

### **3.2. Bushcare Community Programs update 2020**

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**ATTACHMENTS:** Nil

Nil.

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

Council's Bushland Management Team coordinates and delivers a range of community engagement and education programs aimed at increasing community awareness of urban ecology and the importance of natural area conservation.

These programs focus on volunteer participation (i.e. Bushcare; Adopt-a-Plot; Wildlife Watch) and resident engagement (i.e. Native Havens; Bushcare Workshops, Activities and Events).

From March 2020 onward, the Coronavirus pandemic affected the way in which these programs were delivered to the community. Unlike a number of other metropolitan Councils, North Sydney suspended volunteer involvement in Bushcare programs only during the "lockdown" period from the around the 27<sup>th</sup> of March until the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2020. As soon as NSW Government restrictions allowed, the Bushland Team sought to utilise every available resource and apply innovative practical operational procedures to enable all possible volunteering and community engagement activities to recommence safely.

The following report details the activities and achievements within each of these programs during 2020, as well as a snapshot of current or planned initiatives for the 2021 calendar year.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Nil.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- 1. THAT** the Bushcare community programs update 2020 report be received.

## **LINK TO COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN**

The relationship with the Community Strategic Plan is as follows:

### 1. Our Living Environment

1.1 Protected and enhanced natural environment and biodiversity

### 4. Our Social Vitality

4.3 North Sydney supports lifelong learning

## **BACKGROUND**

In the context of North Sydney Council, “Bushcare” can be considered a catch-all term that encapsulates many of our community education and engagement activities that focus on biodiversity conservation. Bushcare incorporates 12x active Bushcare groups working across 16x bushland sites; the Bushcare Community Nursery and an annual program of workshops, events and activities provided for the general community, pre-school to primary school aged children and for volunteers. The Bushland Team also delivers other, related programs including Adopt-a-Plot; Native Havens and Wildlife Watch.

## **CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS**

Community engagement is not required.

## **DETAIL**

### **Bushcare Volunteer Program in Review**

The Bushcare volunteer program was suspended during “COVID lock-down”, from mid-March through to mid-May 2020 in order to ensure the safety of staff and volunteers. As a result of this decision, the Bushland Operations Team and Adopt-a-Plot Supervisor added maintenance of the Bushcare sites to their already busy workloads.

The Bushland Team employed innovative, online avenues for keeping in contact with our Bushcare volunteers during lockdown. This included circulating short video blogs made by individual Bushcare Supervisors while they worked on their respective Bushcare sites, keeping a presence on our social media platforms and preparing/sharing a weekly “Bushcare Learning” (or training blog) with our volunteers. The blog profiled different technical skills used in the field of bush regeneration, as well as introducing and explaining the science behind bushland rehabilitation concepts and strategies. These training initiatives received consistent positive feedback from volunteers and generated good discussion among others.

Several volunteers suggested these learnings could be utilised as a basis for creating training videos, a need previously identified as it is a challenge for new volunteers to complete their compulsory face-to-face Bushcare Essentials training within the first six months of joining the

program. Two training video modules are now complete, covering Work Health Safety and weed control techniques. Weed identification and some theory modules will be developed during the next financial year. The training videos are currently being integrated with Council's E-learning platform, "Litmus", as the software will enable the Bushland Team to verify volunteers have completed introductory Bushcare training and understood the content. Existing volunteers will also be asked complete the training as a refresher.

The second major project commenced during 2020 was the revision of Council's Bushcare Volunteer Program Guidelines. It has been over a decade since the Bushcare Guidelines were last reviewed, hence the need for an update that reflects changes in legislation, as well as currently adopted policies and procedures that have been amended over time. A supplementary booklet outlining weed control technique and plant identification will be developed to accompany the Guidelines, providing a valuable resource for new and existing volunteers alike.

Volunteer participation in the Bushcare program was reinstated in mid-May with the adoption of mandatory social distancing and hygiene measures. Volunteers were reminded by email and in person, to refrain from attending if they felt unwell and/or suffered symptoms consistent with Covid-19. At Bushcare, volunteers and staff were asked to social distance, that is; maintain a distance of 1.5m with persons outside of their home. Morning tea, an important social aspect of Bushcare that involves the sharing of food/tea/coffee, was suspended until further notice. Furthermore, hygiene practices such as washing hands and using the supplied hand sanitiser are encouraged. All tools and shared equipment were required to be sterilised using a 70% Methylated Spirits solution at the end of each meeting. To date, there have been no cases of Covid-19 at Bushcare.

Regrettably, the all-of-Bushcare Volunteer Christmas party was cancelled in 2020 and replaced with individual Bushcare group parties, which were celebrated at local cafes/venues where social distancing and safe food service could be assured. Whilst most volunteers lamented the cancelled all-in Christmas party, the reasons were well understood, and the alternative individual group parties were greatly appreciated.

### **Changes to Bushcare Groups**

The Bushland Team instigated changes at several Bushcare sites to enhance reserve-level bushland rehabilitation outcomes, as well as accommodate feedback from volunteers seeking a greater variety of work, such as secondary removal of wood weeds (i.e. plants other than herbs and grasses) found mostly in adjoining sites now dominated by regenerating native plants and where volunteer participation has been increasing.

Smoothey Park Bushcare Group was reduced to one meeting per month due to a decline in volunteers and reduced weed presence (due to successful site management over the past 25+ years). This decision enabled a second Bushcare site to be created in Badangi Reserve, at Bridge End, along the residential property boundary. The second, mid-week Bushcare Group that work in Primrose Park also benefited from a change in site boundaries, with a new area designated near the walking track entrance adjoining #5 Folly Point. This is a resilient site with healthy canopy cover, diverse understory and unstable (i.e. weedy) edges adjoining the private property interface. Another mid-week Bushcare site was established at Walumetta Reserve in Waverton, to accommodate strong interest from new volunteers wishing to join the already well-attended Balls Head group in Waverton.

There has been a proportionally large increase in the number of volunteer applications for Bushcare since the pandemic began, presumably due to more residents working from home or electing to take early retirement. Bushcare Officers from other Greater Sydney Local Government Areas reported similar observations at a recent Volunteer Convenor Network (VCN) meeting.

### **Bushcare Volunteer Contributions**

There was a ~15% decrease in volunteer hours during 2020, when compared to 2019, however this was to be expected with the 8-week participation hiatus due to COVID lockdown. Volunteer participation in the Bushcare program has continued trending upward by ~9% from 2018 to 2020. The 2021 figures only represent February and March, and due to wet weather are not yet a true reflection of volunteer participation. There are currently 130 active Bushcare volunteers working with Council, 25% of whom have been participating for up to two years and a further 25% for twenty years (or greater). Overall, the length of service and depth of volunteer experience is evenly distributed. Below is the annual breakdown of hours and volunteer numbers:

**2018** Total Voluntary Contribution: 1739 hr 10 min  
Total Number of Volunteers: 105 Volunteers

**2019** Total Voluntary Contribution: 2045 hr 20 min  
Total Number of Volunteers: 115 Volunteers

**2020** Total Voluntary Contribution: 1760 hr 15 min  
Total Number of Volunteers: 126 Volunteers

**2021** Total Voluntary Contribution: 422 hr 50 min  
Total Number of Volunteers: 83 Volunteers (*note this figure only represents volunteers that have attended a work session up to the end of March 2021 and does not account for several rain-cancelled work sessions*)

### Voluntary Service by percentile

0 to 1 years = 9 or 7%  
0 to 2 years = 31 or 24 %  
0 to 4 years = 44 or 34%  
5 to 9 years = 25 or 19%  
10 to 19 years = 30 or 23%  
20 to 28 years = 31 or 24%

Total number of active Bushcare volunteers, as at April 2020 = 130

### **Bushcare Events Calendar**

Each year, the Bushland Team provides a range of environmental education activities and events on behalf of Council, to engage our community and encourage their interest in

conserving our bushland environs. Examples include guided bush walks, community nursery tours, Bushcare volunteer exchanges and community planting events.

These Bushcare activities have progressively increased over the past decade, unintentionally placing a strain on the Bushland Team's time and resources. Therefore, a reduction in the overall number of activities offered was necessary to allow for a more balanced and sustainable approach to delivering the Bushcare workshops and events program. This also enabled the Bushland Team to refocus our attention on improving the provision of Bushcare volunteer training and support.

In 2019, the Bushland Team planned 69 activities, this decreased to 43 in 2020, however just 12 of these were actually delivered due to the disruption caused by Covid-19. Initially, lockdown restrictions precluded activities from going ahead, followed by the subsequent social distancing measures which resulted in some events being non-viable. This year, we plan to provide 31 activities adhering to COVID-safe practices, with consideration for social distancing restrictions of the relevant venues and transport requirements. To-date, seven of these activities have been delivered to the North Sydney community.

In 2020, Bushcare activities were delivered as planned, up to mid-March, before being suspended through to August with the exception of a Family Bush Walk during the June/July school holidays. The Bushland Team mostly provided bush walks in local reserves, a popular activity during this time. School holiday activities were cancelled for a variety of reasons, the Mini Beast Muster required shared equipment and we couldn't ensure social distancing for the Spotlight Walk in the evening. Bushcare kayaking was cancelled as it was too labour intensive for voluntary provider Jeff Cottrell to sterilise equipment after use. However, the children's kayak activities provided by local business SydneybyKayak were able to go ahead.

National Tree Day, our largest annual community engagement event went ahead, as planned on 2 August at the Coal Loader Parklands. Unlike previous tree day events, time slots were mandated and volunteers were social distanced at the planting site. Unfortunately, Planet Ark made the decision to cancel National Tree Day as a risk mitigation strategy. This resulted in all our registrations being lost and participants being told by Planet Ark that the event was not going ahead. However, with preparations well under way and a COVID-safe approach in-place, the Bushland Team pushed ahead with the activity. Despite this being our smallest ever Tree Day, we managed to get 101 native plants in the ground with the aid of five enthusiastic participants and two Bushland staff.

A most interesting public engagement trend emerged during the Pandemic through the development and delivery of online educational content. The Bushland Team provided our first webinar to the community, a Bandicoot Talk on 13 August 2020. The webinar was very successful, with 91 people in "virtual" attendance. The presentation by Prof. Peter Banks and Associate Prof. Catherine Price of Sydney University, as well as volunteers from Sydney Wildlife, was recorded and can now be used as a "living" educational resource. Owing to the success of this activity and the unpredictability of the pandemic, a further three webinars have been planned for 2021. The first was a Rakali (native Water Rat) talk provided on 18 March with 50 people in attendance. The second will be a Native Bee Talk with Apiarist Gavin Smith that is planned for 20 April and the third is a Dark Skies for Wildlife Conservation talk to be provided by the Dark Skies Alliance on 12 August.

## Landcare Collaborations

On Thursday 31 October 2020, the Bushland Team provided our first Landcare Australia Corporate Environmental Volunteer (CEV) day at Balls Head Reserve for Amgen Australia. The Bushland Team entered a host agreement for the CEV program to provide an avenue for corporate sponsorship to Landcare Australia, with the added benefit of being able to pass on the activity fee (paid by the corporate group) to our longstanding Landcare partners Boorowa Community Landcare Group.

Understandably, our annual trip tree planting weekend to Boorowa, NSW was cancelled for the first time in twenty years due to the pandemic, as was Harbour2Hunter, a *Building Bridges to Boorowa-type* activity with a new Landcare group at [Luskintyre](#) in the Hunter Valley. This initiative was in response to a request for help by Hunter Regional Landcare Network as a means to kick-start their environmental restoration project and demonstrate to other potential partners the value of urban/rural volunteer programs.

## Bushfire Recovery

Following the devastating 2019/20 bushfires, which affected much of NSW (outside of Sydney), attention turned to what we could do, both as individuals and as North Sydney Bushcare, to assist affected communities. As a first step, the Bushland Team promoted bushfire recovery volunteer opportunities and services in the Bushcare Newsletter, including The Centre for Volunteering website and the National Bushfire Recovery Agency.

The Bushland Team also registered an offer of assistance with the NSW Office of Local Government to provide a *Building Bridges to Boorowa - style* volunteer activity in which Council would transport, supervise and support up to 40 North Sydney volunteers to assist with appropriate recovery activities, such as replanting bushland buffer edges, target weed control, fencing and erosion control, habitat augmentation and other bush regeneration actions. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented many of these activities from actually taking place.

Eventually, the Bushland Team were able to undertake a Bushfire Recovery Project in partnership with the Australian Association of Bush Regenerators and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. The project involved helping to control a 1,000 ha infestation of Scotch Broom (*Cytisus scoparius subsp. scoparius*), 95% of which was impacted by fire in the World Heritage-listed Barrington Tops National Park. Joined by members of the NSC Tree Management Team, the work required chainsaw accredited workers that could safely use these power tools within a remote-access environment. In part, the Bushland Team selected this project with the intention of scoping its suitability for our Bushcare volunteers and because it has a further 4-years of funding that allows follow-up weed control to occur.

On Wednesday 5 February, the Bushland Team along with representatives from Willoughby, Lane Cove, Ku-ring-gai and Hornsby Councils attended the Northern District Branch of Sydney Wildlife Rescue's monthly meeting. The Councils were invited by the Chair, Bev Young, so they could learn about opportunities to assist wildlife recovery projects in the post-bushfire phase. During the meeting, discussion turned to how Council could help in emergencies by potentially providing suitable venues as evacuation points to house animals in the event of a natural disaster. Other ideas included providing foliage for possums and other

wildlife and helping to build habitat nest boxes, something the Bushland Team has previously carried out in partnership with Willoughby Council.

Another activity suggested during this meeting was assistance for wildlife carers in fire affected areas. Andrew Scott – NSC Bushcare Officer volunteered to help with a wombat compound rebuild on Anne William’s Native Animal Rescue Group (NARG) property in Sassafras NSW, 50km south west of Nowra. This activity was facilitated by Sydney Wildlife Rescue volunteer Sonja Elwood, taking place on the weekend of 25 & 26 July 2020. North Sydney Council supported this activity by providing Andrew with the use of a pool vehicle.

### **Volunteer Workforce Planning**

At the recent biannual Bushcare Convenor meeting, the need for proactive recruitment was questioned by some attendees as a response to the significant increase in new volunteer applications received during 2020/21.

Over the past year, online volunteer applications increased to 53 – nearly double the number for 2019 (28). This trend of increased community interest in volunteering appears to be continuing, with 20 applications received to-date in 2021. The reason for this increase is thought to be reflective of more people working from home, travelling less and or taking early retirement.

Variation in group sizes – both between the different Bushcare Groups and within each group from meeting-to-meeting – was identified as a significant issue affecting the management of Bushcare sites and the facilitation of Bushcare meetings. It was suggested that core group sizes of 6-8 would be optimal and that this could potentially be achieved through group dynamic training that targets volunteer retention. Scoping new work sites to accommodate further volunteer interest was also discussed by the Bushland Team.

### **Bushcare Nursery**

2020 could be considered an unusual year, one of disruption and adjustment. Although plant propagation and general nursery business continued apace, the COVID-19 pandemic affected much of community life. The result was the cancellation or scaling down of most community and volunteer events, such as citizenship ceremonies, National Tree Day, Trees for Mum, Nursery Open Day and community markets/giveaways. National Tree Day used 1,794 plants in 2019, but only 124 plants in 2020. The Bushcare Community Nursery volunteer group was also put on hold from late March until mid-May.

The Native Havens program used fewer plants during 2020, reflecting the need for social distancing between participants and staff. Internal bushland and parks teams were mostly unaffected by COVID-19 protocols and their plant usage increased, largely due to favourable rainfall throughout the year (compared to 2019).

The total number of plants used in 2020 (8,603) is notably less than 2019 (11,209). Of these, 7,028 (82%) were grown in the Bushcare Nursery and 1,575 (18%) were supplied by other nurseries to be used in the Native Havens program and for community events and giveaways.

**Figure 1.** Comparative plant supply 2013-20

Year	Plants supplied by Bushcare Nursery
2013	9,513
2014	11,107
2015	9,170
2016	11,767
2017	12,382
2018	11,382
2019	11,209
2020	8,603
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>10,642</b>

**Figure 2.** Plant supply by Program, 2020

Council Program	Quantity
Native Havens	2,975
Bushland Rehabilitation	2,661
Other (i.e. Community Events)	969
Streets Alive/Parks & Gardens	955
Adopt-a-Plot	681
National Tree Day	124
NSC Tree Planting Team	17
Dead stock	167
Unaccounted stock (i.e. theft)	54
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>8,603</b>

Historically, we use delivered (D) plants for non-bushland destinations such as Native Havens (NH), Streets Alive (SA), Parks and Gardens and “Other” programs (community events, markets and giveaways). This ensures that our bushland provenance plants, which come from a finite local source, are available for bushland projects where we can achieve the best conservation outcomes. In 2020, the nursery grew 58% of plants used for Native Havens. These plants were not necessarily bushland stock - many of the popular species were propagated in bulk from non-provenance or nursery stock plants, representing a saving to council with fewer plants bought from external suppliers.

**Figure 2.** Percentage of plants grown at the Bushcare Community Nursery (NSC) or delivered from external nurseries (D) across all programs.

Origin	Quantity	Percentage
NSC Bushcare Nursery	7,028	82%
External Nurseries (D)	1,575	18%

**Figure 3.** Percentage of plants grown at the Bushcare Community Nursery (NSC) or delivered from external nurseries (D) for the Native Havens program.

Program	Origin	Quantity	Percentage
Native Havens	NSC Bushcare Nursery	1,720	58%
	External Nursery (D)	1,255	42%

Across both delivered and home-grown stock, 160 different native plant species were supplied by the nursery in 2020, which is comparable to previous years.

Excluding (D) delivered plants, the estimated value of outgoing NSC stock grown by volunteers and staff was over \$24,000. Most plants comprised tubestock (6,318 @ \$3.00) with the remainder being larger pots and trays. The value of plants has been estimated and averaged from prices charged at equivalent wholesale/retail suppliers. Most of these nurseries have a sliding scale of prices depending on species and quantity ordered, so the prices below can only

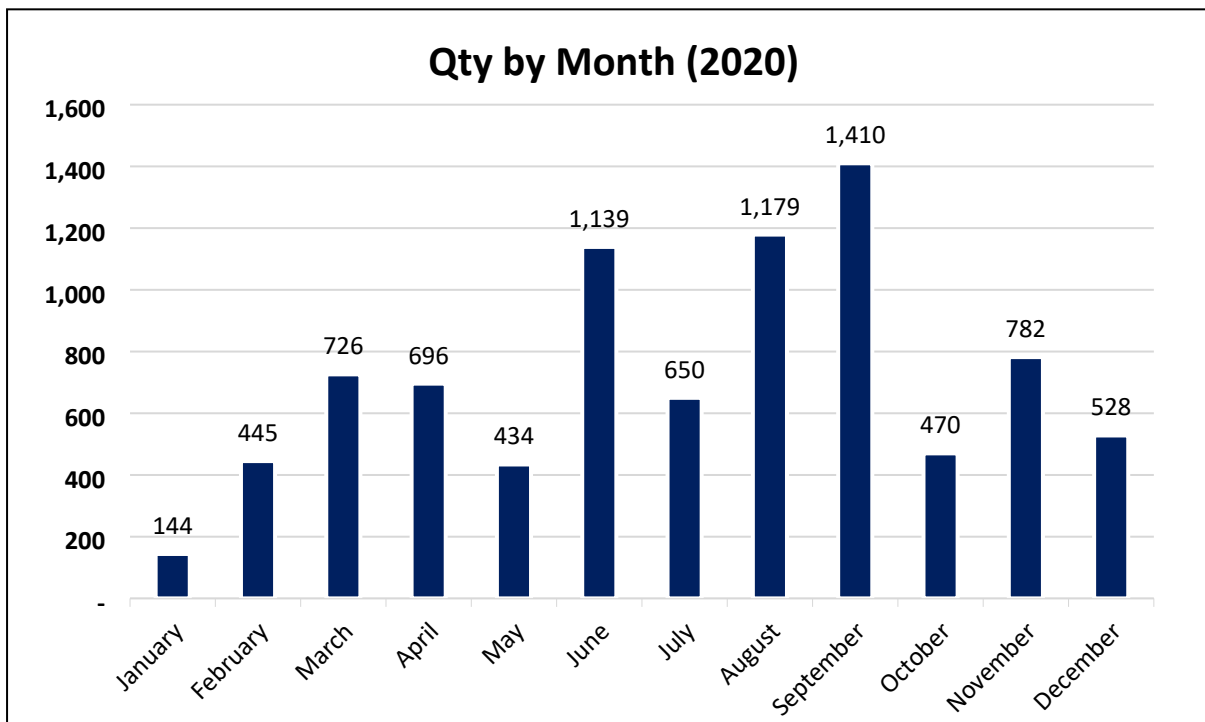


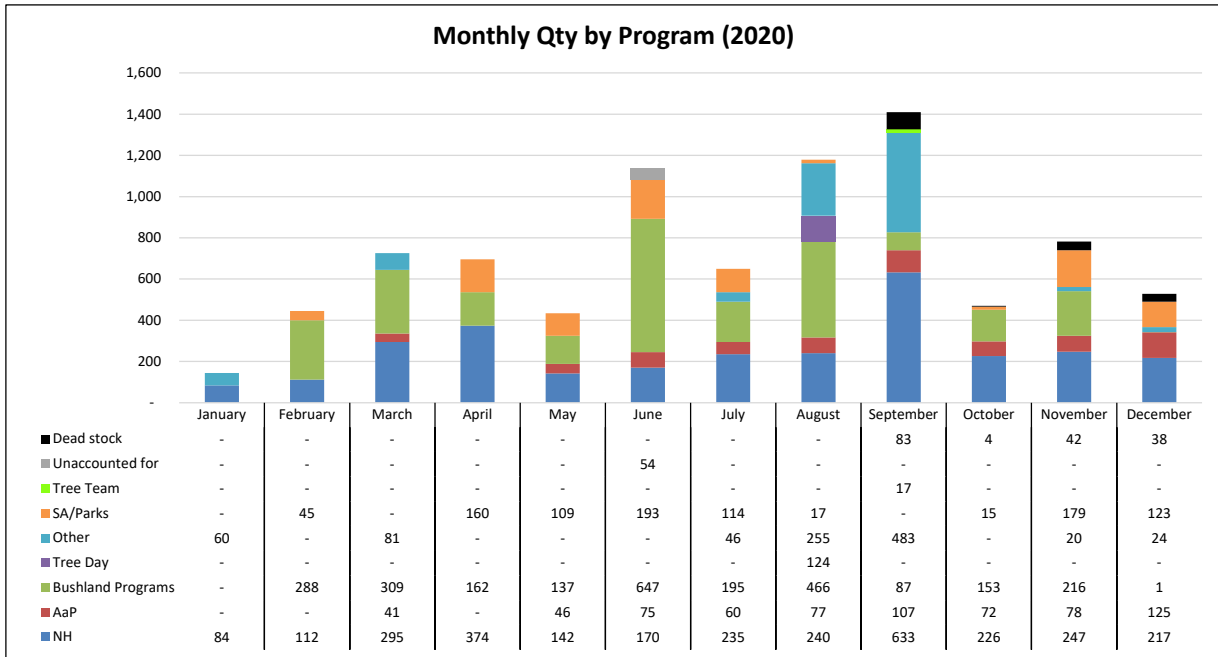
be considered an estimate. Trays and flats have not been assigned a value as there is no comparable commercial product.

**Figure 4.** Estimated value of plants grown in the Bushcare Community Nursery.

Size	Quantity	\$ Each	\$ Total
Forestry Tube	6,318	\$3-	\$18,954-
Mega Tube	42	\$8-	\$336-
Round Tube	474	\$6-	\$2,844-
4" Square Pot	103	\$6-	\$618-
6-8" Pot	68	\$15-	\$1,020-
Rocket Pot	12	\$25-	\$300-
Tray/Flat	11		
			<b>\$24,072</b>

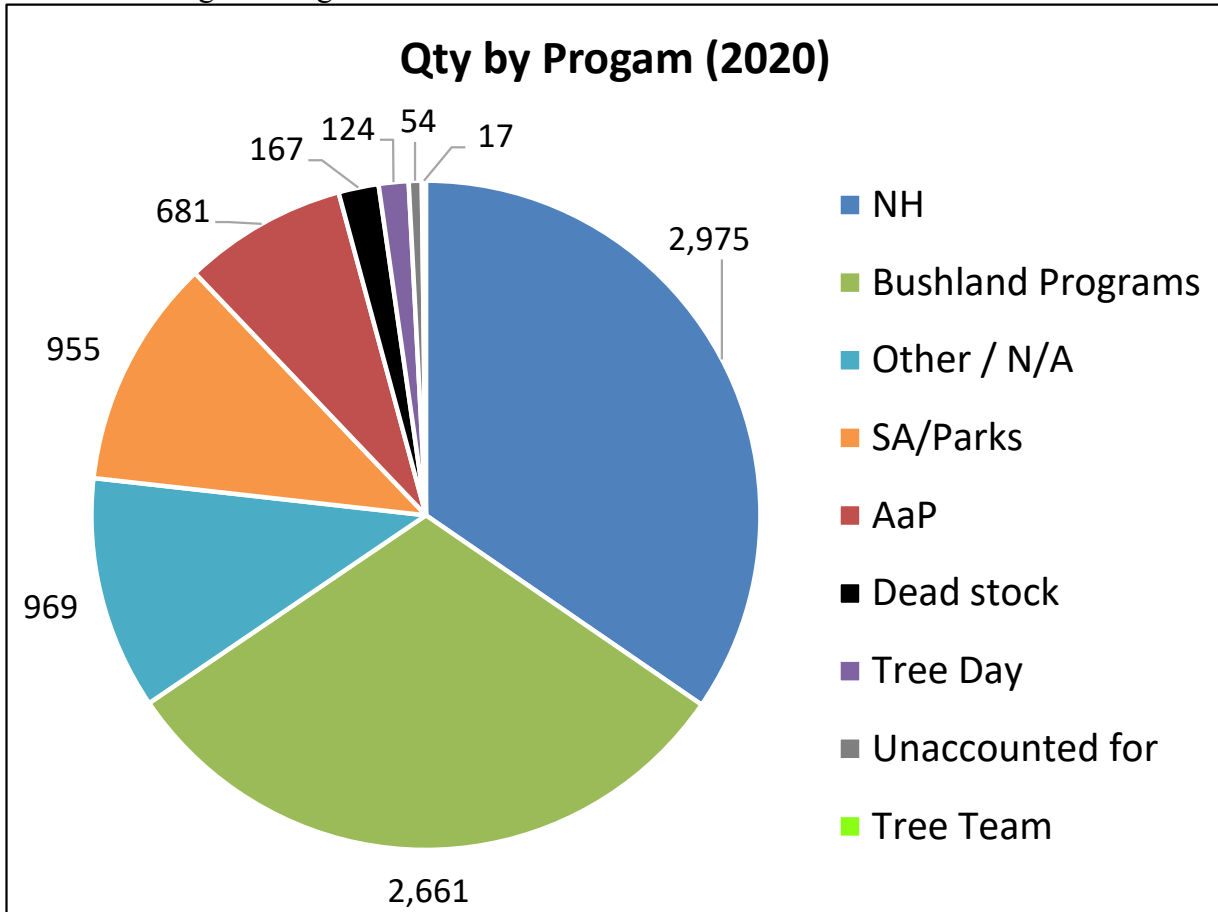
**Figure 5.** Stock usage per month and yearly total





**Figure 6.** (above) Monthly stock usage, by program.

**Figure 7.** (below) Annual Stock usage by program, showing Bushland Programs and Native Havens with highest usage.



“Other/NA” = e.g. community events, markets & giveaways

## **Bushcare Community Nursery Volunteers**

The Bushcare Community Nursery Group meets fortnightly on the second and fourth Thursday morning of the month, from February to November inclusive.

Due to the pandemic lockdown, there were no volunteer meetings in April and May 2020. Meetings resumed in June with COVID-safe protocols in place, including no shared morning tea, strict sanitising procedures and a rostering system whereby volunteers attended on alternate fortnights to keep numbers within manageable limits for physical distancing. Group numbers remained steady with around 8-9 regulars.

During the lockdown period, a short video was filmed by the Nursery Supervisor (a virtual nursery tour and update) and this was distributed to the volunteers as a way of keeping in touch until in-person meetings could resume.

To uphold COVID-safe protocols, the nursery volunteer Christmas party was held at the Coal Loader Café instead of the usual self-catered affair.

## **Bushcare Nursery Events and Achievements 2020**

The seed propagation workshop in March was fully booked with eight participants. However, on the day, only one participant showed up. This was likely due to heavy rain and the beginning of government discussions about a Covid-19 lockdown.

Nursery Open Day was held in September and was a great success despite COVID-safe protocols that restricted attendees to 20 at a time in booked time slots. Between them, the 75 attendees took away 321 plants comprising 12 specially selected native species.

In October, we ran the popular seed propagation workshop where participants learn techniques for propagating native plants from seed. The workshop was fully booked with 8x attendees participating.

The nursery continued to propagate and supply plants for all programs and events, but the unpredictable nature of 2020 meant that a lot of stock was produced and remained unused, to be held over into 2021.

A stock-take system was trialed in June 2020. When information from the Stock Out procurement sheets is entered into the database, it is automatically deducted from a master list, giving an accurate figure for the number, pot size and species of plants available in the nursery at any one time.

## **Plant thefts and security**

During the height of the COVID-19 lockdown, the Coal Loader and Balls Head became a focus for North Sydney residents seeking outdoor recreation and diversion. It was during this time that a noticeable number of plants, sometimes entire crates of tubestock, began disappearing from the nursery.

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Some of these disappearances could be traced to specific residents pursuing unauthorised “lockdown” projects (planting out road verges, public parks and the like) but many of the thefts remain a mystery. Some of the unexplained losses have been recorded in the stock records as “unaccounted for” (see figures 2, 8 and 9). Others have been registered under the program they were traced to, whether they were approved or not (e.g. Streets Alive). Many have not been recorded as they were taken before the new stock take system was implemented. Estimated losses would be around 200+plants, mostly tubestock but also larger pots.

To prevent the nursery becoming a public thoroughfare during the Covid-19 lockdown, and to discourage plant thefts, signage and yellow plastic chain barriers were placed across the nursery access points. These were removed in 2021 as Covid-19 restrictions were relaxed.

The nursery continues to collaborate with internal teams such as Parks and Gardens and Tree Management, fulfilling requests for native plants for specific projects (e.g. Green St, St Leonards Park, the bushfood garden at Civic Park etc). Advanced, local provenance trees were also supplied for use by the tree planting team and we continue to grow these for future streetscape and parkland planting projects.

### **Bushcare Nursery Events 2021**

It appears that 2021 will be a more “normal” year with greater community participation and events being offered. After record rainfall in summer and autumn, many plants will be leaving the nursery for use in bushland programs (Bushcare, contractors, corporate volunteers and by bushland staff). Planting events, such as Trees for Mum, National Tree Day, citizenship ceremonies and the nursery open day are all likely to proceed.

An irrigation upgrade is planned for the shade house, where there has been repeated leaks and failures with overhead sprinklers. Ideally, the hose will be replaced with rigid poly pipe, pending feasibility.

A volunteer excursion to Sutherland Shire community nursery is planned for May 2021, as well as two nursery workshops for 2021. A cuttings propagation workshop in March (cancelled due to extreme weather and torrential rain) and a seed propagation workshop in October.

Nursery volunteer numbers are stable and the group is at capacity with 9 regular participants. A new volunteer joined the group at the start of 2021.

### **Adopt-a-Plot**

Council’s Adopt-a-Plot Program grew out of an Environmental Trust grant project commencing in 2005. This unique approach to bushland rehabilitation and community involvement provides local residents with an option to either work one-on-one with a professional Council Bush Regenerator, typically in a “plot” of bushland near their home or, where time and family commitments prevent this option, co-funding the cost of Council’s Bush Regenerator working for 4 hours per month in “their plot”.

During 2020, the Adopt-a-Plot program continued to be delivered without interruption, albeit with a COVID-required hiatus of volunteer involvement from late March to late May. During this period, the Adopt-a-Plot Supervisor worked on all “plots” regardless of whether they were registered as participant (i.e. volunteer) plots or donation (i.e. co-funded) plots. Understandably, there was an overall reduction in volunteer hours during 2020, with only 420 hours contributed to bushland rehabilitation, as well as fewer plants (approx. 895) installed.

Over 2020, the Adopt-a-Plot program supported 26x participants working in 6x North Sydney Bushland Reserves. In 2021, an additional bushland reserve was included in the program, through the creation of a new plot in Waverton Park, at the bottom of John St. This degraded bushland edge will be transitioned over time from a mostly weed dominated foreshore slope to a structurally complex and species diverse bushland buffer, providing habitat for locally rare small bush birds including the Superb Fairy-wren and White-browed Scrubwren.

During 2020, changes to the Adopt a Plot donor fee structure were introduced, with the elimination of a sliding scale system that reduced fees over a successive 4 years period. This approach was originally initiated to encourage ongoing, as opposed to short-term, donor support.

The change introduced a simplified 2-tier fee structure that was more closely linked to the individual plot’s rehabilitation needs rather than a more arbitrary temporal factor. The new system comprises:

- Standard fee (equivalent to 50% of the cost to employ a Council Bush Regenerator to work for 4x hours per month on a plot)
- Maintenance fee (equivalent to 50% of the cost to employ a Council Bush Regenerator to work for 2x hours per month on a plot)

The introduction of a Maintenance fee provides recognition of where an AaP Donor site has been under continuous rehabilitation for several years, and the phase of ecological recovery has reached a low maintenance stage. The Maintenance Fee was made available to long-term donor plots that have substantially achieved the rehabilitation objectives stated in their contracts, including the establishment of dense, species diverse native vegetation cover with only sporadic weed incursions and subsequently, low maintenance requirements.

Donors were also given the option to continue contributing the full Standard fee, in which case the additional hours not required on their Plot would be utilised in neighbouring bushland areas where the work will benefit the donor plot and/or help to improve bushland condition at the wider reserve level.

All existing donors transferred to the new maintenance fee, with the exception of the new donor at Waverton Park. This change is a reflection of the progress of the program meeting its long-term objectives and the application of continuous improvement principals.

Following feedback from participants in the Adopt-a-Plot Program, the Bushland Team organised an online talk on communal and solitary native bees to be delivered by expert apiarist Gavin Smith in April 2021.

## **Native Havens**

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North Sydney Council's Native Havens Program has supported the establishment of over 613 native and mixed native gardens across the local government area since 2003. Native Havens has been recognised for its ongoing environmental stewardship, as well as the role this program plays in enhancing wildlife corridors that link our bushland remnants.

Council's Bushcare Nursery produces a average of 10,000+ local native plants per annum. Of these, approximately 2,975 native plants have been distributed over the past 12 months to local participants in the Native Havens program. Importantly, around 20% of these plantings are locally endemic tree species. These long-lived trees will contribute to canopy connectivity and help to replenish North Sydney's urban forest. During 2020, there were 63 new participants who joined the program and a further 93 existing participants who were provided with ongoing support.

### **Wildlife Watch**

During 2020, the Wildlife Watch Program evolved from employing a paper-based wildlife monitoring and reporting format to utilising a web and smart-device interface. This long-planned initiative was made possible by the Atlas of Living Australia's "Biocollect" smartphone app. being customised to record the same data as Council's paper-based monitoring forms, which are themselves based on database requirements of the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and the Environment's BioNet wildlife atlas.

The move to digital reporting has been embraced by all participants in the Wildlife Watch Program and has resulted in an increase in recorded observations. Two training workshops are planned for 2021 and will be delivered for new and existing participants in the Wildlife Watch Program.

During 2020, 713 wildlife observations were added to Council's Wildlife Watch database as well as the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) and BioNet. A further 2,546 wildlife observations were entered directly in to the ALA and subsequently, the NSW BioNet, using North Sydney's BioCollect smartphone app. There are currently 22 volunteer contributors in the Wildlife Watch Program.

For the fifth year running, North Sydney residents actively participated in Birdlife Australia's "Aussie Backyard Bird Count" as part of National Bird Week. The event was promoted by Council's Bushland Management Team as an extension of the Wildlife Watch program.

2020 saw a 30% increase in local participation, largely due to Council's promotion of the event, which included the NSC website, Facebook page, Bushcare newsletter, Posters (erected at the Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability) and direct contact with our existing Bushcare and Wildlife Watch volunteers (via email). Local Schools were also contacted to raise their awareness and encourage participation.

### **Result:**

The following statistics relate specifically bird sightings made in the North Sydney LGA during the "Aussie Backyard Bird Count", which ran from the 19<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> October 2020:

**182** observers took part in the surveys (over 24 percent increase over 2019 participation levels)

A total of **6,542** birds were observed and recorded during the week (see Table 1), this represents a ~ 22% increase over 2019 results. **60** individual bird species were recorded during the 2020 survey - (Table 1)

The most commonly observed species included Rainbow Lorikeets; Noisy Miners; Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Silver Gull and Australian Magpie. Locally significant species recorded included a Grey Goshawk, Pacific Baza, Red-browed Finch, Silveryeye and Sacred Kingfisher.

**Table 1:** Total count of all 60 bird species observed within the North Sydney Councilboundaries during the 2020 Aussie Backyard Bird Count.

\* Introduced species; RA = Rare; NT = Near Threatened; VU = Vulnerable; En = Endangered, CE = Critically Endangered (based on IUCN listings; BirdLife Australia, 2019).

Bird Species	Count	Bird Species	Count
Rainbow Lorikeet	2307	Common Starling *	11
Noisy Miner	874	Little Black Cormorant	11
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	566	Pacific Black Duck	10
Silver Gull	321	Brown Gerygone	8
Australian Magpie	311	Tawny Frogmouth	8
Pied Currawong	279	Australian Pelican	6
Welcome Swallow	272	Pied Cormorant	6
Rock Dove *	181	Chestnut Teal	3
Little Corella	162	Golden Whistler	3
Australian White Ibis	147	Great Cormorant	3
Grey Butcherbird	147	Red-whiskered Bulbul *	3
Australian Brush-turkey	100	Spotted Dove *	3
Laughing Kookaburra	98	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	2
Common Myna *	93	Eastern Yellow Robin	2
Australian Raven	89	Little Pied Cormorant	2
Australian King-Parrot	69	Long-billed Corella	2
Australian Wood Duck	56	Powerful Owl (VU)	2
Channel-billed Cuckoo	47	Spotted Pardalote	2
Crested Pigeon	40	Variiegated Fairy-wren	2
Galah	40	Australasian Darter	1
Eastern Koel	33	Australasian Grebe	1
Superb Fairy-wren	32	Brown Goshawk	1
Magpie-lark	29	Grey Goshawk	1
Musk Lorikeet	27	Northern Mallard *	1
Australasian Figbird	25	Pacific Baza	1
Eastern Whipbird	25	Red-browed Finch	1
Fairy Martin	23	Red Wattlebird	1
White-browed Scrubwren	20	Sacred Kingfisher	1
Masked Lapwing	16	Silveryeye	1
White-faced Heron	13	Topknot Pigeon	1

