

HUT NEWS

Issue No. 420
December 2023 /
January 2024



"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"

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

Back to The Hut with a World Heritage Theme

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society held its first meeting at the 1992 vintage Conservation Hut since it has had extensive renovations. There was a World Heritage theme to the evening. 60 members and visitors enjoyed a light supper and shared memories of the Society and the old Conservation Hut.

Former Wilderness Australia director, Keith Muir, spoke briefly about the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage listing. He said it is a tool in ongoing negotiations with government agencies about mountains conservation matters and gave as an example the 1991 listing of Nattai Wilderness and the 2001 listing of the Grose Wilderness.

Joan Domicelj, who wrote the nomination document, shared some humorous reflections on the twists and turns of the processes that led to World Heritage listing. The negotiations stretched over many years. Both answered questions from the audience. The general mood of the evening was positive and relaxed. (Image: A Solomon)



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. Please join online at www.bluemountains.org.au/joining.shtml or phone 0418 462 576. Membership includes our monthly newsletter, Hut News, by post or online.

Do You Have a Cat? And Do You Love Wildlife?

A cat enclosure can allow your cat to be outside safely and keep wildlife safe too. Blue Mountains City Council is currently offering subsidies of up to \$400 for cat fencing, runs and enclosures, including portable ones.

The program is supported by the RSPCA's Keeping Cats Safe at Home project, funded by the NSW government. Apply on the council website - <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/animals/keeping-cats-safe-at-home-project> - or ring 4780 5000 to speak to Holly Nettle who is managing the project. There are a limited number of subsidies available.

Blue Mountains Conservation Society NATIVE PLANT NURSERY

We will be at the Blackheath Growers Market on
SUNDAY 9th DECEMBER
(no market in January) AND on the 2nd Sunday of
every month until the winter break.

For enquiries and to place an order, please contact
Nursery Manager, Paul Irwin:
plantnurserybmcs@outlook.com

Gift Certificates to the value of \$10, \$20 or \$50
are available at our markets stall or email your
request to the Nursery Manager (email above).

Wanted: a volunteer with a flair for brochures

Can you please help put together a Society brochure about Invasive Species. It will ask Blue Mountains bushwalkers to look for and report evidence of damage to bushland by introduced invasive pests and diseases including dieback (areas of dead plants), insects (eg Fire Ants), feral animals, sick native animals, spread of weeds, etcetera and advise bushwalkers how they can avoid unintentionally spreading the invasive species into pristine bushland.

We've got the information but not the skills to put it all together in an eye-catching brochure.

Contact Christine hutnews@bluemountains.org.au
or phone 4787 7246.

Western Sydney Airport EIS

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Western Sydney International has been released. The Society will be making a submission, and we aim to put together some points for those who wish to make their own submission. This will take a little time to organise as the EIS is 4,444 pages.

Watch our website: www.bluemountains.org.au/#flight You can download the draft EIS at <https://www.wsflightpaths.gov.au/download-the-draft-eis>
Submissions close on 31 January 2024.

President's Report -- Annette Cam

Another year comes to a close and our minds turn to celebrating Christmas and sharing with family and friends. I hope that, whatever else this season means to you, it is filled with joy and friendship and that you can share those pleasures with others. I also hope that in looking over the past year and looking forward to the next, you have time to enjoy our beautiful natural surroundings, its animals and plants, the pleasures and challenges it offers.

Thank you for all your support for the ConSoc over this past year; as always, our members are the backbone of our organisation.

In late October, we had our first General Meeting in quite a while at the Conservation Hut; it was a wonderful evening to celebrate its reopening. It was a cool and misty evening and, looking out over the valley, I was reminded what a wonderful place the Blue Mountains is.

Next year, we plan to have more General Meetings and, of course, these will be advertised in Hut News, in e-blast and on our website. Members and friends will be very welcome and I do hope to see you there!

The Society's submission on NSW Invasive Species Management Review was submitted at the end of October and you can read a copy on our website. Invasive species are considered the number one threat worldwide to biodiversity; of course, this threat is compounded by clearing of our forests and other vegetation and our changing climate.

We are working hard on the submission in response to the draft EIS for Western Sydney International airport, which is due at the end of January. This is a very important submission as, not only does flight noise adversely affect the people in our community, it also will adversely impact our national parks and other protected areas, including wilderness in the southern part of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, and the birds and other animals living in these parts of the GBMWSHA and nearby protected areas. There is also the risk of collision with Grey-headed Flying-foxes and White Ibis from incoming and departing flights. We all know the airport will go ahead, so we must ensure that these risks are eliminated or properly managed. During December and January, we will be updating the information on our website relating to the EIS so that you can make your own submission.

With the expected hotter, drier weather during December and January, please make sure you have your fire emergency plans ready and that you keep safe! -- Annette Cam.

Protect Sydney's drinking water from coal mine waste

Centennial Coal proposes to recommence discharge of 10 million litres of mine water a day to Sydney's drinking water supplies by pumping out the Angus Place mine workings. The proposed pumping is likely to lower groundwater by up to 30 metres. Such an impact would damage nationally significant swamps and associated endangered species.

Please write to the NSW Planning Minister and ask him to use his powers to refer the plans to Federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek. You can find a guide letter at <https://www.gardensofstone.org.au/form/angus-place-west-modifications-e>

How to contact your local MP (Blue Mountains electorates)

Federal: Susan Templeman MP, Member for Macquarie. PO Box 855, Windsor NSW 2756. susan.templeman.mp@aph.gov.au
Phone 4573 8222.

State: Trish Doyle MP, Member for Blue Mountains, 5 Raymond Road, Springwood NSW 2777. Phone 4751 3298.

ElectorateOffice.BlueMountains@parliament.nsw.gov.au

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bushcare@bluemountains.org.au

THE DEADLINE FOR FEBRUARY HUT NEWS IS 12 JANUARY

hutnews@bluemountains.org.au

Enquiries: Christine 4787 7246

GOOD NEWS STORIES FOR THE ENVIRONMENT:

In this issue of Hut News we have lots of positive news to report. Thank you to all the members who have attended meetings and rallies and written letters and other submissions to support these and other campaigns. The Society has 900 members and together we can help make a difference.

Federal funding for the eradication of fire ants

The Federal Government has announced an extra \$268 million over four years for the National Fire Ant Eradication Program (NFAEP). The funding will be used to supply 1,400 tonnes of bait each year and to create 350 additional jobs in the eradication program. The government also plans to invest in new drone and satellite technology to detect colonies.

Fire ants are one of the World's worst invasive pests. In Australia they are currently contained to 750,000 hectares of Queensland's south-east. But, over the last year, numbers have surged and fire ants have been found five kilometres from the NSW border.

Fire ants can be deadly. They typically live in colonies of 200,000 to 400,000 and can swarm in large numbers if their nests are disturbed. They have a venomous sting and can overwhelm and kill prey much larger than themselves.

Reece Pianta, conservation officer at the Invasive Species Council, welcomed the funding but said more was needed from Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia. "We understand these states will be considering their level of funding and urge them to unite with Queensland, NSW and the Federal Government to stop fire ants in their tracks", Mr Pianta said. "Eradication will take at least a decade and so, while this four-year funding announcement is very welcome, work should start immediately on developing the next funding package so that we do not have any more delays." (Source: ABC News)

Uses for existing plastic bags and more help for our Environment

-- Liz van Reyswoud

Good News! Did you see the advertisement from BMCC in the recent Gazette? Residents can drop off soft plastics and e-waste (anything with a cord) for recycling at both Blaxland and Katoomba Recovery and Waste Management Facilities. Start saving now, you will be amazed just how quickly you can accumulate a large bag full. Magazines arrive in your letterbox wrapped in plastic, all those wrappers from the packet of biscuits or chips, scraps of bubble wrap and the bags around loaves of bread. There is no cost for residents.

The council is running a trial until June 2024, so it is important to support this effort so that it will be continued into the future. Read more: <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/waste-recycling/20232024-recycling-trial>

More Good News! I have discovered a website which teaches you how to weave plastic bags together to make sleeping bags for the homeless. This group is trying to teach this simple technique of mat-weaving to students, disability centres, aged care facilities etc. The woven bags are then distributed to homeless centres around Australia. It appears that these bags are not only waterproof and insulating, they are insect proof and odour proof, lightweight and portable, and they are durable and easy to clean. They roll out to 190cm x 90cm. More information: www.makeanest.com.au.

Wouldn't it be great if someone in the mountains could learn the technique and teach others how to make the bags?

Warragamba Dam plan officially scrapped

Bob Debus, Chair, Wilderness Australia, has written to campaigners to thank them for the extraordinary community effort put into protecting the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. Here is a summary of the letter.

The threat of Warragamba Dam is finally over. For the first time in five years we can have a sense of certainty that the spectacular valleys of the southern Blue Mountains National Park will not be flooded.

It has taken a great effort by many people. Conservation groups, traditional owners, scientists, technical experts, local councils and local residents had banded together to ensure the dam wall will not be raised. And together we succeeded.

When the Labor Government was elected on the 25th of March, with an unambiguous policy of stopping the raising of the Warragamba dam, I was elated, like all of us. But I also knew that a lot of bureaucratic work behind the scenes would be required to turn this enlightened policy into reality.

And so in April, shortly after the election, Wilderness Australia wrote to the Minister for Water and the Minister for the Environment, asking that the EIS be formally withdrawn and that a series of actions be taken to close off the project for good.

In August the Hon. Rose Jackson, Minister for Water and the responsible Minister for the Warragamba project, wrote back with a positive message: *"As you have noted, the NSW Government will not be proceeding with the former Government's proposal to raise Warragamba Dam wall for flood mitigation purposes, and WaterNSW has been directed to cease all work on the project."*

The Development Application for raising the Warragamba dam has now been officially withdrawn.

There is still more work to do to try and future-proof this outcome — the dam builders will certainly be back if an opportunity arises, but we will put some more roadblocks in their way.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the extraordinary community effort to protect the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. It made a difference!

Also read

Saving Kosci (Page 7).

At last there is hope for the survival of the delicate ecosystems and threatened species of the Kosciuszko National Park.

Plans for Australia's longest zip-line in Gardens of Stone scrapped (Page 8)

The "Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area will not be a "theme park". But there is still more to do.

Cuckoos of the Blue Mountains

-- Annette Cam

There are several migratory cuckoo species that return to the Blue Mountains during Spring and Summer, leaving again in Autumn. The arrival of these birds always reminds me that longer days and warmer weather is on its way.

Cuckoos belong to the bird family *Cuculidae* and are well-known for laying their eggs in the nests of other bird species. (Did you know that over half the world's species of cuckoo raise their own young, but the only species in Australia that does so is the Pheasant Coucal (*Centropus phasianinus*.)

The cuckoo species I record around Lawson are: Channel-billed Cuckoo (*Scythrops novaehollandiae*), Eastern Koel (*Eudynamis orientalis*), Shining Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcites lucidus*), Pallid Cuckoo (*Cacomantis pallidus*) and Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cacomantis flabelliformis*). Whilst I haven't recorded them in the Blue Mountains, Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo (*Chalcites basalus*) has been recorded here in previous years.

This month I am writing about two of these species – the Channel-billed and the Shining Bronze-Cuckoo.

Channel-billed Cuckoo

Over the years I have lived at Lawson, I usually record my first Channel-bill for the season on the first weekend in October. This is a raucous, conspicuous and large cuckoo, demanding attention. The largest species of cuckoo in the world, they migrate from New Guinea and east Indonesia, where they spend our winter, to breed in Australia. They are fruit-eaters, but also eat insects and sometimes nestling birds.

Channel-billed Cuckoos lay their eggs in the nest of other large birds, such as crows and ravens, Australian Magpie and Pied Currawong. A huge, pale cuckoo with long tail and massive wings, in flight they have a cross-shaped silhouette. Birdlife Australia lists climate change and habitat loss as threats to this species.

Googling "Galls"

I have often noticed strange 'buds' on *Allocasuarina* bushes. They're not flowers and they're not cones, but I didn't investigate further, assuming they were caused by disease or insects.

On a recent walk on Kings Tableland, I saw some bushes covered in the same 'buds', particularly on *Allocasuarina distyla* but also on *A. nana*. Time to find out more!

Enquiries on Facebook and Google have opened up the fascinating world of GALLS. A scale insect called *Cylindrococcus spiniferus* causes the growth of these bud-like galls specific to *Allocasuarina* species, not *Casuarina*. The larger galls house the females. The smaller ones, on the tips of branches, house the males. In the photos, you can see some of the galls are growing on the tips of the leaves.

So, when you're out in the bush, look, observe, wonder and question. But don't stop there – find out the answers. There are amazing things to learn every day.

-- Sue Nicol



Shining Bronze-Cuckoo (C)Chris Dubar 2016
birdlifephotography.org.au

Shining Bronze-Cuckoo

A small cuckoo, this bird is green and glossy, with iridescent, green upper parts, white underparts with bold dark barring. Their call is a series of clear, high-pitched whistles, each note rising in pitch. This year, we had one breeding bird in the bush just near our house calling all day and most of the night during October making its presence clearly felt!

The Shining Bronze-Cuckoo is found throughout south and eastern Australia from Cape York Peninsula, Qld to the Eyre Peninsula in SA. They are found in wooded habitats from lighted wooded to rainforest. They parasitise smaller birds species such as Brown Thornbills and fairy-wrens.

Movements of this species are complex. Some of the subspecies of Shining Bronze-Cuckoo are migratory, breeding in NZ and some of the islands in the Pacific, whereas other subspecies are thought to be sedentary. Some birds that breed in Tasmania and eastern Australia may migrate north during winter as far as New Guinea and the Lesser Sunda Islands, east of Java. There is much more to learn about this lovely species of cuckoo.



Cylindrococcus spiniferus galls on *Allocasuarina distyla*. The larger galls house the females (one shown near top of first picture). The smaller galls house the males.

Photos: C Davies.

Grand clifftop walk

-- Don Morison

What kind of investment would make the Clifftop "Grand"?

A 2023 "opening" of the "Grand Clifftop Walk" along what Council calls the Southern Scenic Escarpment isn't happening. This is a continuous work in progress. We can take stock of which needs this walking track network already fulfils and which needs should be better fulfilled.

The Katoomba to Leura Prince Henry Cliff Walk opened in 1935. Decades afterwards, the esteemed late Council officer John Metcalfe and the Blue Mountains Conservation Society's dedicated member Norm Harris advocated its extension.

Blue Mountains historian and TAFE teacher, Jim Smith, described a "Great Circuit of the Jamison Valley" which had elements in common with what the Grand Clifftop Walk might become. Through Smith's classes, students, some still active in Blue Mountains conservation, learned of new ways of relating to mountains' bushwalking.

Experiencing Nature at Much Visited Locations:

Promoting a world-beating natural area experience on an urban perimeter is an experiment. It affects private landholders, very short-stay visitors who might just want selfies and vehicle operators who want to park close to the escarpment to herd their passengers quickly in and out. And it affects the local economy.

Students of Jim Smith's courses learned to interpret the bush while walking but also while standing or sitting still. Pauses in the noise created by other visitors, aircraft, domestic dogs and such were valued. Overseas, even supporters of high volume tourism realise that this type of experience is at the core of what you can market to travellers.

In 2023, the Grand Clifftop Walk still often has this vibe. But poor Government decisions could make it vanish.

How Can Government Protect the Natural Area Experience?

Topping the list of Government responsibilities is to greatly restrict and regulate the numbers and types of invading motor vehicles. Echo Point is set to continue with very high volumes of short-stay visitors. The Grand Clifftop Walk will do best if long-stay visitors are prioritised through most of it.

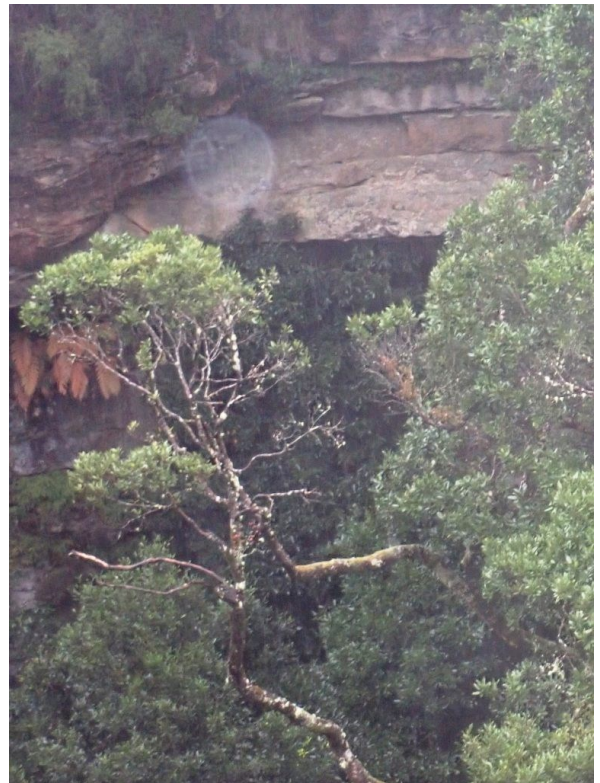
The Clifftop on TV in 2023

The SBS program, "Julia Zemiro's Great Australian Walks", had an hour long episode, ostensibly about a walk from Katoomba to Wentworth Falls. The presenter emphasised the relationship of First Australians to The Gully and discussed the kinds of insects, already discovered and yet to be discovered, found in ecosystems of the Kedumba Valley catchment.

Significant things would have to change about the Grand Clifftop concept if it were to incorporate the elements the producers of the SBS program thought were most important. There would have to be a commitment to better preserve the bushland corridors linking the Clifftop to The Gully area. The Clifftop Walk would prioritise those who want to walk slowly and absorb details of the environment.

In the 7 Networks, "Police Rescue Australia", there was a response to a head injury of a bushwalker on the remaining open stub of the National Pass below Wentworth Falls during a particularly high-visitation day in the summer of 2022/23. The highly professional rescuers bustled their way past crowds of ill-prepared day-trippers, using only a small amount of breath to inform a visitor they were not supposed to have a large dog on the stepping stones at the top of Wentworth Falls.

(To be continued in February 2024 Hut News)



Sudden vegetation changes in small wet climate canyons are noticed regularly by walkers winding their way along the "Grand Clifftop" from Wentworth Falls to Katoomba. Photo: C Davies.

1 Million Turtles Community Conservation Program

November is the peak nesting season in much of southern Australia for turtles. The Glenbrook Lagoon community and Blue Mountains City Council staff have been busy organising the protection of turtle nests close to public walkways around Glenbrook Lagoon. There is a "Turtle Island" at Glenbrook Lagoon which offers protection for the turtles.

Nest predation rates on turtle nests are very high in many parts of the country. The fox is the major predator that attacks turtle nests.

1 Million Turtles is a national community conservation citizen science program. This program promotes a strong collaboration between scientists and the community to support initiatives aimed at conserving threatened Australian freshwater turtle species.

The program creates opportunities for the community to actively learn, participate and contribute to freshwater turtle research and conservation. This is achieved through a variety of activities suitable for different interests and skill levels. Visit the following website for further information: <https://1millionturtles.com/>

A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY ...

Members and friends are invited to the **Sunset Gathering at the Conservation Hut on Thursday, 22 February 2024, 6.30pm- 9pm.**

Details of guest speaker and other information will be in February Hut News.

Net Zero Future Bill & Coal Expansions

-- Nathalie Verellen, Sustainability Officer

The NSW government has tabled a new Climate Change Bill 2023 (Net Zero Future Bill). The purpose of this bill is to enshrine emission reduction targets in NSW law. In addition a new independent Net Zero Commission will be established to monitor climate targets and report on progress of these targets. This commission is an advisory body only and their findings are not legally binding, leaving the final decision in the hands of the NSW government.

At the same time of tabling this Climate Change Bill, 14 new coal mine expansions are being proposed in NSW alone (many more Australia wide).

The Lock the Gate Alliance has recently launched a campaign called "NSW COAL WATCH" to track progress on these proposed projects. According to Lock the Gate, the "Net Zero Future Bill" is NOT strong enough to be able to stop these projects.

If approved, the total of the proposed new coal expansions will create 15 times NSW's annual emissions.

In the Hunter Valley, the Hunter Valley Operations mine expansion will cause one billion tonnes of greenhouse gas and is the largest proposed project since the Paris Agreement.

For more information and how to help: https://www.lockthegate.org.au/nsw_coal_watch

Move Beyond Coal (formerly Stop Adani) has also launched a campaign and is appealing to the public to take action and contact their local Federal Member and ask them to not approve any new fossil fuel projects or at the least to take into account the Climate Impact of the projects.

The Federal Minister for the Environment and Water, Tanya Plibersek, has recently refused to consider Climate Impacts when considering the approval of new fossil fuel projects. Both our federal and state government are very well aware of the consequences of fossil fuel pollution, yet they refuse to act responsibly.

For more information and how to help:

<https://www.movebeyondcoal.com/>

poll should the fed gov consider climate impacts

What you can do ...

You can write a letter (handwritten and mailed for ultimate effect, if you can) to Trish Doyle and Susan Templeman asking them to put pressure on their governments not to approve any new fossil fuel projects. A short, personal message works well. You will find their contact details on page 2 of this newsletter.

A visit to Muttonbird Island

-- Alethea Morison

Muttonbird Island is a grassy somewhat eroded hump of land connected to busy Coffs Harbour and its marina by a breakwater. After an excellent Indian meal in Coffs, our small party drove to the marina and strolled out along the breakwater as dusk was falling. The breakwater path was still lively with cyclists and dog walkers, numbers thinning to the occasional walker and jogger as we passed through the gate in the fence that prevents feral animals swarming the island.

Signs informed us we'd arrived during the season the muttonbirds were cleaning their burrows and seeking mates preparatory to raising the next generation. The trail climbed steeply past many burrows, an occasional bird scampering for cover as we approached. We reached the summit and descended to the clifftops on the island's ocean side, lucky to glimpse distant whales spouting in the last daylight as waves roiled on the rocks below.

As we returned westwards, mountains that had recently flared in the sunset sank into darkness, only shapes were visible and sound replaced sight. Thumps to our right were a couple of kangaroos that inhabit the island and wingbeats began to fill the air, together with odd little cries and sighs. We stopped and listened, entranced, as the cries and sighs built to a haunting symphony surrounding us with wave upon wave of sound rising and falling. The experience was altogether other-worldly.

We were nearly back to the gate when a bright headlamp approached us and Narelle Swanson, the volunteer bird-bander attached to the lamp, invited us to turn around and view the birds up close. Narelle has been conducting long-term research into decline in the muttonbirds or wedge-tailed shearwaters population. They face a variety of threats, including disruption of their "food webs" related to climate change.

As we turned back with Narelle, her headlamp lit up slopes alive with scurrying and squawking birds. She explained though that their habitat is being degraded. While the fence excludes cats and dogs, native swamp rats still have access to the island and destroy the vegetation and with it, the muttonbirds' nesting places.

Narelle plucked an indignant muttonbird from its burrow and briefly displayed its impressive wingspan and wedge-shaped tail. It submitted to us taking a couple of snaps before being freed. Its beak and head shape reminded me of an albatross. I think of the vast tracts of sea and sky these species wander and the tiny fragile nesting spaces they depend on, all of which must be protected for them to survive.

An ABC podcast of a visit to Muttonbird Island by Ann Jones, which includes the magical muttonbird chorus and her own encounter with Narelle Swanson, is available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/offtrack/muttonbird-colony-collapse/11082474>

(TING trip away - Urunga/ Dorrigo/ Coffs Harbour - October 2023)



Before visitors' eyes, the gloved hands of Narelle Swanson assess a female muttonbird. Narelle is a multi decade veteran of research and advocacy for this breeding colony on the doorstep of the city of Coffs Harbour.

Saving Kosci

--The Feral Herald, November 2023

Last month, the NSW government overturned the decades-old ban on aerial culling of feral horses to save Kosciuszko National Park. This incredible win throws a much-needed lifeline to more than 30 threatened species that call the Australian Alps home. How did the ban on this vital control tool even come about? And what's next for the Reclaim Kosci campaign? Feral Herald spoke to Richard Swain, co-founder of the Reclaim Kosci campaign, to find out. Extracts from Richard's responses are underneath.

"It all started with the Brumby Bill (Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Bill). The Bill was introduced by former NSW deputy premier John Barilaro in 2018. It was to protect the so-called heritage values of feral horses in Kosciuszko National Park. People rode horses around the mountains, but it was never good for Country. You can't throw hard-hoofed animals and ecological ignorance together for 150 years and think that's going to be good for Country. It was never, never good for Country.

"We were told not to even mention aerial culling ... it would never happen again. But we never gave up. We educated politicians and the media about the damage and we helped thousands of people have their voices heard. We had a Senate enquiry that was very conclusive that aerial culling is a method that needs to be employed. And now finally we've got an environment minister and a premier prepared to listen to science and stand up for Country by overturning the ban.

"Reclaim Kosci started off the back of the Brumby Bill. It was the coming together of the Invasive Species Council, National Parks Association of the ACT,

National Parks Association of NSW, Colong Foundation for Wilderness and Nature Conservation Council of NSW to stop it.

"And me, I was just a river guy who got cranky about it and was ringing everyone I could. That's how I got into the political stuff. I'd been in this battle on social media and locally, but I hadn't bothered to join a group as such. But this really upset me, this Brumby Bill.

"And since then we've had hundreds of volunteers, donors, scientists and organisations back the campaign and make it successful. The Invasive Species Council has led the way and people like Linda Groom and Professor Jamie Pittock have stood up and made sure politicians couldn't ignore us."

(The Feral Herald is the e-newsletter of the Invasive Species Council).

The Brumby Wars - by Anthony Sharwood.

Anthony Sharwood encountered brumbies firsthand while trekking the Australian Alps Walking Track. As he started to investigate the issue and spent time with people on both sides of the debate, he realised that for all of them, there is much more at stake than horses. For those enraptured by the legend of the Man from Snowy River, descendants of cattle families and many Australians in urban and regional areas, brumbies are a symbol of wildness, freedom and a vanishing way of life. To ecologists and people who ski, walk and fish in the High Country and other areas where the brumbies proliferate, they are a menace that must be removed to save delicate landscapes. Something has to give. But what? The land or the horses?

"A distinctive, charming narrative ... a thinking, caring man's trek" (Canberra Times) Published 2021.

The Rare and Mythical Australian Painted Snipe Sighted at Base of Blue Mountains

-- Chris Whiteman

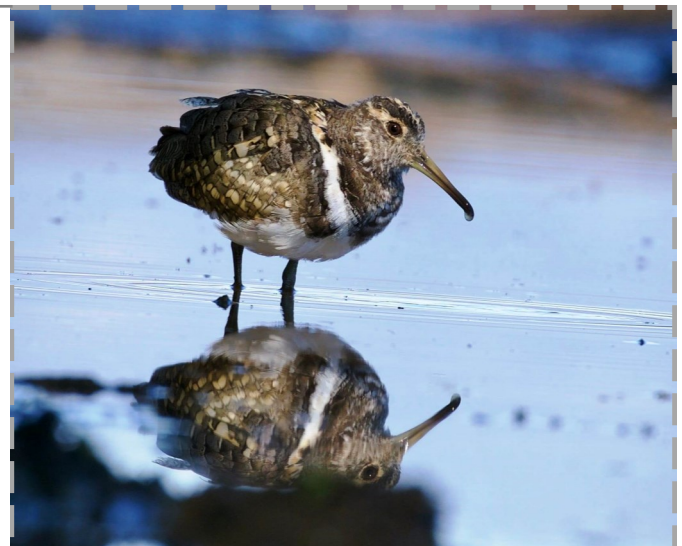
The rare and endangered Australian Painted Snipe has been sighted at the Richmond Lowlands near the base of the Blue Mountains. There are thought to be only 340 of the endangered species in existence; Australia's rarest water bird which is ranked 29th for global bird conservation priority.

Ecologists have classified this bird as near mythical due to the lack of knowledge about the bird. There are no recordings of the Australian painted-snipe's call and they vanish for years at a time during droughts.

Numbers have declined drastically from the 1950s to the early 2000s. Causes of the decline are thought to be wetland drainage, river management and salination, as well as grazing and trampling of wetlands by stock.

The birds can range across a vast area from the Murray-Darling Basin to the Kimberley and parts of south-eastern Australia to coastal areas in Queensland, but sightings are few and far between. It is certainly a special event that this bird has been sighted near the base of the Blue Mountains.

The Australian Painted Snipe has its own website where scientists mention improved ways to track this mysterious bird. <https://paintedsnipe.com.au/about-aus-painted-snipe/>



Australian Painted Snipe, photographed by Andy Klotz.

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



"I've lived in Blaxland 80 years. No-one ever comes here for a date."
(Hut News January 2001, Joshua Thompson (graphics), Don Morison (text)).

The Intergenerational Transformations Series Public spaces in 30, 60 & 90 years' time Series coordinated by Don Morison.

In preparation for detailed discussion in future issues, we depict four public tree scapes that have already aroused public interest over many decades. (series coordinated by Don Morison)

1. Glenbrook Park: In one of the Blue Mountains' most significant public spaces, inspiring the love of native trees remains a primary objective. That is because of years of campaigning by local environment groups championing the importance of native trees that are allowed to grow large over many decades.

2. The deciduous exotics of Wentworth Street, Clanwilliam Street and Prince George Street, Blackheath, are among the most photographed trees in the mountains, especially in autumn. Over time, the disorderliness of Nature is disrupting these colonnades of plantings. When a mature tree becomes unviable, a "missing tooth" appearance disrupts the regimentation. This is just one example of the challenges humans face in trying to plan the long-term future of the mountains' diverse biomass.

3. Kingsford Smith Park, Katoomba. As the well-kept Vale Street side of the park merges into the northern side, visitors find themselves in a jumble of nondescript exotic trees and shrubs with

steep, broken surfaces on the paths. Perhaps this part of the park is a blank canvas where something completely new and inspirational could be planted in coming years. The tall native Eucalypts in the background are beyond the park's boundary.

4. Recent Council proceedings suggest Blue Mountains residents have run out of time to take "digs" at the Canary Island Date Palms in Blaxland shopping centre.

To be continued in February Hut News ...

Plans for Australia's longest zip-line in Gardens of Stone scrapped

Plans to build an adventure park with the country's longest zip-line in the Gardens of Stone State Conservation Area have been scrapped after community opposition. It was hailed by the previous NSW Coalition government as the "centrepiece" of a \$50 million project to turn the SCA into an ecotourism venture, in the hopes of attracting more visitors to the region each year.

Bushwalking NSW executive officer Kirsten Mayer said: "We are delighted ... Our national parks are absolutely magnificent in their own right – they don't need a theme park to make them appealing".

But the government plans to forge ahead with a lease to build eco-cabins at the site. The "low impact" shelters would be put up along a six-day walk, which is yet to be constructed. This is being opposed by environmental groups. "We don't want (eco-cabins) in national parks because national parks are for everyone, and putting a private lodge ... is effectively selling off our public assets," Ms Mayer said.

(Source: ABC Central West, posted 13/11/23)

Blue Mountains Conservation Society was among a number for environmental groups, including Wilderness

Australia, National Parks Association, Bushwalking NSW and Lithgow Environment Group who campaigned against this proposal. Many individuals also opposed it in submissions to NPWS. Thank you to Blue Mountains Conservation Society members and everyone else who contributed to this successful campaign.

In our Society's submission to NPWS in July 2022 we pointed out, "the proposal to locate an adventure activity hub in the Lost City area would require installation of infrastructure. This would blight one of the most spectacular pagoda landscape views (the Lost City) and put the fragile pagodas at risk of damage from both the infrastructure and from users of the activity hub."

HAVE YOUR SAY:

The National Parks and Wildlife Service is seeking feedback on the draft amendment to the Gardens of Stone SCA and Wollemi National Park management plans to create the Wollemi Great Walk. Submissions close on 11th December 2023.

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/have-your-say/gardens-of-stone-national-park>; <https://www.nsw.gov.au/have-your-say/wollemi-national-park>

Activism Works: Part 3 Downer Shareholder Meeting

-- Susanne Rix (2017)

There are easier ways to protest than locking on to a bulldozer. I returned to Sydney after my sojourn at the Adani mine and two weeks later donned my navy blue suit, heels and white silk shirt and caught the train to the city. Quite a contrast to the dusty camp clothes in central Queensland.

I had been invited by Tom to act as a proxy at the Downer shareholder meeting (2017). This technique for activism is headed by a group called Market Forces and staffed by dedicated volunteers. I clip clopped my way up Martin Place to the assigned coffee shop in Macquarie Street. For once, I was not dressed like a mountains mung bean so I felt quite in place amongst the fashionable and formally clad legal and financial throng of workers. Most people had an air of important haste.

There, at the back of the coffee shop, was a group of enthusiasts huddled around a large table spread with papers. I recognised Tom who had conducted the training at Market Forces on how to gain maximum benefit from our questioning techniques at shareholder meetings.

To have access to the Annual General Shareholder meetings, one must be a shareholder or hold a proxy from a shareholder who cannot attend. My shareholder lived in Western Australia and, while holding only a small parcel of shares, was still offered access to the meeting. A small parcel of shares was a way to limit activists bombarding the meetings with difficult questions.

Our target today was Downer. Downer is one of the biggest construction companies in Australia. Think stadiums, roads, railways, infrastructure. The company was about to contract for the construction of the railway to enable Adani to haul coal from the mine to the port at Abbott Point - a billion dollar project. Once constructed, the whole Galilee Basin will be open to mining.

I collected my coffee and joined Tom and his colleagues. We discussed tactics and designed probing questions. Having worked in finance in a previous incarnation, I had my own question in mind. Once prepared, we headed to the meeting as individuals rather than a force of activists.

The meeting was held in a five-star venue in Macquarie Street, beside NSW Parliament House. After passing the security checks and collecting the annual report, we entered a lavish hall - reeking of money - where we could help ourselves to the vast array of luscious pastries and fruits.

The meeting was announced and we all found our way to the auditorium. Several hundred maroon velvet chairs faced a high stage containing a panel of dark-suited executives - all men. (An aside here - In the US, I'm told there are more CEOs named James than CEOs who are women). After an hour of boring talks of numbers, profits, futures and share prices, the board invited questions from the shareholders.

We were scattered amongst the audience and one by one presented our concerns about the proposed contract with Adani. The other shareholders were getting agitated - particularly as the major newspapers were there to report on the proceedings. Most just wanted profit figures. Mrs Hermes Handbag (HH) kept interrupting us, complaining that we didn't belong with our left wing ideas.

Finally, I stood nervously with my question. "What could happen to the share price of Downer when it is revealed that



The Sydney Morning Herald reports on the Downer Shareholder Meeting, 2nd November 2017. An image of Susanne Rix is encircled on right. She held the sign, "Clean Jobs Not Dirty Jobs"

the company is contracted to Adani?" There was a murmur among the audience.

At the end of the meeting, our group gathered at the front of the audience, below the executives, and sang the anti-Adani song we had previously rehearsed. Mrs HH leaped to her feet and waved angrily at the cameras that were filming our act. "Get out of here" she screamed.

The meeting and the proposed Adani contract was reported in all the major newspapers the following day. On page three of the SMH the photo showed our group in song, with Mrs HH in front of us gesticulating angrily to the photographer. The photo appeared to show her as if she was leading the protest.

Three weeks later, Downer announced that the contract would not go ahead.

Every win, no matter how small, is a win.

Coming Event:

Who let the cat out? A national overview of cat impacts, curfews and the case for change. Speaker: Candice Bartlett (Conservation Officer with the Invasive Species Council).

Saturday 10 February 2024, 2.30pm at the Mid Mountains Community Centre, New St, Lawson.

Hosted by: Blue Mountains Bird Observers and Blue Mountains Conservation Society. Please register to assist with catering.

Registration: [Humanitix \(https://bit.ly/CatsinBM\)](https://bit.ly/CatsinBM) or phone BMCS on 0490 419 779 and leave a message indicating your attendance.

Blue Mountains stream health: Lawson Creek, progress and setbacks

-- Peter Ardill

How can you help to monitor the health of your local stream? As discussed in November Hut News, BMCC measures a stream's health by sampling for water bugs annually. Declines in bug diversity and populations can reflect a deteriorating stream environment. To thrive, bugs require favourable stream conditions, including suitable water, well vegetated banks and a range of pools, shallows and natural debris.

Perennial Lawson Creek is a place of significance for the Gundungurra community. Forming south of Lawson retail centre and nourishing the World Heritage Area, the creek has been subjected to many health challenges. In 2010 massive sediment flows originating from urban construction work destroyed 200 metres of stream



Degraded vegetation and erosion at Lawson Creek caused by unauthorised dog activity P Ardill

habitat. On occasions, raging stormwaters have gouged sections of creek bank.

BMCC natural area managers and South Lawson Park Bushcare Group members have engaged with these issues. Additionally, the bushcare group manages several ecological restoration projects, restoring indigenous vegetation. BMCC natural area managers have created a Lawson Parklands conservation area near the creek, where indigenous vegetation will naturally regenerate.

Improved vegetation density stabilises creek banks, filters polluting nutrients and supplies natural debris and cooling shade. Tested regularly by bushcare streamwatchers, Lawson Creek water quality is usually satisfactory: good oxygen levels and low phosphate (faeces, fertilisers), minimal salinity, appropriate chemical balance and low turbidity. Recent BMCC stream health checks have recorded "Fair" to "Good" scores, an improvement.

But a new threat to Lawson Creek has emerged. Unauthorised off-leash behaviour by dogs has vegetatively denuded sixty metres of creek bank. The resulting erosion and siltation of water has destroyed bug habitat (see illustration). Remediation of this ugly degradation will cost BMCC and ratepayers thousands of dollars.

To support the health of your local stream, inspect regularly, exercising caution near water. Report wildlife die-offs and environmental damage. Check unusual occurrences of silty water and foul odours. Monitor your stream's health ratings at <https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/waterquality>

(Peter Ardill is a Streamwatch practitioner and accredited bush regenerator.)

Landcare Volunteering in Broken Hill

-- Meredith Brownhill

Broken Hill is a great place for a holiday. It's a centre from which to travel to many new and established National Parks in western NSW. Broken Hill is Willyakali country which connects to Paakantji land at Menindee on the Darling/Baaka River.

Having a love of the Mulga and Saltbush country, I joined Landcare Broken Hill and, when on holiday last winter, I volunteered to work on the Imperial Lake Landcare site. I spent three Saturday mornings with local volunteers creating a nature reserve with walks and picnic facilities near an old mine site on the outskirts of town. The plan is to regenerate the site and to build an environmental education centre.

Lovely *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*, River Red Gums, surround the lake which has the rare Broad-shelled Turtles, *Chelodina expansa*, in it. Black Swans were present and mellow calls of the Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater could be heard which added to the ambience of western red earth country. Oldman Saltbush, *Atriplex nummularia*, abounded with its grey-green leaves and lovely purple flowering *Solanum ellipticum* was scattered over the red earth.

Volunteers were busy installing drip water hosing and clearing walking tracks. My bushcare job was weeding something new to me, called Matchheads Weed which was destined to be composted under black plastic in the hot western sun to kill the seed. I also planted my first Mulga Tree, *Acacia aneura*. This was an historic

moment.

A "Trees for Travellers" project is underway, for visitors to plant trees at Imperial Lakes to offset their holiday vehicle carbon emissions as well as helping the local environment. <https://www.facebook.com/LandcareBrokenHill/>

Getting to know the local community, being inspired by their enthusiasm and caring for the local ecology all added up to a splendid holiday, plus birding at Menindee Lakes and watching the sunset over Broken Hill. Next time you go out west, join the local landcare volunteers and give them a hand. It is a wonderful way to make friends.



Mulga planting at Imperial Lake



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.

Dec 11 **Lyrebird Dell, Pool of Siloam, Golf Link Lookout and surrounds.** Gr2/4km. Kathy 0422 209 812.

Dec 18 **Wentworth Falls Lake circuit and Christmas brunch.** Gr2/ 3.5km. Plate to share. Wayne 0429 021 296

Dec 25 / Jan 1 / Jan 8 **No scheduled walk.**

Jan 15 **Empire Pass Lawson** 7km. Lyn Bevington 0432 352 850.

Jan 22 **Weeping Rock circuit Wentworth Falls 1.6km.** Melanie 0431 214 687.

Jan 29 **No scheduled walk.**

Feb 5 **Hat Hill to Bald Head and return** approx 6 km. Car pool. Barbara 0428 962 460 (leave message)

Feb 12 **Bells Line of Rd to Pierces Pass to Grose River and return** 5km. Wayne 0429 021 296

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)

Dec 12, Dec 19, Dec 26 Jan 2 No Programmed walks.

Jan 9 **Pool of Siloam/Golf Course L.O/Lyrebird Dell/Gordon Falls L.O** G2-3/6K, Sharon 0404622515.

Jan 16 **Gladstone L.O/Moya Point** G1/3K, Doug 0455850753.

Jan 23 **Blue Mts Heritage Centre/Fairfax Track/Station** G1/7.5K, Roger 0449902774.

Jan 30 **Walls Ledge Loop/Centennial Glen/Cliff Top Circuit** G1-2/3K, Rob 0429708393.

Feb 6 **Northmead/Darling Mills/Lake Parramatta/North Parramatta** G2-3/9K, Doug 0455850753.

Tuesday (continued)

Feb 13 **Fairy Bower/Cox's Cave/Mt Piddington** G2-3/6K, Sharon 0404622515.

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

Dec 14 **Christmas Party at Wilson Park, Lawson opp swimming pool.** Beverley 4757 2076. Gr1

Jan 4 **Hyde Park, with a chance to swim in River Lett.**

Tracy 0434 362 611. Gr 2

Jan 11 **South Lawson Waterfalls.** Libby 4759 2969. Gr2

Jan 18 **Asgard Swamp, Mt Vic.** Angela 0427 133 327. Gr2

Jan 25 **Den Fenella, Wentworth Falls.** Beverley 4757 2076. Gr2.2

Feb 1 **Dargan Dam.** Maurice 0402 402 783. Gr2.

Feb 8 **Deidre's Walk, Bullaburra.** Beverley 4757 2076. Gr2

Feb 15 **Berghoffers Pass, Mt Vic.** Maurice 0402 402 783. Gr2.

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

Dec 9 **Mt Stead Ridge & Lockley Ridge.** Harold 0409010737, Gr3/4, 9km. Map Katoomba.

Dec 16 **Christmas Lunch.** Alice 0425738766, Meet Lawson Pub "The Henry" 11.30am

Dec 23, through to Feb 24 **Summer Program:** Walkers to meet at Wentworth Falls Stockland Car Park at 8.00am and select a walk and leader on the day.

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

A cuckoo in the nest?

-- Christine Davies

I opened the door and was about to walk out onto the deck. There was a piercing scream and what appeared to be a large black bird rocketed past at head height with some smaller shapes close behind it. It happened too fast and too close for me to focus. I found them perched in the Eucalypt behind the house – a Pied Currawong and the resident Red Wattlebirds. The currawong flew off, with one of the wattlebirds in close pursuit.

The Red Wattlebirds have a nest nearby and have been going backward and forward from dawn to dusk collecting food for their hungry chicks. They return to the nest with their beaks overflowing with a smorgasbord of little creatures which only a sharp eyed bird could find. They sometimes stop work for a sip of nectar from the Callistemon, but chick-food gathering seems to be a full time job. I suspected a cuckoo in the nest.

From my observations, Red Wattlebirds attempt to raise two broods a year. This was their second brood, the first being in August/September, before the Koel arrived.

In late Spring 2022, the fledgling Koel introduced itself by sprawling on the deck when it tried to land.

The Eastern Koel is a member of the cuckoo family which migrates from south-east Asia to breed. The Koel arrives in Blackheath at the beginning of October. A single egg is laid in the host's nest and, once hatched, the chick forces the other eggs and hatchlings out of the nest. Raising the Koel chick is hard work as the chick will grow to nearly twice the size of its foster parents.

A day after the incident with the currawong, the chicks left the nest - three young Red Wattlebirds! They are happily flying around the garden. I don't hear them calling for food. They have their parents beside them to help them learn the things a Red Wattlebird has to know in order to survive.

It was very different with last year's fledgling Koel who was preoccupied only with demanding more food. The adult koel's lifestyle is very different to that of a Red Wattlebird so it would not learn survival skills from its foster parents. How does it learn to be a koel - how to find food, when to migrate, where to go, how to get there?

O

OLD

The **ROCKS** in these parks were formed over millions of years and sometimes contain fossils of plants and animals.



Some of the rocks in the Blue Mountains were formed from lava flowing from ancient **VOLCANOES**.

The **WOLLEMI PINE** is one of the oldest and rarest trees in the world. These trees belong to a family that is 200 million years old.



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Collect the pages as they appear in Hut News.

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