



Lower Blue Mountains Conservation Society

P.O. Box 119 Springwood 2777

NEWSLETTER MAY 1986

CONTACTS George Threlfo 39 5125
Aleen Hanley 39 4079
Besse Bramsen 51 2787

OUR BUSHFIRE POLICY

1. Management plans (including a fire hazard and suppression plan) should be prepared for all bushland areas. These plans should be accessible to the public.
2. Annual fire hazard and suppression plans (as proposed by Blue Mountains Bushfire Control to Blue Mountains City Council) should seek public comment by exhibition in the local media and council offices.
3. Large conservation reserves, especially wilderness areas, should not be subjected to broad area intentional burning.
4. Where a fire risk is clearly identified to life and property and all other avenues of hazard reduction have been exhausted, limited burning may be appropriate at the boundary of urban settlement.
5. Land management, fire prevention and suppression authorities should be adequately trained to recognise the ecological significance of the change of fire regime consequent upon repeated prescribed burning.
6. The construction of fire trails through large conservation reserves should be prevented.
7. Where a real hazard exists in a small urban reserve, fuel levels should be reduced by using selective hand clearing, and ensuring that hazard is mitigated on adjoining developed properties.
8. Areas of severe bushfire hazard should be identified and zoned under regional and local planning instruments with the effect of excluding or restricting development. Other disincentives should be incorporated in insurance and rating policies.
9. Greater controls should be exercised over urban planning design and house construction materials used in fire prone areas.
10. Research programs should continue and should include more emphasis being placed on the ecological responses of native plants and animals to fire; the ecological behaviour of identical or similar species in non fire-prone areas; and the effects on fuel load and flammability of withholding fire from different communities for significant periods.
11. Greater emphasis should be placed on the apprehension and prosecution of persons illegally lighting fires. This should include a substantial increase in the minimum fine.

12. N.S.W. legislation should be amended to ensure that a much greater recognition is given to the nature conservation, recreation and aesthetic values of bushland by land management and fire protection and suppression authorities.

13. Education and awareness programs should be strengthened and increased to reduce the incidence of deliberately lit fires. These programs should also aim to encourage people to be responsible for fire hazard reduction on their own properties.

THE YELLOW TAILED BLACK COCKATOO SURVEY

- an update provided by Molly Edmonds

The response to the paragraph in the 9th April Gazette was quite surprising, twenty seven 'phone calls to date in answer to the request for sightings, mainly to say the birds were feeding in the pine trees, or had flown over, from Lapstone to Mt. Victoria, including every district except Valley Heights. A very satisfactory coverage indeed. They appear to be much admired birds.

Though not exactly endangered in the short term, but because they are such large birds with very long tails they need roomy hollows to nest in, and as we are so busily destroying the big old forest trees their habitat is being drastically reduced all the time, so their long term survival could well be in danger, and now is the time to do something about it.

As they are such long lived birds it is difficult to judge in the large flocks just how many may still be of breeding age, so there could well be a hidden decline, especially as flocks travelling from one feeding ground to another tend to drop off a few or pick up a few. So only over a long and comprehensive survey can the true picture emerge.

A further report on the crested pigeons from what I can gather so far, they seem to have come to the lower Mountains about three or four years ago. There is another little flock breeding well down at Glenbrook.

THE GORDON BAT COLONY

- from an article by Peggy Aird (member of the Australian Museum Society)

In the Sydney northern suburb of Gordon there lies a narrow bush reserve which is the breeding area of the Grey Headed Flying Fox (*Pteropus poliocephalus*). These flying foxes or fruit bats use the tall black butt eucalypts for their roost. This colony is the last survivor of four known areas in Sydney. The native vegetation is being destroyed by weeds and nutrient-rich drainage from the surrounding urban area. The spread of suburbia and the clearing of native forests for agriculture has destroyed food trees and useable breeding campsites.

From information gauged by bat watchers the colony summer population peaks at between 19000 and 24000. A drop in animal numbers is rapid between April and August because of the winter migration. Breeding female numbers seem to remain fairly constant. Each female produces a single young in spring, but mortality in the first months is high. At birth the baby bat's eyes are open and the coat is well furred except on the belly. Typical weight is 80 grams and the forearm measures about 60mm. The young bat is unable to control its body temperature and relies for warmth on the mother who wraps her wings around the baby. Milk is sucked from nipples, one on each side of the body below the armpits.

For the first few weeks, the young bat holds on to its mother whilst in flight in search for food. This can be fatal for some young who fall off in flight. Usually when the baby bat becomes too heavy the mother generally leaves it hanging in the tree in the colony. At night juveniles are hung together for warmth and just before dawn the adults return to unite with their young using sound and smell for identification.

Breeding fruit bats occupy the prime sites in the colony, whilst juveniles and unattended males form groups at the edge. Non-breeding bats camp in other valleys for days at a time.

Fruit bat is not the most appropriate title because nectar, especially pollen, is essential to its diet. Pollen provides protein. Native trees such as Eucalypts, Angophoras, Turpentine and Lilly Pilly provide an abundant and wide-spread source of food. The bats also feed on the fruit of native figs and rainforest trees and in return provide an important service pollinating tree blossoms and spreading seeds.

From the site at Gordon the flying foxes or fruit bats fly out as soon as it gets dark to feed all over Sydney. They have been seen as far west as the Blue Mountains, south to Sutherland and north across the Hawkesbury River. They can fly 50 km to a food source and return before dawn. Their well developed sense of smell and good eyesight enables them to locate flowering trees and also a form of communication with each other, bat language high pitched sounds, which alerts other members of the colony to a food source.

Bats are sociable animals. Communication is necessary between mothers and offspring and mates. Bats chat and squabble constantly. When disturbed they cry a warning. So when you visit a bat colony you must be quiet.

Fullgrown bats weigh about a kilogram and a fullgrown male can weigh up to 1.5kg. Their wings span about a metre. The skin on the wings is soft and elastic (looks and feels like a heavy duty stretched plastic) and blackish in colour. The elongated finger bones which support the wings helps to shape the wings in flight. The soft fur of the grey headed fruit bat is a mixture of greys except for a rusty collar. Some large adult males have white heads.

The bats use the thumb claw, which is separate from their wing, to climb in the trees and is also used to pull closer branches of blossom within easy reach. The hind feet have 5 toes, each with a sharp half circle shaped claw. These animals cannot afford to lose their 'grip' because if they fall to the ground they are vulnerable to predators such as goannas, pythons and dogs. Also they are at a disadvantage on the ground. Bats can only row themselves along with their wings, pushing with their hind legs which are only adapted for hanging.

Bats hang sideways for body functions, to urinate, etc. Drinking is accomplished on the wing either by scooping mouthfuls of water or dipping their body into the water and flying to a tree to lick their fur. Between sleeps during the day bats personally groom themselves frequently. The few parasites found on bats are specific to them and are not a health hazard to humans. The bats exude an odour from the scapula gland on the bat's shoulders. The scent is used for recognition and marking territory. It is always more noticeable in the early mornings and on wet days.

The old adage 'blind as a bat' is also wrong. Bats are not blind. In fact, the bats eyes are an interesting feature of each different species, ranging in size from tiny beads to large. The tongue is also an interesting feature with a 'frilly' edge needed for feeding and pollinating.

Unfortunately, fruit bats raid (on occasions when there is a food shortage) fruit orchards. This practice has given them a bad name. They are really only interested in over ripe fruit. The lack of awareness by people is that:

1. the bats prime food source is the blossom of native trees, and
2. these little animals are important forest pollinators.

If a captive bat is fed solely on soft fruit its health will rapidly deteriorate because of lack of protein.

DARK'S COMMON

A CEP grant of \$35,000 was received recently to employ six long term unemployed and a supervisor over 13 weeks.

All necessary equipment and materials have been obtained and the work is progressing well due to the interest and ability of the people involved and the fine weather recently.

By the end of the work, fences, gates and barriers will be erected, most weeds and rubbish removed, unnecessary tracks and bare areas revegetated, large and small signs installed, and stairways put in place.

The workers will receive some tuition on the environment.

George is researching the history of the area.

BUSHFIRES AND HAZARD REDUCTIONS

Besse Bramsen and Margaret Esson are to be congratulated on their recent successful discussions with both the BMCC Fire Officer and Faulconbridge/Springwood controllers. This has resulted in the fire officers being prepared to note various areas of environmental concern in the Faulconbridge area before control burns are considered. We hope the process continues with other brigades in the lower Mountains.

Bob Chapman and George attended a meeting at Mick and Jill Dark's recently to discuss with the Upper Mountains Conservation Society a grant for the research on the effects of fire on special areas of the upper Mountains.

MUOGAMURRA RESERVE

George was part of a Dunheved High School aboriginal group which recently spent three days in the Muogamurra Reserve. The reserve covers a large expanse of Hawkesbury sandstone land west of the Sydney/Newcastle Tollway near Cowan and the Hawkesbury River.

The teacher in charge initiated these very interested students into the ways of the original inhabitants. This included identifying various rock carvings, looking for middens near the river and identifying and eating fruits from the surrounding plants.

A woman, originally from Babinda, northern Queensland, walked with the students on the second day and sang and danced with them around the campfire that night. The students, who had had no previous contact with such activities, were very impressed.

EASTERN ESCARPMENT

Further changes to the natural values of this area are constantly being effected e.g. by the F4 extension up to Lapstone.

Three areas on the lower Escarpment in Penrith City are cause for concern as developments have been proposed. The areas are south of Leonay, near Old Bathurst Road, and Below Mt Riverview.

We are looking at BMCC and PCC policies on protection of the escarpment.

Mr Mulock has personally offered his assistance in protecting the Escarpment permanently.

The Society's suggestion to BMCC to set up a 530A Committee for the reserves on the Escarpment has been taken up. BMCC and Bob Debus are attempting to have unreserved Crown Lands added to BMCC reserves.

WOODCHIPPING

Besse attended the recent Woodchip Seminar in Sydney which just preceded the release of the industry EIS.

LBMCS will hold a Woodchip Publicity night on the 8th August. Can you help us organise this night? Contact George on 39 5125.

FAIRLIGHT GORGE

Ted Foster and our Society have kept pressure on various state politicians and departments to have speedboats removed from the gorge.

Some progress is in sight. Recently the Maritime Services Board fined 20 drivers of boats passing through the narrows at Glenbrook Creek for various boating infringements.

Further discussions with the MSB and other relevant groups are expected in the near future.

PAGODA LANDS - THE GARDENS OF STONE PROPOSAL

In recent letters to our Society both Mr Wran and Mr Carr rejected the proposal to extend Wollemi National Park to include this area.

However, members of the Colong Committee have recently met with colliery interests on site; and an identification of the most vital surface structures is being done. Some compromises on both sides may result and lead to the eventual protection of the area.

PENRITH LAKES SCHEME

LBMCS has completed a short submission on the latest Regional Environmental Plan for this scheme. Some of our queries and objections relate to the water supply, proposals for housing, use of the lakes, groundwater, and river bank replacement. We will be asking for a study of the use of high quality treated effluent waters from Blue Mountains sewerage plants to supply the lakes.

BLUE MOUNTAINS SEWERAGE

The Blue Mountains Environment Council ran a successful forum on sewerage in March to canvas the issue of upgrading Blue Mountains treatment systems.

The report by the MWS&DB to the SPCC has been completed and apparently has a major recommendation that sewerage be exported from the Mountains. If this can be financed a major increase in the quality of local streams can be expected.

BICENTENNIAL FUNDS

Apparently, \$60,000 of the local \$190,000 bicentennial funds will be environmental projects. Some of this has been earmarked for a tree planting campaign and the reconstruction of the UBMCS Hut.

A further \$60,000 is available to any general individuals or groups for projects. Have you any bright ideas for obtaining small or large grants for any worthwhile environmental project?

Think quickly and have the submission ready by 5th July, the next meeting of the re-constituted Bicentennial Committee.

LBMCS MEETINGS

- 13 June - ' Travels in Australia's Arid Inland '. Talk and slides by Shirley McDonald.
- 11 July - ' The Use and Abuse of Hazardous Chemicals on the Blue Mountains'. A panel discussion with Dr. Kate Short of TEC Toxic Chemicals Committee as the Keynote Speaker.
- 8 August - ' Woodchips in South-East Australia '.
- 12 September - ' Wilderness Areas in N. S. W. '
- 10 October - Annual General Meeting
- 14 November - Aspects of Fire Research on the Australian Bush
- 12 December - Birds Nests.

.....