

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"



Issue No. 419
November 2023



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

STARLIGHT

-- Thomas Ebersoll

Starlight Canyon is a dramatic gorge which plunges from the Wollemi plateau into the Wolgan Valley near Newnes. I've visited the Canyon a number of times. The track leads through the dimly lit canyon with high rock walls, full of orchids, ferns, vines and past a few big trees which have made it up to the light above. On this occasion, I climbed a small rise at the bottom of a rock wall where rays of sunlight streamed through from above and down into this wonderworld.

As I watched, a whiff of a breeze rustled through the canyon and this dislodged speckles of dust from the sandstone wall above; glimmering in the rays of sun as they danced their way down onto the rise I was standing on.

I became aware that this small mound I was standing on was actually the accumulated dust of uncounted such moments, when the cliff got tickled by a puff of air to release its little specks of sandstone.

A long time ago the Newnes sandstone was at the bottom of a sea. 180 million years ago that sandstone was pushed up to form the Newnes Plateau. Rain fell onto the plateau and formed streams which eroded the sandstone, sculpting the valleys and canyons we admire today.

This erosion happens through time, sometimes violently through cliff collapses and landslides; sometimes slowly through the actions of wombats and lyrebirds and all the other digging creatures. Sometimes it's a tree root pushing into a crack of the sandstone, only, one day, to tumble down with a dislodged boulder and sometimes it's just that little whiff of a breeze bringing grains of sandstone down onto the mound where I was standing. And this mound of sandstone grains waits for the next flood to be taken down to the river and out to sea completing the full wonderful circle. (October 2023)

Blue Mountains Conservation Society NATIVE PLANT NURSERY

We will be at the Blackheath Growers
Market on **SUNDAY 12th**

NOVEMBER and on 2nd Sunday
of every month.

For enquiries and to place an order, contact

Nursery Manager, Paul Irwin:

plantnurserybmcs@outlook.com



Starlight Canyon. Photo by Thomas Ebersoll.



Bat Kids, Ruben and
Willow. Hut News,
April 2015.

Bat Night 2023 was a great success

The first post-COVID Bat Night was held at the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre on 23 September 2023. The Blue Mountains 'Bat Nights' have been going for many years, originally inspired by local ecologist Marg Turton who was again very engaged with the planning and the delivery of this year's event. The Blue Mountains Cultural Centre took on the main organisation and provided the venue this year. Marg, in her role with the Australasian Bat Society, the BMCS events coordinator and several others contributed to the planning and delivery of the event.

Approximately 500 participated on the night including many children. Although the night was too cold to actually 'hear' any passing micro bats, using the special microphones available, the many other activities and educational talks were very well received. The children's face painting (paid for by the Society) was a big hit with a constant queue all night.

A big thank you to the seven Society members who volunteered to help on what was a very chilly night. It's hoped that the 2024 Bat Night can be held in March, the usual timing before COVID.

OUTBREAK: a New Improved Website for Current Outbreaks of Plant and Animal Pests and Diseases in Australia

The Commonwealth government through the Dept. of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has improved its Outbreak website, which can be found at <https://www.outbreak.gov.au/>. It has made it easier to find information on how to respond, prevent and prepare for plant and animal, exotic pest and disease outbreaks in Australia. Information about pests and diseases, how to report a suspected case and how to prepare and respond to an outbreak - plus much more. Incursions of pests and diseases in Australia can be tracked and it provides advice on protecting property and people in the event of a pest or disease outbreak.

Another web site where information can be found on plant pests and diseases is PaDIL (Pest and Disease Image Library) <https://www.padil.gov.au/>. PaDIL is a scientific identification tool – an online database containing high-quality diagnostic images and information tools to assist anyone interested in the identification of both pests and diseases present in Australia or not certified as present. It gives access to data and information to help safeguard Australia's environment in identifying exotic pests and diseases.

From BMCS President, Annette Cam

It is great to see some exciting events for ConSoc members where we can learn more about our natural areas and their plants and animals, and also share each other's company! I know that those who went to Bat Night had a great time, and members and community were inspired by Nadi Simpson who gave this year's Mick Dark talk for the Future. And also, of course, our Back to the Hut event.

We are looking at ways to have further gatherings where we can discuss, learn from each other and remember why we love the Blue Mountains and belong to Blue Mountains Conservation Society. Please send me your ideas about what would interest you for future meetings. (president@bluemountains.org.au; PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782 or leave a message at 0490 419 799)

Western Sydney International

I hope you have had a chance to check out the proposed flight paths and consider their impact.

We have met with Hon Susan Templeman and written to her with concerns for the Blue Mountains National Park and World Heritage Area. We will complete a formal submission once the EIS is released and meet with her again. There is more information on our website about ConSoc's stance on WSI.

Draft plan of Management for the Blue Mountains and Kanagraw-Boyd National Park.

Our submission is on our webpage also. I have included a summary of our main points elsewhere in this edition of Hut News.

Spring is here and the weather has been warming up. I have enjoyed seeing the birds in my garden and the adjacent bushland, chasing each other around as they prepare for nesting. I have also been lucky enough to see or hear a few species lately that I haven't recorded for several years, including a Ring-tailed Possum, Tawny Frogmouth, Superb Lyrebird and a Painted Quail. It's great to know these animals are still around! And, of course, the Swamp Wallaby that visits every night to help himself to my native violets and various other tasty plants!

We are certainly lucky to live in such beautiful and peaceful surroundings! I hope you have had time to get out into the bush recently as well.

-- Annette Cam.

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THE DEADLINE FOR DECEMBER HUT NEWS IS 12 NOVEMBER

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NSW Invasive Species Management Review

-- Chris Whiteman

A federal government Senate committee inquiry, examining the impacts and management of feral horse populations in the Australian Alps has called for aerial shooting to be allowed in NSW. NSW Minister for the Environment Penny Sharpe said that the findings of the inquiry "confirm the concerns NSW has about the impact of wild horses on the Kosciuszko National Park".

The report made 14 recommendations, including that the Minister for Environment and Water list habitat degradation, competition and disease transmission by feral horses as a Key Threatening Process under the Environment Biodiversity and Conservation Act 1999. "It has been made clear that if feral horse populations are not urgently managed, there is a real risk of losing this unique landscape and the native species that call it home", the committee found.

These findings should also affect other areas of NSW including the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, where feral horses, pigs, deer, goats, foxes, Myrtle rust, Phytophthora, numerous weeds and other invasive species occur. It is also a concern that Red Imported Fire Ants have reached the NSW border. The construction of the International Western Sydney Airport in proximity to the Blue Mountains is a major concern with the potential for invasive species to spread from this

facility via passenger and cargo vectors.

Subsequently, the Premier of NSW has tasked the Natural Resources Commission to review the risks and impacts of invasive species in NSW, including the effectiveness of current management strategies. Public submissions to the review closed on 31st October.

Over 70% of NSW's threatened species and endangered ecological communities are impacted by invasive species. The review hopes to answer the following points:

- To what extent are the NSW environment, industries and communities currently impacted by invasive species?
- To what extent are existing programs in NSW effectively managing invasive species?
- What, if any, are the key barriers to effective management of invasive species?
- How has invasive species management changed since the introduction of the NSW Biosecurity Act 2015 legislation and associated programs and plans?
- What are the future risks posed by invasive species to the NSW environment?
- What opportunities are there to improve outcomes of invasive species management in the future?

A little good news – more ways to recycle

-- Elizabeth van Reyswoud

I had occasion to visit Katoomba Tip recently in order to recycle some left over paint, some CD and DVD players, and lots of very different cables. I was delighted with what I saw and with the excellent help the staff gave us. Paint is actually divided into water paint, oil paint and spray cans.

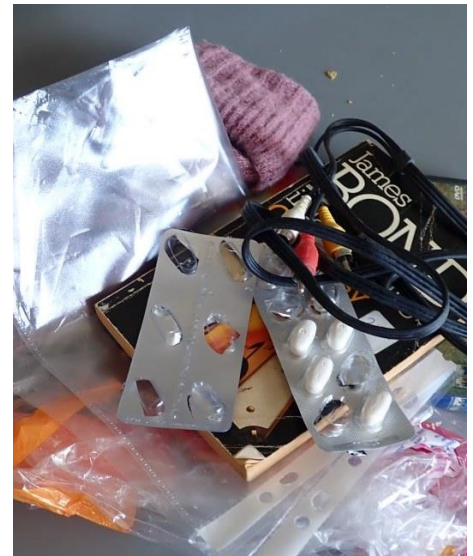
The DVD players were claimed by some of the staff and we were shown where to put all the cables and other metal. I also noticed that they had a place for wearable and unwearable clothing. The shed for reusable furniture was fairly empty, but there were lots of books in a great mess up the back. That was a negative, as well as nowhere to dispose of soft plastics. Personally, I consider soft plastics to be the greatest threat of all to the planet. No, too many humans who create the waste in the first place are the greatest threat.

Several councils in NSW provide a wonderful service called Recycle Smart which aims to transition waste and create a circular economy – copying nature. Recycle Smart is funded by these councils to provide residents with a six-weekly collection of two shopping bags full of

recyclable items at zero cost to those residents. Any additional items to that can be picked up at a minimal cost to the resident. So what happens to the soft plastics? They are shipped to a facility in Victoria, where the plastic is shredded and processed by a pyrolytic machine to convert it into feedstock oil. This is then sent to a processing plant in Geelong where it is turned into a resin and then converted into food grade plastic to be used again.

It would be good if the Blue Mountains Council could investigate this company and perhaps provide this service to its residents.

Meanwhile, the books. Lifeline in Sydney have a retail outlet for books, jigsaw puzzles, DVDs, etc. But this is no ordinary Op shop. The books are sorted into a strict alphabetical order by author, in a similar manner as a library is sorted, so that it is easy to find what you would like. All jigsaw puzzle donations are taken home by volunteers and made up; to ensure there are no missing bits. DVD's and CD's are tested, so you are assured that you are buying what you wanted.



Then there are blister packs – those little packets of pills, such as your medication and vitamins. Blooms, the chemist, will recycle them for you as part of the Pharmacycle Scheme. Just take a shoebox full to one of their outlets. The aluminium and plastic is separated by machine and the aluminium is made into other products. Hopefully some other chemist chains will follow suit.

We are trying, and I hope this makes our readers aware of some extra recycling options.

Blue Mountains stream health: Gordon Creek, Leura, a concerning case study

-- Peter Ardill.

The natural ecosystems of the Blue Mountains feature numerous freshwater waterways. They support indigenous plants and animals, nourish the World Heritage Area and are crucial climate change buffers. But how healthy are our Blue Mountains waterways?

The 2023 BMCC Health Snapshot revealed that 66% of waterways are currently in good to excellent health, and 34% are in poor to fair health.

That a number of Blue Mountains waterways regularly record sub-optimal health is worrying. Creeping urbanisation and climate change are major contributors to this situation.

Gordon Creek, south Leura, frequently exhibits low health quality. Only in 2020 has a "good" result been recently recorded. The stream recorded "poor" health in 2018, 2022 and 2023. Results for 2019 and 2021 were only "fair".

Loss of indigenous vegetation, erosive stormwater flows and severe bank collapse are decimating the stream and bug habitat (see illustrations). How can permanent health be restored to Gordon Creek?

Extensive weed management and indigenous vegetation restoration programs have been implemented by BMCC and NPWS natural area managers, officers, dedicated bushcarers and professional bush regenerators. This rehabilitation work has undoubtedly benefited the health of Gordon Creek.

But more needs to be done! As occurred with the highly successful Blue Mountains Swampcare program, BMCC and NPWS must co-ordinate preparation of a comprehensive stream restoration plan. Local expertise in stream management and ecology should be engaged. Obtaining input from hydrology, fluvial geomorphology, stormwater engineering and riparian ecology specialists is essential. Traditional Owners have important interests. Enormous potential exists for engagement with community skills and knowledge, including bushcarers and Blue Mountains Conservation Society members.

Only an intensive effort will restore permanent health to Gordon Creek.

Peter Ardill is an Accredited practitioner, Australian Association of Bush Regenerators, Streamwatch practitioner.



Poorly vegetated, collapsing stream bank on highly eroded section of Gordon Creek P. Ardill



Well vegetated, stable stream banks, Gordon Creek P. Ardill

Testing stream health

Every year BMCC tests waterway health in approximately fifty streams. A healthy stream supports water bug (or macroinvertebrate) diversity. The health of each stream is rated, according to bug quality: poor, fair, good or excellent. The results are published in the Blue Mountains Waterways Health Snapshot. See <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/waterquality>

Are Mayfly nymphs, Caddisfly larvae, Blood worms, Spiny crayfish, Water mites, Water treaders and other little critters thriving in your local stream? A decrease in water bug populations is a strong indicator of a stressed waterway

Bifenthrin Insecticide caused Hazelbrook Creek Crayfish Kill

-- Chris Whiteman

As a follow up to last months report on a contaminated tributary to Hazelbrook Creek - on 22 September the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) reported in a statement that they have identified the pollutant which caused a major kill of Giant Spiny Crayfish in the tributary. They have stated that "initial lab testing has found the insecticide Bifenthrin in water, sediment, and crayfish samples collected from the impacted creek". "Bifenthrin is commonly used for general pest control, such as for termites, spiders, ants, and cockroaches and is highly toxic to crayfish and other aquatic organisms".

"Herbicides used by Blue Mountains City Council to control weeds, such as Glyphosate, have been ruled out as the cause of the crayfish kill and Council is not a subject of the ongoing investigation," the statement said.

At the time of writing, warning signs erected by Blue Mountains City Council regarding the contamination of the creek remain at the site. A statement from Council says they "will continue to monitor the recovery of freshwater crayfish and other aquatic macroinvertebrates at Hazelbrook Creek, as part of ongoing waterway health sampling programs".

Blue Mountains and Kanangra-Boyd National Park Draft Plan of Management

-- Annette Cam, President

ConSoc made a detailed submission to the recently released Draft Plan of Management (POM) for the two national parks. You can read the entire submission on our website under the tab "Campaigns".

The POM is of immense importance in driving future directions of National Parks and Wildlife Service's work in maintaining these protected areas to ensure they fulfil their primary purpose of conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of this region for future generations. These national parks are of international significance forming a large part of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. Blue Mountains National Park is the most visited national park in Australia.

To achieve these goals, a POM must provide direction for park management, research into and restoration of damaged areas, control of invasive species, strategies for dealing with future risks from climate change and increasing bushfire risk, assistance in maintaining the quality of Sydney's water supply and provide for visitor experiences that are consistent with the parks' conservation and world heritage values.

In the published Draft POM (DPOM) we found that there were both good points and areas that are wanting. I have outlined some of these below.

1. **The plan for the two parks, Blue Mountains NP and Kanangra-Boyd NP, have been combined** into one plan, which allows continuity of management across both parks.
2. We support NPWS' statement of "Our Vision for the parks". (*"The outstanding beauty, rich heritage and globally important biodiversity of the parks is preserved and the living cultures of the Aboriginal peoples of this place are protected, respected and celebrated."* Excerpt page ix)
3. We broadly support the statements included in the section "Why these parks are important".

4. In our view, the POM fails to outline and respond to significant future changes including impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss, increase in severe bushfire events and increase in visitation for recreation.
5. We are disappointed that the DPOM emphasises planning for visitor management yet provides insufficient detail on conservation of natural heritage and biodiversity. Some of the information included needs to be updated.
6. The plan itself should contain more detailed, specific information about conservation. Planning details not provided in the DPOM are consigned to a separate, non-statutory Planning Considerations document.
7. The DPOM allows for future development as well as upgrading at high visitor use zones. However, the types of possible facilities and physical extent of the zones are not defined. It appears these important details are to be decided through a process outside the plan's control.
8. The DPOM does not adequately account for how these national parks link to broader regional tourism resulting in a risk of overdevelopment of these two NPs.
9. The DPOM recognises that:
 - (a) Climate change will influence hydrological processes putting pressure on animals and habitats, and will also impact fire regimes;
 - (b) An improved understanding of the impacts of climate change on the parks' values is needed to build "resilience into all management programs". However, the threat posed by climate change has not been adequately recognised as a major threat to biodiversity in these parks.

We thank the National Parks and Wildlife Service for providing the opportunity to comment on the Draft POM.



Blue Mountains National Park is a land of regular fires, of vegetation that rebounds from them, of magical floral moments such as the blooming of the *Xanthorrhoea* and of majestic ancient landforms - Point Pilcher, Medlow Bath, late 2020. (Image: Christine Davies)

The Intergenerational Transformations Series

In this series, Hut News looks at the way conservation activism has changed in the Blue Mountains over decades with articles such as the one on page 7 which contains the reminiscences of Beverley and Roy Thompson. We also look at the kind of issues future conservationists might have to engage with as a new debate ignites over freight and passenger transport across the Blue Mountains and a prominent rail advocate answers questions from Hut News – see below. Last month, the series looked at the future of environmental volunteering. Next month, we will look at the kinds of plants that might be growing in public spaces in the Blue Mountains in many decades time.

-- Series coordinated by Don Morison.

The transport corridor between Greater Sydney and Orange: Rail advocate Dr Philip Laird OAM answers questions from Hut News (9 October 2023)

New South Wales Minister for Regional Transport, Jenny Aitchison, has told the Blue Mountains Gazette her Government will look at “all of the options for east-west connectivity across the Blue Mountains” (11/10/23, page 16). Groups such as the Orange Rail Action Group and Action for Public Transport (NSW) have long been drawing attention to the underutilisation of the rail corridor. Dr Philip Laird OAM, from the University of Wollongong, kindly agreed to answer questions from Hut News, now that the proposed Blackheath to Little Hartley road tunnel is being thoroughly reviewed.

HN: *The A32 road between Katoomba and Orange currently carries both long-distance and local traffic. What difference do you think Government rail transport policy can make to this in coming decades?*

Dr Laird: Difficult to say in the absence of the final Central West and Orana Transport Plan from the NSW Government.

HN: *Can you summarise what you think Governments would have to do to significantly reduce atmospheric emissions caused by transport in the Katoomba to Orange corridor?*

Dr Laird: Given that for many freight tasks, rail uses one third of the diesel than trucks do, and so produce one third of the emissions, there is a need to get more freight onto rail. This includes some of the freight that was on rail 30 years ago, and is now on road.

HN: *What is your understanding of the severity of heavy vehicles damaging sealed road surfaces along corridors such as the A32 between Katoomba and Orange when considering the following aspects: changes to runoff and erosion in the surrounding environment; compromising of anti-pollution measures in the surrounding environment; safety of all vehicle occupants, cyclists and pedestrians; damage to motor vehicles and bicycles using road surfaces damaged by heavy vehicles; general economic effect of taxpayers meeting the social cost of the damage caused by the heavy vehicles?*

Dr Laird: Each of these impacts are relevant. When combined, they are significant. These impacts have been increased when governments have increased mass limits for heavy trucks. Allowing such trucks access to roads after heavy rain events only increases these impacts.

HN: *What is your understanding of the impact on social, community and economic life in population centres bisected by roads like the A32 if passenger and freight needs which could be met by rail are met by road transport instead?*

Dr Laird: Road transport imposes appreciable external costs including increased road maintenance costs and road congestion, higher road crash risk, plus higher carbon emissions along with increased air and noise pollution. These external costs, which are higher in urban areas, are appreciably higher for road transport than they are for rail transport.

HN: *What do you think would be economical options for Governments to reduce the travel times and costs for rail freight and rail passengers in the Katoomba to Orange corridor?*

Dr Laird: To improve the alignment of the track between Lithgow and Orange as recommended by the Orange Rail Action Group and others (see, for example, *Faster rail for the NSW Western Main Line* by Max Michell and Philip Laird, in *Railway Digest* December 2019, or <https://theconversation.com/nsw-on-a-slow-track-to-fast-trains-promised-regional-rail-upgrades-are-long-overdue-160932>)

In many locations, this would simply be by reverting from the c1920 steam age alignment to the straighter 19th century Whitton track alignment. A package of such works would reduce the Lithgow–Orange track distance by 15 km and allow for passenger trains to be 25 minutes faster. Freight trains would also benefit and emissions would be reduced.

HN: *Do you think that the Katoomba to Orange rail corridor is free from constraints on increasing its modal share that would be highly expensive to correct?*

Dr Laird: Such track straightening need not be expensive. It has already occurred in other states, notably WA in the 1960s, Queensland in the 1990s and more recently in Victoria with their Regional Fast Rail projects.

HN: *What are your ideas for persuading Governments to make economically and environmentally responsible decisions for major transport outlays in this corridor, given that the NSW Government has suspended the progress on the “Blackheath long tunnel” option (the most expensive basket into which the previous NSW Government put virtually all its eggs)?*

Dr Laird: More community involvement along the lines of the Orange Rail Action Group and others. Seek to involve the Australian government and local government as well as the NSW government.

Images on page 7 show sharp rail curves on pastoral land between Lithgow and Bathurst.

A lasting contribution to conservation: Beverley and Roy Thompson

Beverley and Roy Thompson represent one of the longest standing Blue Mountains families active in our organisation. Beverley is still the coordinator of one of our Thursday bushwalking groups.

Already familiar with our Society through her mother's work, Beverley quickly became involved with the then Katoomba and District Wildlife Conservation Society after moving to Wentworth Falls in the 1970s. Beverley participated in the monthly bushwalks and was placed in charge of The Hut roster, which provided volunteers to serve refreshments, soft drinks and lollies to visitors at the old Conservation Hut building on weekends so that the message of Blue Mountains conservation could be delivered.

Isobel Bowden was then regarded as an elder stateswoman of the conservation movement. Hut volunteers retrieved the change float from Isobel's home without disturbing Isobel in the process. The Thompsons also remember Isobel's emotional moments, such as her tears over insensitive hazard reduction burns.

In the 1980s, Beverley and other conservationists were horrified at the Fairmont Resort plans. Active in the campaign to contain Fairmont was the local author and long-time TAFE guiding teacher, Jim Smith, who, for many years, gave a well-attended annual address to Society members at the Hut.

New members became involved with our Society in the late 1980s, including now life member Lyndal Sullivan and the late Deidre Morton. Deidre and her husband Ivor created one of the mountains' most interesting nature-themed stone residences at Woodford and Beverley remembers attending Deidre's wake there.

Frank and Greta Vanry from Leura were remembered. Greta was noted for "never walking past a weed without attempting to remove it". (Greta Vanry is now honoured by a small plaque in the reserve at the corner of Sublime Point Road and Willoughby Road; where bushcare continues and a relevant book was reviewed in October Hut News.)

Others were remembered. David Thomas, whose day job was at Taronga Zoo, delighted his fellow bushwalkers with his extensive knowledge of fauna. At



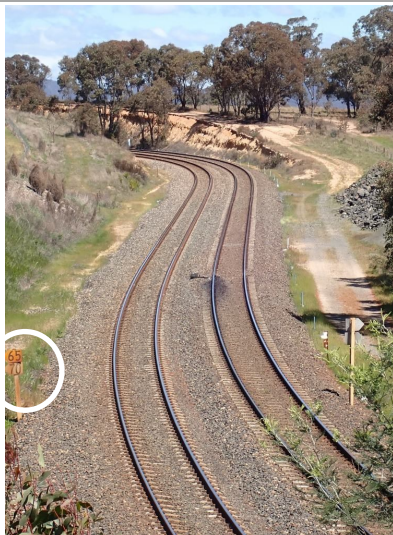
Beverley and Roy Thompson, October 2023 (C Davies)

one time he let them experiment with the benefits of elephant manure for their gardens. Former Society presidents, the Alcorn brothers – Graham and Wilson – were the great authorities on ornithological matters during the bushwalks. Olive and John Noble, whose son David would discover the Wollemi Pine in 1994, introduced bushwalkers to intriguing places in the Newnes Plateau region.

The Thompsons remember the monthly meetings of our Society with guest speakers in the Hut as a really interesting part of their lives in those days.

Enthusiasm was the key to volunteering. People who didn't have scientific knowledge initially learned a lot from involvement in the bushwalks and discussion with their fellow conservationists. Today, Beverley still feels very much in touch with fellow bushwalkers but not so much with the more senior office bearers of the society.

It was former bushwalking coordinator, Maurice Kerkham, who asked Beverley to begin coordinating bushwalks in 2011. Beverley says she appreciates those who take time to thank those who volunteer to do tasks.



Images relating to Dr Laird interview

Sharp rail curves on pastoral land replaced part of the original alignment between Lithgow and Bathurst in the early 20th century to suit operational needs that are no longer relevant. This publication does not imply our Conservation Society is, at the present time, endorsing new civil engineering at specific locations. The 70 and 65 on the warning board (encircled) in the right hand picture, refers to maximum speeds in kilometres per hour for faster passenger trains and other trains on the curves ahead. (Images: Christine Davies)

Birds of the Paroo Darling (Peery) National Park NSW

Part 6 - Woodswallows

-- Annette Cam

The woodswallows are a family of beautiful small birds that are widespread and have a crucial role in our ecosystems across Australia. They are in the order Passeriformes (passerines) and the Family Artamidae.

In the Paroo, we have recorded five of the six species of Woodswallows that occur in Australia.

These are: White-breasted Woodswallow (*Artamus leucorhynchus*), Masked Woodswallow (*A. personatus*), Black-faced Woodswallow (*A. cinereus*), White-browed Woodswallow (*A. superciliosus*), Dusky Woodswallow (*A. cyanopterus*). We have not yet recorded a Little Woodswallow (*A. minor*) in this national park.

In general, woodswallows inhabit open eucalyptus forests and woodlands, mallee, shrublands of acacia, eremophila and chenopods, heathlands, and over ephemeral wetlands or farmland. When nesting, they utilize any structure that will hold a simple open, cup-shaped nest. We have seen them nest about 1.5 metres above the ground, between a large strip of peeling bark and the trunk of a eucalypt. The pair successfully fledged four young from this nest! Woodswallows roost communally, huddling together on a branch or a tree trunk. Often three or more species will form large, mixed flocks. Commonly, you will see flocks of White-browed and Masked Woodswallows together, sometimes with Black-faced in there as well.

Woodswallows are about 16 – 19 cm in length and weigh about 35 grams. They are predominately aerial foragers, screening insect prey in continuous flight above open spaces or tree canopies. They will also glean insects from tree trunks and foliage or from the ground. Woodswallows have bifurcated (divided) tongues that are adapted for nectar feeding. The various species of woodswallows have been recorded feeding on nectar-producing flowers such as those of eremophila species or flowering eucalyptus and corymbia and occasionally eating fruits or seeds.

Our last visit to the Paroo-Darling NP was in August-September 2023 and we were delighted to see flocks of thousands of woodswallows on most days we were surveying. They are very gregarious birds. One of the birds' endearing qualities is the constant cheeps and



Black-faced Woodswallow (C)David Newell 2015
birdlifephotography.org.au

chattering when they are flocking. Sometimes, you could hardly hear anything else above their calling.

We started our surveys at sunrise and for the first survey sites of the morning, we would hear the woodswallows approaching in smaller groups of between 10 - 100 birds from wherever they had roosted (often more than 500m away) and continuing on to where they would feed, chattering constantly all the way. Mostly they were aerial feeding, with the birds soaring around and around above our heads catching whatever winged insects had perhaps just hatched and were in the airspace 20 metres or more above. Frequently, the birds were too high up to see without binoculars, yet you could hear them in constant communication with one another.

The eremophila species (including *Eremophila longifolia*, *E. duttonii*, *E. sturtii*) were flowering profusely in many areas of the park (glorious to see!). In addition to the many hundreds of Black Honeyeaters and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters present, the woodswallows (particularly the Masked Woodswallows) were also feeding on the nectar of the eremophila flowers. On one eremophila (*E. sturtii*) bush about 3 metres in height there were at least 50 Masked Woodswallows hanging off all the branches and branchlets, feasting. When they were disturbed, they took to the air in a mass of feathered bodies!

We observed similar flocking and feeding behaviours of thousands of woodswallows in September 23 at Naree and Yantabulla north-west of Bourke. Here the birds also fed on the nectar of the flowering Yapunyah trees (*Eucalyptus ochrophloia*).

The Dusky Woodswallow is listed (on 5 August 2016) as "Vulnerable" in NSW¹. This is largely thought to be a result of clearing of habitat across their range. There are strategies in place for the recovery of the species (see "Saving our Species" ²).

The other woodswallow species are listed as "Least Concern".

¹ <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/Topics/animals-and-plants/threatened-species/NSW-threatened-species-scientific-committee/determinations/final-determinations/2016/dusky-woodswallow-artamus-cyanopterus-cyanopterus-vulnerable-species-listing>

² <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/savingourspeciesapp/project.aspx?ProfileID=20303>



'White-breasted Woodswallow (C)Simon Pelling 2022
birdlifephotography.org.au'

Activism Works: Part 2

Adani's Coal Mine

-- Susanne Rix (2017)

The Adani mine was to be the largest coal mine in the Southern Hemisphere at a time when coal should be history. We are not young or strong, but yes, passionate! We are fitted for our lock on devices. A metal bracelet for my birthday ... (The story continues from October Hut News).

Two hours later, we are roaring through the dark in six vehicle convoy. We arrive pre-dawn, climb the fence and enter the site. We choose our beasts – massive earth-moving bulldozers. John and I are locked on with a technique known only to the career activists. My arms curl around the engine supports and are linked together inside thick metal pipes. Impossible for anyone other than ourselves to release without heavy gauge metal cutting equipment to slice along the length of the pipe. Police need to be specially trained and equipped to release this type of lock-on to prevent injury. Even so, removal by police is a hot, dangerous and painful business.

I'm sitting on the dirt under the fuel line of Bull my bulldozer. I can't smell fuel but it frightens me nonetheless. The Adani security guards arrive at 6.00 am. They thrust their cameras in our faces. At 7.00 the police come. "Leave or you will be arrested and charged", the Sergeant informs us. Our supporters leave. Their job is to record the events from the gate and supply a live feed to the media. There is not much point in protesting if no one knows about it.

Eight hours later, still locked onto Bull my bulldozer, the Queensland sun sweeps into my face. I'm hot, stiff, sore, thirsty, and busting to pee. The police have been polite, even kind - offering water and requesting that we release. I can't see John but we call to each other.

After 9 hours, with the heat, the need to drink and to pee, I feel weak and afraid of fainting. If I pass out, the only way to be released is with the metal cutting saw. We are told the specially trained police release team is several hours away. Terrified, I need to unlock while I still can.

I release my lock on device, am officially arrested and escorted to the paddy wagon. At 10pm, when John is finally released, we are driven off the property to be fingerprinted and formally charged at Clermont police station. The wife of the sergeant makes us Vegemite sandwiches.

As we drove out of the mine site we were greeted by the rest of the camp members. 30 people had stayed all day in the heat to record the events, sending the saga on to the



"My granddaughter has just turned five. I'm here to stop Adani and protect the environment and our water for her future."

media - and to cheer us out like heroes. The Adani guard sneered as we left: "You failed at that then didn't you Missy". Perhaps he was unaware the support team had been feeding the media with "Grandmother stops Adani", etc. Social media along with Queensland TV, radio and newspapers were overflowing with video and images of our protest.

Three weeks later the Queensland election was held. The upcoming election promise of a billion dollar grant that Adani was expecting was suddenly removed. The new government was elected on the changed policy. Failure? A major success, more like. At the court case, no criminal charges were laid. My \$600 fine was paid for by my dear friend Sandy. "I can't do what you did - but please let me support you", she urged. All contributions count.

In the #StopAdani fight, we have:

- Stopped at least AUD\$3 billion in taxpayer funded loans, a \$1 billion loan from the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF), a \$1 billion loan from Chinese government owned banks and a \$1 billion loan from the State Bank of India;
- Pushed over 100 major companies to rule out any involvement with the Carmichael project including the world's biggest banks ruling out financing and 40 global insurance companies refusing to underwrite the project;
- Exposed Adani's dodgy track record of environmental and human rights abuses across the world, and sought to hold them accountable; and

- Built a powerful movement of over one million Australians who are standing up to the coal industry and calling for a cleaner future.

Adani's Carmichael project today looks nothing like they planned - thanks to years of effort from so many people.

What was planned as a \$26.5 billion project, Adani now bills as a \$2 billion project. What was to be funded by taxpayers and banks has been funded by Adani Group parent companies.

For a mine that was planned to operate for 90 years, now Adani says it will operate for just 24 years.

The fight continues ...



Thought provoking NZ No 7: RECYCLING THE MEAT WHARF

-- Christine Davies

One day, in March 2020, we looked down on the South Island town of Oamaru from a lookout above its southern outskirts. Although it was once predicted to be one of New Zealand's great port cities, it is now most noted for its seal-strewn fishing boat harbour and the grand old white stone buildings which surround it. On the most sheltered side of the boat harbour, a long fairly shabby finger wharf stretched towards the waves lapping at the breakwaters. This was Sumpter Wharf which spent part of the 19th century as one of the country's most important meat exporting facilities.

What was intriguing to the viewer was a myriad of tiny dots shimmering on the decking of the wharf. A hypothesis was quickly formed and a drive down to the harbourside confirmed it. Although the human species had let the wharf fall into disrepair since 2004 without finding a new use for it, two shag species had turned the site into a bird breeding city. The Otago Shags and the Spotted Shags were now resident in their hundreds.

The Otago Shag was named in 2014 as a new species after scientists proved it was separate from previously identified species. 2019 saw roughly 650 nests on the ageing wharf which represented 40% to 50% of the entire species which makes Sumpter Wharf a significant ecological protected area.

Blue Penguins, Yellow-eyed Penguins and the New Zealand Fur Seal call Oamaru home. It is one of the World's most ecologically interesting towns.



Images: Sumpter Wharf. The Otago Shags are in the majority and appear to have claimed the most desirable real estate - the seaward end of the wharf.

The old seal was relaxing at the beginning of the wharf, blocked to protect the shags from intruders such as hungry seals.

Platy-Project Month

Thousands of people signed up for the Australian Conservation Foundation's "Platy-Project month". Hundreds of platypus were spotted across Eastern Australia.

Sightings, or attempted sightings, will provide crucial information about the presence (or absence) of platypuses in our waterways. This better enables researchers, campaigners and community members to advocate for their protection.

Hut News would love to hear from Blue Mountains residents who participated in this project. Please write to Hut News and tell us about your experiences. (Exact platypus locations should not be included). What you saw, who you saw it with, how you felt. Your stories may inspire others to participate in future Citizen Science events to help our native fauna.

-- Christine Davies, Hut News Editor
hutnews@bluemountains.org.au or
 PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls, 2782.

You can still look for a platypus, host survey events and log your sightings in the coming weeks. All information collected will help the platypus thrive.

<https://platy-project.acf.org.au/>

Blue Mountains Conservation Society

Planning & 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

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: www.bluemountains.org.au/joining.shtml or 0418 462 576.

Membership includes our monthly newsletter, Hut News, by post and online.



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 detailed walks program and program changes.**

MONDAY LEISURE WALKS: Short day walks 3-5 hours. Bring morning tea, lunch and adequate water. Coordinator: Melanie Lawson 0431 214 687. melanielawson@outlook.com.au.

Nov 6 **Blue Gum Swamp & Grose Head Lookout via Bees Nest Hill.** Gr3/13km. Carpool. Angela 0427 133 327

Nov 13 **Popes Glen/Govetts Leap/Braeside track circuit.** Grade 3, approx. 8km. Leader Barbara 0428 962 460

Nov 20 **Bus trip to Kanangra Walls. Walk to Kanangra Plateau with side trip to Kalang Falls.** Gr2/5km. Melanie 0431 214687. Book \$15 Maurice 0402 402783.

Nov 27 **Glenbrook -Jack Evans Track-Erskine Creek.** Gr3. (bring swimmers) Wayne 0429 021 296

Dec 1 **Kanuka Brook & Crayfish Pool.** Gr3/4 km (bring swimmers). Carpool \$5. Lyn 0432 352 850

TUESDAY FITNESS WALKS: 'Medium Day' walks suitable for walkers of average fitness, 3-5 hours. Bring morning tea/lunch/adequate water. Coordinator: Phill Cox (0415 449 174 mrpacox@hotmail.com)

Nov 7 **Baltzer Lookout, Hanging Rock;** Gr2/8km. Roger Blane 0449 902 774 Lynne Blane 0407 498397.

Nov 14 **Ikara Head** (wildflowers). Gr2-3/7km. Sharon Cox 0404 622515

Nov 21 **Red Gum Park & Genevieve Road Reserve, Bullaburra.** Gr2/5km. Maurice Kerkham 0402 402783.

Nov 28 **TRAIN Milsons Point – Harbour Bridge – Botanic Gardens – Art Gallery of NSW.** Gr1-2/6km. Imma Millward 0422 313828 Anna Drew 0403 711457.

Dec 5 **BUS TRIP Fitzroy Falls, West Rim Lookouts.** Gr1-2/up to 4km. Marek Bowman 0412 347478 Margaret Tilden 0416 849506. Book \$15 Maurice 0402 402783.

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

Nov 9 **Echo Bluff to Frederica Falls, Lawson.** Lawson Bowling Club CP 8.45am. Carpool. Take lunch. Beverley 4757 2076. Gr2

Nov 16 **Willoughby Road to Sublime Point, Leura.** Meet cnr The Mall and Megalong St, Leura 9.30am. Carpool. Beverley 4757 2076. Gr1

Nov 23 **Ingar Fire Trail, Wentworth Falls.** Carpool/bring lunch. Libby 4759 2969. Gr2

Nov 30 **TRAIN Edgecliff Trumper Park, Goethe Institute plus Mystery Site.** Maurice 0402 402783. Gr1

Dec 7 **Braeside Walk, Blackheath.** Carpool/bring lunch. Tracy 0434 362611. Grade 2

Dec 14 **Christmas Party at Wilson Park, Lawson opp swimming pool.** Bring plate to share, drinks, cups, plates, cutlery, chair and picnic table. Meet 12 noon. Beverley 4757 2076. Gr1

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

Nov 4 **Birrabang to Yileen.** Harold 0409 010737, Gr3/10km. Map Mt Wilson

Nov 11 **Lawson Waterfalls.** Harold 0409 010737, Gr3/10km. Map Katoomba.

Nov 18 **Mount Victoria.** Harold 0409 010737. Gr3/7km. Maps Katoomba/Hartley

Nov 25 **Burra-Korain Head.** Harold 0409 010737. Gr3/12km. Map Mt Wilson.

Dec 2 **Rainbow Cave and Numantia Falls** (Meet Faulconbridge). Harold 0409 010737. Gr3/9km. Map Springwood.

TO WALK

that track
remote
serene
veils of green and gold abound
galleries of nature's art
cathedrals from the dawn of time
no sound
our being blends
this moment
now
peace

Ross Bridle. 2023.

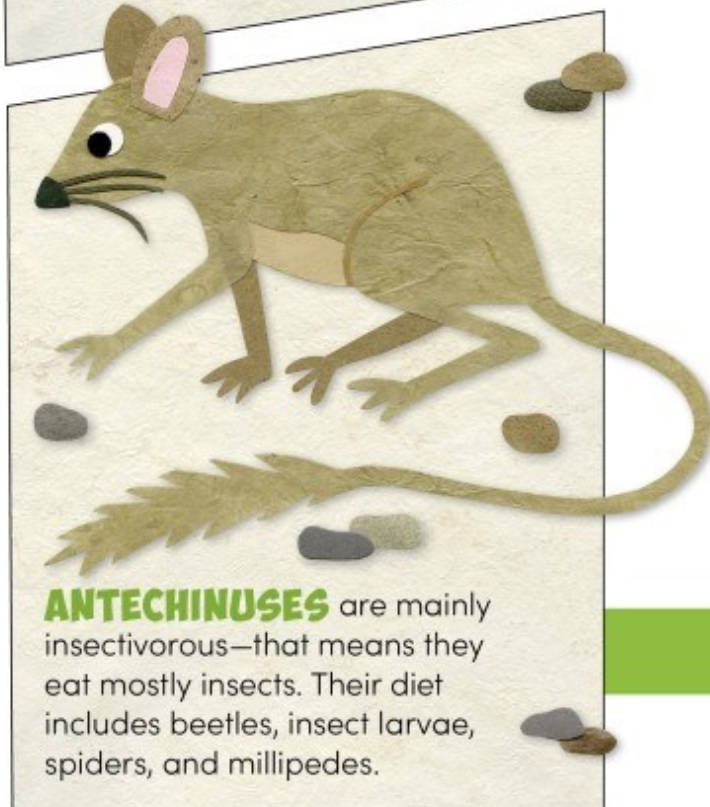
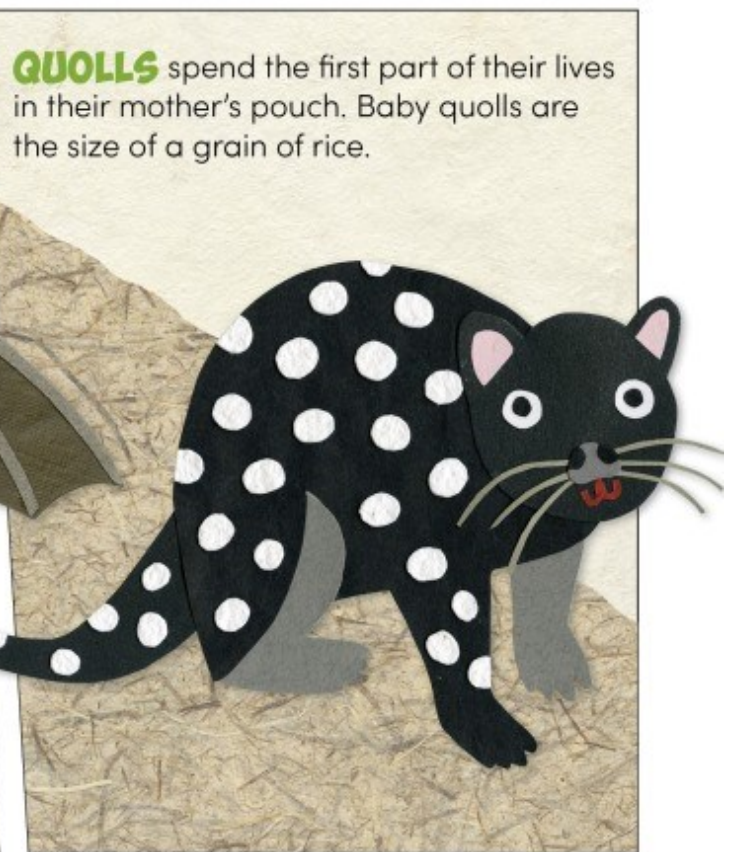
Visit the Saturday walks facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/bmcslongerbushwalks?fref=nf>



*Leptospermum
macrocarpum*

Photographed during a Plant Study Group walk by Sue Nicol, 8/10/23.

Rigby Hill offers dramatic views of the Grose Valley. In years when there had been less frequent fires, Rigby Hill was one of the greatest places to see spring wildflowers in the Upper Blue Mountains.



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Conservation Society in "Hut News"

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-N.pdf>