Drink Tap Water Campaign aims to reduce depletion of groundwater and educate people about the importance of water cycle management in protecting Blue Mountains hanging swamps, now listed as a vulnerable ecosystem.

Students are distributing self-adhesive labels and reusable bottles printed with a message encouraging people to drink tap water instead of bottled "spring water".

The students organized a launch of the campaign nearly two years ago at their school by the Minister for Environment and Climate Change. They continue to promote the campaign through their School Environment Network and visit other schools to distribute the adhesive labels. They have contacted other local government areas in NSW to discuss similar campaigns.

Over 5000 labels have already been distributed to children in 15 schools, at Winter Magic and the Blue Mountains Folk Festival. The next step is to extend the campaign to the remaining 12 Blue Mountains schools and print reusable bottles with the message to be distributed at festivals and sports clubs.

The aim is to eventually produce a documentary film and distribute that and more labels/bottles to other areas in NSW.

Strobos

Strobos is a bi-monthly environmental newsletter published for the Blue Mountains Conservation Society by high school students for high school students.

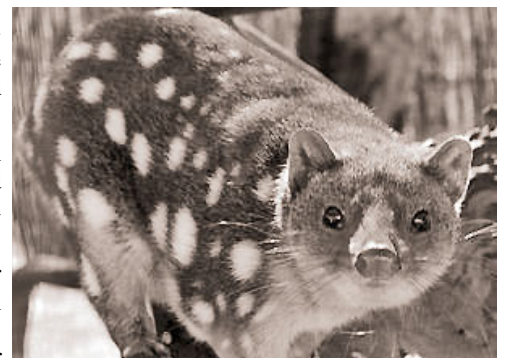
The May/June 2009 can be found on the Society's website. It's a good read with lots of short informative articles and good photos.

Included in this issue is a section for younger members, Quoll Corner which is aimed at Primary School children. The quoll is described and a project for winter is to make a simple compost bin.

Did You know???

60% of the rubbish Australians put in their bins could be used in the garden as compost and 5% of our greenhouse gas emissions are caused by organically active waste buried anaerobically (without air) in land fill to produce methane, a gas 25 times worse than carbon dioxide. We could change this by composting it and return carbon to the soil.

(from Queen, May/June 2009 Strobos)



Spotted-tailed Quoll

Cox River Legal Action

David Hall

Background: In December 2008 Hut News we reported that since September 2006 the Lithgow Region Subcommittee (LRS) had been monitoring water quality at some thirty sites in the upper Cox's River catchment. Alarming water quality issues were identified, including: salinity levels 80 times higher than natural background levels, phosphate levels (125x); pH levels (1000x); turbidity levels (400x); water temperature in industrial discharges 15 degrees higher; and dissolved oxygen levels as low as 5%, which is lethal for aquatic life. These results were reported to and verified by the relevant government agency. However it appeared that no action had been taken to address the issues. BMCS subsequently engaged an independent consultant to undertake further water testing. These results were consistent with the water testing results obtained by LRS. We reported that we were considering taking legal action in relation to these matters.

The Society commenced legal action in the Land and Environment Court against Delta Electricity on June 2, claiming that Delta has polluted the waters of the Cox's River in contravention of s120 of the Environmental Operations Act 1997.

An application for a maximum costs order was lodged with the Court on June 18th. If the Society is successful with this application, the costs that the Society will be liable to pay if the legal action is unsuccessful will be set before the action continues. Following this, Tara Cameron and I met with Ben Cubby, Environmental Reporter with the Sydney Morning Herald which led to front page stories on June 18 and 19. On June 18, Tara and I were also interviewed by TV Channels 9, 7 and 10, PrimeTV and WINTV, ABC Radio702 and 2SER.

The Action is intended to oblige Delta to eliminate pollution caused by them in the Cox River and have the Department of the Environment and Climate Change (DECC) review its Environmental Licensing Standards. The current policy seems to allow Licensees to pollute providing they measure and report the emissions covered by the Licence. DECC also seems to lack the staff to effectively monitor current Licensees.

The Society is currently investigating the feasibility of Catchment Emissions Standards and a Licence requirement to reduce emissions as best practice emissions controls become available.

Loose Feathers, with Carol Proberts

As the days get colder and we pile on coats and scarves, one resident of the forests is coming into his element. On the chilliest winter mornings his voice echoes around the valleys; he's arguably the most incredible songster and mimic in the bird world - the Superb Lyrebird.

June-July is when the male lyrebird's display is at its peak. Often (but not always) using a low mound of scratched-up earth as a stage, he raises his long tail feathers over his head in a shimmering silver cascade. In an effort to attract females he pumps out a stream of mimicked bird calls—Gang-gang, Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo, Pied Currawong, Eastern Whipbird, Kookaburra, Golden Whistler and Pilotbird are some of his most commonly-mimicked sounds. He can imitate the bill-clapping of the Red Wattlebird, a whole flock of rosellas calling simultaneously, branches creaking, and a spinebill's wingbeats—all using his voice. One bird I've been watching at Mt Victoria regularly mimics more than 20 different bird calls.

Interspersed with this mimicry is the lyrebird's own territorial call. This is the loudest part of the song—it can be heard more than a kilometre away—and generally consists of a series of loud whistled notes, with considerable geographic variation. There are also chopping, whirring, galloping, twanging, “clonk clonk” and clicking notes, which accompany the display and provide the “rhythm section” to which the bird dances.

These notes can sound quite mechanical and are probably the origin of some of the stories which abound of lyrebirds imitating modern or artificial sounds such as axe blows and forest machinery. While there is no doubt that lyrebirds have the physical ability to mimic any sound at all (remember the David Attenborough footage of what was actually a captive-raised lyrebird mimicking a camera shutter and motor-drive), the reality is that they learn their song from other lyrebirds and therefore, in the wild, mimicry consists almost entirely of natural sounds.

Because of this it takes some time for a new sound to find its way into the lyrebird's breeding song. For example, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos have greatly increased in the Blue Mountains over the past 30 years, before which they were rarely seen here. So far, I have never heard a lyrebird in the area mimic them. If you have, I'd love to know—please email me!

Carol Proberts (origma@westnet.com.au)

A lyrebird walk

On 25 June the Interpretive bushwalkers went to Mount Victoria to join Carol Proberts for a lyrebird walk near Pulpit Rock. In past years the resident lyrebird has put on a wonderful concert.

Rock climbers or others have recently cut a track from Pulpit Rock which I presume joins the clifftop walk from Sunset Rock. We followed that track, quite steep and difficult in parts. Views were splendid. At a creek crossing we saw an Eastern Yellow Robin and White-browed Scrubwrens, but no sight or sound of a lyrebird.

At the top of the hill, within sight of houses on Kenny Street, we stopped for morning tea. Unexpected bird calls were those of Noisy Miners, unusual in the upper mountains.

We returned the way we had come. There were lots of lyrebird scratchings, some old dancing mounds, but no lyrebird. Had the cutting of the track made the resident lyrebird decide to move elsewhere?

We were nearing the end of the walk, when suddenly there was an influx of little birds—the most marvellous mixed flock! Species identified among them were White-throated Treecreeper, Red-browed Treecreeper, Brown Thornbill,

Yellow-faced Honeyeater, White-eared Honeyeater, Brown-headed Honeyeater; White-napped Honeyeater, Eastern Spinebill, Varied Sittella. At the same time we saw a pair of Rock Warblers, then, after the mixed flock moved away, several Crimson Rosellas.

Even if you don't see what you set out to see, there is always something unexpected and wonderful on a bushwalk. Christine Davies.

Menura's Song (The Lyre Bird)

I'm Menura! I'm Menura!
The clever lyre bird,
I've the greatest store of talent,
But then, you've surely heard;
I sing songs of every kind,
I'm the cleverest in the world,
I'm master of the dance,
Have you heard me mime, perchance?
I'm Menura, the minstrel of the bush.

I'm Menura! I'm Menura!
And I think you'll all agree
My entertainment's best around,
You won't spy me in a tree,
I love dancing on the ground,
I need only clear a space
Then I sing and dance with grace,
I'm the lyre bird, Menura,
I'm Menura, the minstrel of the bush.

By Clive R Roebuck, from the book of his poems “Under the Scenic Hill”

Genetically Modified Crops and the Environment by Craig Linn

Most well informed people are now well aware of the growing body of evidence that the consumption of genetically modified (GM) foods constitutes a significant health risk to both humans and animals. There are many studies that now demonstrate this, with Jeffrey Smith's 2007 book, *Genetic Roulette*, providing a comprehensive summary of these documented risks¹.

However, fewer people are aware that the cultivation of GM crops constitutes a very real and significant danger to the environment at large. This danger takes several forms: self-perpetuating genetic pollution, detrimental effects on local fauna, loss of bio-diversity, and more. Let us look at just a few instances which embody one or more of these dangers.

The bio-tech corporations (and indeed many government agencies) initially scoffed at the idea that the artificially introduced *transgenes* in GM crops would escape and jump into other species. Further they said that even if the transgenes did escape to other species they would not persist in those populations. Well they were wrong on both counts. Recent 2007 studies from Canada reported in the journal *Molecular Ecology*^{2,3} have shown that transgenes from GM Canola (*Brassica napus*) have indeed found their way into the weedy relative Wild Turnip (*Brassica rapa*), and indeed are persisting in the weed population. And what have these lucky weeds picked up? Well herbicide resistance, for that is what the transgene confers, making them very very tough weeds!

As another example of genetic pollution, let us look at Mexico the ancestral home of corn that possesses the greatest genetic diversity of maize species on the planet. In 2001, the

prestigious journal *Nature* reported that native varieties ("landraces") of cultivated maize in remote Oaxaca in Mexico, had been contaminated by genetically modified corn, even though Mexico had placed a moratorium on the entry of GM corn in 1998. Drs Chapela and Quist, the authors of the report, and the journal *Nature* all suffered sustained attack from many with vested interests in GM crops and bio-tech funded research programs. Under enormous pressure, *Nature* took the unprecedented and highly controversial step of withdrawing the article. Well the years have passed and new studies by scientists from Mexico, the United States, and the Netherlands, have confirmed that the original report was in fact correct and that there is indeed significant genetic contamination of the rich corn heritage of Mexico⁴.

One of the great myths the bio-tech industry likes to spin is that GM Crops reduce toxins in the environment. This is not necessarily so. Dr Charles Benbrook, in one of the few independent long term studies undertaken, examined 9 years of US Dept of Agriculture data⁵. He found that in the case of GM herbicide-tolerant soybeans there was a decline in herbicide use over the first 3 years but then as herbicide resistant weed communities developed the herbicide usage steadily increased. At the end of the study in 2004 herbicide use on GM Crops was still increasing, while it was actually declining on conventional non-GM crops. The impact on wildlife can also be significant and measurable. Some of the largest field trials comparing GM canola with non-GM conventional varieties concluded in Britain in 2005. These trials demonstrated significant changes in the weed communities of GM fields resulting in declines in insect pollinators (bees and butterflies) and declines in the

seeds eaten by birds. The researchers, in their report to the British Royal Society⁶ concluded that GM Herbicide Tolerant canola production could "*adversely affect pollinator species and those taxa at higher trophic levels, such as some birds, dependent on dicots as a seed food resource.*" This is at a time when the bird populations of Britain and Europe are already under threat because of other environmental problems. They do not need any more.

To conclude let us note the words of the eminent environmentalist and geneticist Professor David Suzuki in 2007. He stated: "*The ability to introduce alien genes into a genome is an impressive technological manipulation but we remain too ignorant of how the genome works to anticipate all the consequences, subtle or obvious, immediate or long-term, of those manipulations.*"

On the 7th July Blue Mountains City Council will be considering whether to take a precautionary approach to GM Crops in our LGA. Given all of the above, and it is only a small sample of the many documented issues associated with GM crops, let us hope our councillors show wisdom and maturity, and exercise due caution. Craig Linn.

References:

1. J.M. Smith (2007) *Genetic Roulette*. (BMCC Library Springwood Branch has a copy)
2. S.I. Warwick et al. *Molecular Ecology* (2008) **17**, pp. 1387-1395
3. K. Dlugosch and J. Whitton. *Molecular Ecology* (2008) **17**, pp. 1167-1169
4. A. Pineyro-Nelson et al. *Molecular Ecology* (2009) **18**, pp. 750-761
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6. D.A. Bohan et al. *Proceeding of the Royal Society B* (2005) **272**, pp.463-474

Game and Feral Animal Control Amendment Bill: A Product of the Shooters Party

The Game Council and the Department of Primary Industry (through the active encouragement of Minister Macdonald) have already set aside two million hectares of NSW State Forests for so-called 'conservational hunting'. This has occurred despite opposition by environmental organizations and other concerned community groups. In the absence of a formal mechanism for public objection, the Game Council has achieved this by arrogantly disregarding correspondence and persisting with its pro-hunting agenda.

It is outrageous that the sinecure-appointees on the 'hunter-dominated' Game Council control a budget subsidised by more than \$8M of

taxpayers' money over the last four years. 'Conservational hunting' provides negligible feral animal control in benefit-cost terms; it works out as about \$323 for each animal killed. Programs implemented by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Livestock Health and Pest Authority are scientifically managed for the benefit of natural ecosystems. The Game Council and Shooters Party are predominantly concerned with advancing the interests of hunters with, at best, an incidental and *ad hoc* concern for environmental conservation. It is pathetically amusing that, after several years of 'efficient' operation, the Game Council spends taxpayers' money advertising for hunters to join goat-slaughtering programs.

The Shooters Party's Bill now before State Parliament would extend the Game Council's costly and inefficient activities to national parks. If passed, hunters could be licensed to **shoot native animals and birds**. The Bill identifies 26 native species as suitable for hunting down on public land, including national parks. This is completely unacceptable. The Society joins with the State Opposition's spokeswoman (Catherine Cusack), and The Greens (Lee Rhianon) in calling on Minister Tebbutt to affirm her rejection of "*...the hunting of native animals or hunting in national parks*" (SMH, Fri June 12, 2009, p6) and ensure that the Bill is rejected in its entirety.

Brian Marshall

Mt Vic Bypass (continued from page 4)

environmental and heritage values, the seemingly neglected social impacts on Bell, Dargan, Clarence and Marrangaroo, impacts on and by mining, climatic constraints, costs, and opposition from the Defence Department.

On the grounds that it would be least injurious from social, heritage and environmental viewpoints, BMCS has consistently opposed the Newnes Plateau option, while consistently advocating a route that bypasses Mt Vic and partially utilises the GWH corridor.

So what is now happening? Irrespective of local and broader interest groups, the RTA community consultation process rolls on. The four identified corridors¹ were evaluated in three workshops over the May-June period. The aim was for each group² to identify a preferred route in each of the four corridors, and put forward 'alternative' options for the RTA's consideration. Composite plots of the ~8 group-preferences for each corridor showed major sections of agreement interspersed with minor but critical zones of divergence. The latter were further refined such that the RTA used the workshops to find a predominantly common route in each corridor. Rather cunning!

What happens next? Between mid-June and the fourth workshop in late October or early November, the RTA will examine the predominantly common routes and any 'alternative' options in terms of a yet-to-be-resolved constraints hierarchy. The workshop will be presented with a 'final' set (say 3 to 5) of RTA-preferred routes, together with ball-park costings of engineering components (e.g. tunnels, viaducts, etc) and property resumption. The RTA will seek final community inputs and then progressively move towards a final recommendation for consideration by the Minister. Then, if the economy recovers and the Federal money flows, the route might be constructed; perhaps some time over the next 5-10 years!

At the wind-down for the third workshop, each group was asked to give its route-preference. Three favoured the orange 'GWH' route, but emphasised the merits of truly bypassing Mt Victoria rather than relocating the impact from through the middle to along the northern margin; one favoured the purple route; one lacked a clear preference; and the remaining three wanted re-investigation of a Newnes Plateau route. Plus ça change; plus la même chose!

Brian Marshall.

Notes:

1. http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au/Construction_maintenance/downloads/greatwesternhighway/4_modified_corridors.pdf

2. Participants formed into ~8 groups that were assisted by the design team and other RTA personnel.

Down the Wallaby Track — a backward glance, with John Low

TROUBLE AT THE MINE

In May 1893 one of the many minor disputes to come before the magistrates in Katoomba was a case involving two women who lived in the Jamison Valley at the Ruined Castle Shale Mine. Marion Johnson accused her neighbour Mary Halligan, "a very disagreeable woman" who had been "picking on me for the last month", of abusing her with "insulting words", language the *Katoomba Times* could only record as "— —". Both women were married to miners employed by the Australian Kerosene Oil & Mineral Co. which had recently taken over the shale mining activities begun in the vicinity of the Ruined Castle in the 1880s.

Many readers will have descended the Golden Stairs from Narrow Neck and followed the path once used by the mining company's horse tramway that serviced the shale works at the Ruined Castle. It is a walk rich in both natural and human history. Among the rainforest trees and ferns and the magic of lyrebirds and bell miners, are the mysterious traces of the miners' presence. Old shale adits, the meandering tramway path itself and the stone remains of company buildings all point to the small but busy community that once existed here. Other more fugitive evidence lies hidden in the undergrowth and the earth itself, relics of rusted iron, crockery shards etc. suggestive of the domestic routines performed by women like Marion and Mary and the ephemeral dwellings in which they occurred.

The miners' shacks were made of scrap materials, corrugated iron, hessian bags etc. Marion Johnson referred to her home as "made of bags" and both women lived in close proximity to the tramline and each other, with little privacy. Their makeshift accommodation afforded little protection from the elements and the invasions of other irritants like leeches and snakes. They "were good friends previous to this" and their dispute is indicative of the pressures such primitive and isolated conditions could place upon relationships.

So, what triggered Mary Halligan's abusive language and Marion Johnson's summons against her former friend? Clearly their friendship had been fragile for some time and in the end it was a simple argument over a dog and a cat that took them to court. Mary's little boy wandered into Marion's house with his puppy and was promptly told to remove it because "it was worrying my little pussy cat". Mary, standing at her own door, heard the rebuke and took exception. The magistrates heard several witness statements to the effect that the incident did not occur in "a public thoroughfare" and then dismissed the case.

Shale mining at the Ruined Castle came to an end several years later. The adits were closed, the tram track taken up, the horses and miners removed and time, bushfires and the bush itself gradually did the rest, erasing much of the remaining evidence of the community's existence. Did Marion and Mary ever make up and what direction, I wonder, did their lives take after they left the Jamison Valley?

John Low

Close encounter with an Eastern Yellow Robin in the Blue Gum Swamp

So many people move to the Blue Mountains and never venture into the bush and experience its many offerings. Seems such a shame. Over the years I've walked in the UK and New Zealand, but it's only in the last fifteen years I've taken an interest in our feathered friends. Suddenly it's a whole new ball game!

Recently I spent a couple of hours by myself in the Blue Gum Swamp, Winmalee, which is easily accessible. I identified a little over twenty species of birds, both by sightings and sound. LBB's are so frustrating, they never stay still for long. Grey Fantails and New Holland Honeyeaters are easier to spot. Then the familiar call 'whipcrack' of the Eastern Whipbird, as if to say 'you can hear, but can you find me?'

The track through the Blue Gum Swamp is a long firetrail which enabled me to spend a few magic moments with an Eastern Yellow Robin. Even if you are not a bird watcher these birds are fairly easy to spot. Just a flash of

yellow, close to the ground, flitting from side to side of the track. So I stopped and watched, it didn't seem to bother him; we eyed one another, before we moved slowly on, in unison for maybe a hundred metres or more.

They are a very considerate little bird and will hang 'sideways' on a trunk and give you a really good sighting.

Later on the familiar 'whipcrack' of the male Eastern Whipbird was so close, followed by the female's reply, that I did manage a brief sighting. Patience is a virtue, or so I was told once upon a time.

Ron Hyslop



(Eastern Yellow Robin in typical pose). Photo by Jenny Miller.

BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY BUSHWALKING ACTIVITIES

Membership of the bushwalking group is open to Society members. The BMCS Bushwalking Guide which explains the numbered grades can be found on the Society's website www.bluemountains.org.au or can be posted on request. For more information call Liz van Reyswoud on 4757 2694, email bushwalks@bluemountains.org.au or write to PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782. **Late changes to the program will be published on the website.**

SATURDAY WALKS: Usually a full day longer walk at a faster pace. Before attending ring the designated contact person or the Group Co-ordinator Jim Percy 4758 6009 or email jp34@tpg.com.au

Date	Details	Grade	Contact	(Map)	(km)	Meet
Jul 11	Wilsons Glen Transit of Venus Mabel, Edith and Hazel Falls	2/3	Jo 4758 6009	Katoomba	8	Woodford Station CP south side, 9 am
Jul 18	Robert's Pass on Lillian's Bridge. All on track. Long climb back to start	3	Bill 4758 8545	Katoomba	11	Conservation Hut Wentworth Falls, 8.30 am
July 25	Two heads and a Mine Walk No2 - Thor and Asgard and Makenzies - 2 steep, scrambling ascents, more gentle descents – Bring torch for the mine inspection – approx half off track	3/4	Jim 4758 6009	Mt Wilson	9	Blackheath Station Carpark, 8:15am
Aug 1	Evans Crown – Explore more of this wonderful area with its granite outcrops and scenery	3	Meredith 4782 4823	Evans Crown	~8	Blackheath Station CP 8:20 am
Aug 8	Caleys Range to Gadara Ridge to overlook Kolonga Walls. Views unchanged since the explorer saw it. Firetrail and Track with 4 to 5 kms off track	3	Hugh 0423 309 854	Mt Wilson	11	Wentworth Falls CP (Contact leader for other possibilities) 7:55 am for 8 am

MONDAY LEISURE WALKS: Short Day walks of 3-5 hours, suitable for walkers of an average fitness. Bring morning tea and lunch and adequate water. The Group Co-ordinator is Maurice Kerkham, 4739 4942, email mauricekerkham@hotmail.com

Jul 6	Great River Walk, Penrith. Finish up at O'Donoghue's Pub for the \$6 lunch special	1	Judith 4758 6310	Emu Plains Station, 9.36 am.
Jul 13	Gooch's Crater. Spectacular natural formation.	2	Phil 4787 5560	Mt Victoria Station, 9 am
Jul 20	Deep Pass and the T-Bone. Explore dramatic chasm. BUS TRIP.	2	Norm 4784 15542	Book and pay Mary-4757 4569. Cost \$10.
Jul 27	Christmas in July, Hazelbrook Bowling Club.	1	Mary 4757 4569	Meet at club, from 12 midday.
Aug 3	Transit of Venus, Woodford. Historical walk, waterfalls.	2	Judith 4758 6310	Woodford Station, north side, 9am.
Aug 10	Roberts Pass to Wentworth Falls. Historic mountain track.	2	Phil 4787 5560	Wentworth Falls Station car park, 8.30 am

THURSDAY PLEASURE WALKS: Walks of 2-3 hours conducted at a leisurely pace to suit walkers on the day. Bring morning tea, adequate water and lunch if noted. Group Co-ordinator is Simone Bowskill, 4757 3416, email simbow@tpg.com.au

Jul 9	Reinert's Pass, Mt Victoria. Some steep and rough sections.	2	Phil 4787 5560	10 am, Mt Victoria Station
Jul 16	Minnehaha Falls, Katoomba. Walk to waterfall to see regenerating vegetation.	2	Joan c/o 4782 5966	9.30 am, Gearins Hotel, Katoomba
Jul 23	Evans Crown Circuit. Climb up to granite summit with spectacular views. Lunch at Tarana Pub or take your own	2	Phil 4787 5560	10 am, Mt Victoria Station
Jul 30	Great River Walk, Penrith. Follow the Nepean to O'Donoghue's Pub for the \$6 lunch	1	Maurice 4739 4942	9.36 am, Emu Plains Station
Aug 6	Wall's Ledge, Centellial Glen, Blackheath. Delightful walk with some scrambling.	2	Phil 4787 5560	9.45 am, Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre
Aug 13	Tesselated Pavement, Mt Irvine. Extensive sandstone rock platforms, spectacular views.	2	David 4757 3416	10 am, Mt Victoria Station.

Clam shrimps identified

In June 2009 Hut News Christine Davies reported the interpretive bushwalkers' discovery on Kings Tableland of "small crustaceans in a rock pool" with "shells and lots of legs". They are *Conchostracans* (Clam Shrimps).

When the pools dry out their eggs can survive in the soil at the bottom of the pool until rain fills the pool again. The soil with eggs can also be dispersed by wind or perhaps birds' feet.

I have sometimes spent hours lying beside pools watching them. They are active in all but the coldest months.

Conchostracans seem to be found in the more remote areas and not along popular tourist tracks. Perhaps they are sensitive to pollution, e.g. food scraps dropped in the pools.

More information on these fascinating creatures is in *The Waterbug Book*, by John Gooderham and Edward Tsyrlin, CSIRO Publishing, 2002.

Jim Smith.



*Conchostracan
(Clam Shrimp)
photo by
Jenny Miller.*