

NEWSLETTER

www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au/bushcare



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MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

Our bushland and reserves have become places of sanctuary, rest and joy throughout this unforgettable year. During the

initial lockdown, walking through our reserves was a precious treat and a highlight of my day. I am thankful to each of you for giving your time selflessly and passionately to Bushcare.

Together you have made great strides in nourishing and improving our natural environment. As they do every year, this year's Bushcare statistics astound me with how much you accomplished.

Our 119 active Bushcare and Adopt a plot volunteers contributed 1,593 hours from January through to the end of October this year. This is despite the COVID-19 shutdown through March/April and it doesn't include November's

Merry Christmas

and I hope you all have safe,
healthy and happy holidays!

Bushcare hours! What a significant achievement considering some other Council-supported Bushcare Programs in the Greater Sydney region are yet to recommence.

The Bushcare Community Nursery produced nearly 9,000 plants this year which is again amazing given the suspension of volunteer activities during March/April. Over 7,500 plants were distributed from the nursery for our bushland, garden and community projects.

I'd like to give my thanks to the following volunteers - Anita Semler and Vera Yee for 25 years of service; Margaret O'Brien for 20 years of service; Kathy Stewart, Monika

Gaede and Rachel Dawson for 15 years of service; Anne Ying, Colin Ying, Kathleen Bisits and Kim Ryan for 10 years of service;

and Peggy Lim for five years of service.

Once again, a gold medal is awarded to Wildlife Watch participant Anne Pickles, who contributed more wildlife sightings than any other volunteer (or staff member) involved in the program!

I'd really like to recognise and thank Bush Regenerator Flo Stricher for coordinating the Wildlife Watch Biocollect App project. Flo is no longer working with us - we wish Flo all the best with her future career.

On behalf of the North Sydney community, I want to thank you all for your dedication and hard work, especially through the pandemic.

COORDINATORS UPDATE

Gareth Debney Bushland Management Coordinator

planned a

On Thursday 15 October, we farewelled the late Bruce Burns, a community champion who'd been instrumental in securing public ownership of Waverton Peninsula's ex-industrial lands and helping to shape these iconic foreshore areas into the



Caption: Residents receiving free local native plants at the Community Nursery Open Day, Sat 19 Sept 2020

much-loved community assets they are today. On behalf of Council, the Bushland Team and all the Waverton volunteers, we thank Bruce for his legacy and extend our warmest sympathies to Carole and his family.

As 2020, a year like none we have experienced in living memory, draws to a close, our hopes turn to 2021 and a progressive return to "normality." While this is far from certainty at this stage, it is important to remain positive and adapt as best as possible. This being the case, we have

modified
version of our
usual program
of workshops,
activities and
events for next
year's Bushcare
Calendar. We
will recommence
Bushcare in
February 2021 –
as per normal.

In terms of adapting, as an alternative to our

usual Bushcare & Streets Alive Volunteer Christmas Party, we've arranged for individual volunteer groups to celebrate this tradition in their own way together in a COVID-safe way.

Over the next few months, the Bushland Team will be coordinating a much-needed walking track upgrade project in Primrose Park, as well as improvements in Balls Head Reserve (including the new aerated wastewater treatment system that replaces the archaic septic tank that is currently in place). There are also plans to update the original 2010

North Sydney Natural Area Survey, which established a baseline assessment and description of North Sydney's ecological assets.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank a number of our Bushcare volunteers who have helped with some "extracurricular" activities this year. Once again, Ruth Mitchell has been plugging away entering many Wildlife Watch records that are still in paper form — thank you for persevering with this arduous task

Ruth! We also need to thank Cathie Cowell and David Yip for helping to film some Bushcare Essentials training videos with Andrew Scott, our Bushcare Officer. These videos will help with our training program and the eventual plan of providing an online component of the Introductory Bushcare Essentials training program.

To our wonderful Bushcare volunteers, thank you for your patience and flexibility as we have sought to follow the changing public health guidelines this year and balance the provision of Bushcare with keeping everyone safe. The Bushland Team wish you all the best for Christmas and New Years – keep safe and we look forward to seeing you all next year!

Last but definitely not least, I'd like to thank the Bushland Team for managing the many challenges and stresses of 2020 with professionalism, dedication, good humour and resilience. Let's hope 2021 is just a little less "exciting!"



WARMER WEATHER, LONGER DAYS AND SWOOPING BIRDS: MUST BE SPRING AGAIN!

As spring rolls around, we start receiving enquiries about the aggressive, swooping behaviour of certain native birds – typically Magpies, Butcher Birds and Noisy Minors. While not every bird swoops, it's enough to raise community concerns and give the unsuspecting a good fright.

These birds swoop because they are very protective of their nest and young. Generally, the swooping behaviour only lasts for a few weeks each year and only when people enter their nesting territory.

Being swooped can be very unsettling, especially when you're not expecting such a close wildlife encounter! Swooping mostly occurs within 100 metres of the nest site and usually results in a nearmiss. Occasionally however, contact between beak and person occurs and can cause an abrasion.

It's important to remember that all native species are protected in NSW and it is an offence to harm or interfere with them – especially during sensitive life-cycle stages such as breeding.

If you are having problems with a swooping bird, there are a few simple steps that can help:

- Contact the Bushland Team we can install temporary warning signs to raise awareness
- Avoid the nesting area (if possible)
- Be aware of the bird's location most are unlikely to swoop if they think they are being watched
- Be calm, walk quickly but don't run
- Draw a pair of eyes on the back of your hat, carry an umbrella or fold your arms above your head if you have to pass through a nesting territory
- Cyclists should dismount and walk past the nesting territory – attach pipe cleaners or cable ties to your helmet to discourage swooping
- Educate kids about the birds and what they can do to avoid being swooped
 it's important for children to learn to protect their face

Forewarned is forearmed – stay safe!

ADOPT A PLOT UPDATE

- OCTOBER -

It has been a pleasure to work with all the Adopt a Plot volunteers again, to have a bit of company on the plots, now that the program is back in full swing.

I caught up with a number of participants at the annual Adopt a Plot meeting in September, thank you to all those who came along. We reviewed our work to date and discussed the objectives for the remainder of the year. Gareth spoke about current bushland management projects and issues, the minutes have been sent out to all the program members.

On the plots, the weed growth has been bolstered by the damp conditions experienced during winter through spring. We aim to control the herbaceous weeds before the arrival of summer. These conditions have also been favourable for planting, we are trying to plant as many native tube stock as possible, particularly in areas lacking vegetation structure and species diversity. The recent discovery of a Bandicoot in Badangi Reserve highlights the importance of our work and each of your plots for establishing resilient ecological communities capable sustaining our unique flora and fauna.

The Bushland Team and I are grateful for the ongoing support, I look forward to seeing you out in the bush!

Emma Hyland – Adopt a Plot Supervisor



Caption: Green Sea Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) in Berny's Bay by Marty Arbuthnot from https://www.ecobel.org/ Ecobel community based social enterprise, September 2020

WILDLIFE WATCH UPDATE

(AUGUST TO OCTOBER 2020)

Big thanks to all the Wildlife Watch volunteers who monitor wildlife in North Sydney and submit their observations to Council. The highlights of recent sightings were:

- Powerful Owl (Badangi Reserve)
- Southern Boobook Owl (Badangi Reserve)
- Echidna (Tunks Park)
- Brown Goshawk (Berry Island Reserve)
- White-Bellied Sea-Eagle (Cremorne Urban)
- Swamp Wallaby (Tunks Park)
- Australian Fur-Seal (Kurraba Point Reserve)
- Southern Shortfin Eel (Tunks Park, North Sydney Urban)
- Australian Pelican (Tunks Park)
- Little Corella (Tunks Park, Brightmore Reserve)
- Orchard Butterfly (Cremorne Point Reserve)
- Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo (McMahons Point)
- Variegated Fairy-wren (Tunks Park, Primrose Park)
- Red-Browed Finch (Tunks Park)
- Silvereye (Tunks Park)

- Yellow Admiral Butterfly (Brightmore Reserve, North Sydney Urban, Cremorne Reserve)
- Tawny Frogmouth
 (Milson Park, Warringa Park,
 Cremorne Reserve, Neutral Bay
 Urban, Primrose Park)
- Eastern Rosella (Berry Island Reserve)
- Australian King-parrot (Coal Loader Site, Brightmore Reserve, Primrose Reserve, Balls Head Reserve, Cremorne Reserve, Tunks Park, Wollstonecraft Urban)
- Eastern Whip Bird (Gore Cove Reserve, Primrose Park, Cremorne Reserve, Tunks Park)
- White-browed Scrubwren (Balls Head Reserve, Carradah Park, Cremorne Reserve, Tunks Park, Primrose Park)



- Little Black Cormorant (Primrose Park/Folly Point, Sawmillers Reserve, Neutral Bay Urban, Anderson Park)
- Red Wattlebird (Wollstonecraft Urban)
- Australian Darter (Neutral Bay Urban, Kirribilli Urban)
- Eastern Water Dragon (Cremorne Urban, Balls Head Reserve, Brightmore Reserve, Primrose Park, Cremorne Reserve, Wonga Road Reserve, Tunks Park)
- Blue-Tongue Lizard (Neutral Bay Urban)
- Green Sea Turtle (Berrys Bay)

Have you seen any interesting fauna in North Sydney Council, or do you have a photo of your observations? If so, email the Bushland Project Officer - Ramin Khosravi at **council@northsydney.nsw.gov.au** or visit Council's Bushcare Page - **www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au/bushcare** to post your photo.

NESTBOX WORKSHOP SUCCESS

Kent and Marilyn Atkinson - Kurraba Road, Neutral Bay

For more than 20 years we had been sharing our home with possums. They lived in the ceiling and we lived below them. In breeding season, things tended to get a bit noisy up there so when the Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability held a workshop on building nesting boxes, we decided it was an opportunity to rehouse our furry friends. We might add that we were often far less tolerant of our uninvited house guests than these reflections suggest. At one stage we called in the experts who identified the entry point and installed a one-way barrier.

The workshop was held on 2 June 2018 and was very professionally conducted with Bushcare officers and volunteers on hand to provide materials, guidance and encouragement. The workshop involved an introductory briefing by a Bushcare specialist about native creatures and their nesting behaviour. This was followed

by a demonstration of a possum box installation in a tree at the Coal Loader. The next phase of constructing the nesting boxes took place in a previously prepared workshop with all parts supplied for a small fee. Even though it was a very cold June morning, the atmosphere was warm and friendly.

At home we turned to our next-door neighbour, a builder, who very kindly and without fuss installed the possum box approximately 8 metres up our jacaranda tree. The possum box is currently inhabited by a Brushtail Possum. Sightings of the possum of unknown gender have been on 2 March and 20 September this year but scratch marks on the tree trunk over time suggest long term residents. Although there is a Brushtail living in our possum box, we are still visited on most nights by noisy Ringtail Possums running across our roof.



On this week's episode of Landline, we saw nesting boxes being installed in bushfire ravished farming areas to encourage the return of native wildlife. Clearly a project with widespread appeal.

We encourage residents who are kindly disposed towards sharing their environment with our little Aussie friends to embrace the workshop should it be offered again at the Coal Loader Centre for Sustainability.

Caption: Common Brushtail Possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) occupying Kent & Marilyn's Nestbox.



Captions:(L to R) Mark Breda, Sue Oyston, Meena Kelso and Friend at the Bushcare & Streets Alive Volunteer Christmas Party at the Coal Loader, 11 December 2019.

It is with a heavy heart that I must inform you that Mark Breda and Sue Oyston have retired from North Sydney Council's Bushcare Program after close to 20 years of voluntary service.

Mark and Sue signed up for North Sydney Council's Bushcare program in 1997, then spent a few years in the Northern Territory and volunteered from this time on.

Residents of Neutral Bay, Mark recalls getting involved in the Bushcare program via the Native Havens program when Nola Handcock was the Project Officer. Nola would encourage Mark to join the Bushcare program during her visits and he was reluctant at first as he assumed bush regenerators were akin to landscapers. They eventually relented and joined Forsyth Bushcare Group and undertook the one-day Bushcare Essentials course with TAFE, provided by Council. After that, they caught the Bushcare bug and never looked back. A few years later, Mark took on the responsibility of Bushcare Group Convenor from Doug Matheson who fell ill at the time. In the early days, Mark grew plants at home for the Bushcare program, before Council had its own community nursery, as well as volunteering for the Streets Alive program.

Mark's enthusiasm and interest led him to take on further study. He completed Certificates 3 & 4 in Conservation Land Management and a similar qualification with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. From 2007, he was employed as a trainee for Toolijooa Environmental Restoration, a private bush regeneration contractor. Within two years, Mark was promoted to Bush Regeneration Supervisor. He worked Bush Regeneration East, one of the four geographical divisions for the company, which extends roughly south to San Souci, North from Palm Beach and west to Ryde.

Mark's favourite sites are the Endangered Ecological [vegetation] Communities (EECs), Eastern Suburbs Banksia Scrub and Duffy's Forest – the most interesting but slightly less attractive site because of the ticks.

The highlight of Mark's career was specialising in the management of post burn sites for Ku-ring-gai Council. Mark said, Dom Edmonds and Andy Robinson from the KMC Bushland Team, now long gone, were innovators in bushland regeneration techniques at the time. He would work on elevated platforms so as not to disturb potential regenerating native plants, and they would even collect and pile bark from shedding Angophora costata for the same reason. The Bushland Fire Team at Ku-ring-gai would create hot fires (this would cook any Ehrharta seed and the like) and the pre-burn fuel load would sometimes be piled to waist height. It was important not to work post burn sites immediately, to show restraint, observe the site first and only then enter to remove weeds at seed-set. Culling dominating natives could be undertaken between 12 months to two years after and one should only ever plant-in when there is evidence of low resilience. That is, when there has been little-to-no regeneration of native plants in response to fire for three years.

Mark continued, saying sometimes the best thing to do is nothing — let the site rest, don't disturb it, don't walk on it. Some plants, for example those in the Fabaceae family, have hard seed coats and remain viable in the soil for many years, sometimes germinating five years post-burn. To further illustrate his point, Mark recalled a story about the disposal of a Sir Joseph Banks botanical collection in England. Some seeds were thrown into a garden and they miraculously germinated some 200 hundred years later, having been stored in ideal conditions.

On behalf of North Sydney Council's Bushland Team and Bushcare volunteers, I would like to thank Mark and Sue for their service to our community and for sharing their love for the bush. Mark, we will miss your dark sense of humour. Good luck with your new hobby in retirement, out-witting those pesky piscines.

OUR NATIVE HAVEN - ON THE EDGE OF THE CBD By Winifred Chevalier

My garden, on the edge of North Sydney's CBD, was once part of a much larger estate and has been in the family for five generations.

Over the last 20 or so years, it has seen a transition from English Cottage Garden to being largely native with many local species obtained from the North Sydney Council Bushcare Nursery.

Unfortunately, the rich variety of native fauna in the original garden has dwindled dramatically over the years with the relentless encroachment of urbanisation. However, we have managed to retain many of the smaller creatures including - skinks, butterflies, bees (occasionally native) and Ladybirds along with some old faithfuls such as Tawny Frogmouths whose families have been visiting for as long as I can remember.

Creating this garden has been a trial and error process which involved ruthlessly removing many of the established ringins and almost starting from scratch with advice from the experts. Early on, Danie Ondina who was working as a consultant for Council at the time, gave us some very worthwhile suggestions for restoring a more natural landscape by creating mounds and avoiding straight lines. We also rescued large sandstone blocks from nearby building sites and scattered them around the garden for habitat. More recently, we put in a small pond with Pacific Blue Eyes (much to the delight of Kookaburras).

Because of the continual disruptions from various high-rise building projects, we have constantly been forced to adapt to different light, wind and temperature patterns but we now have a stable core of large protective trees, including a majestic Spotted Gum (with a permanent Magpie nest) and an old Illawarra Flame as well as some more unusual garden plants such as: Davidson Plum, Podocarpus spinulosa, Sand Paper Fig, Callitris and a tiny Finger Lime. To encourage as may insects, birds and reptiles as possible we have endeavoured to plant a natural range of ground covers, grasses, vines and small bushes as well as the taller canopy plants.

It is such a relief to walk-off a busy main road into our green oasis.

If you are thinking of starting a native garden from scratch, it would be worth your while consulting the Bushland Team at North Sydney Council.









Caption: A - Spotted Gum (Corymbia maculata) providing a screen on the property boundary and protection from the elements for the garden, Polyscias in foreground and Callitris midfield. B - Native garden with complete structural layers. C - Winifred's native garden looking toward the courtyard, landscaped mounds with grassy understory represented here by Microleana and Lomandra. D - Recently installed pond with Pacific Blue Eyes.



It's that time of year when we shake our heads and ask, "Where has the year gone?"

I can't quite decide if this year has felt very long or very short but given the level of COVID-19 disruption we've had, I'm proud of what we've achieved in the nursery.

Volunteer numbers have remained steady and our propagation schedule has continued unabated. Although we've grown as many plants as in previous years, necessary changes to community planting events meant that less of these plants were used. Thankfully, good rain through autumn and winter saw lots of bushland and Bushcare planting.

Up to the start of November, we supplied over 7,000 plants across a variety of bushland, garden and community projects. Understandably, this is down a third compared to the same time last year.

National Tree Day and the Nursery Open Day were much smaller events this year with only 124 plants used for Tree Day, compared to 1,794 in 2019.

Nursery Open Day was held in September and was a great success despite COVID protocols that restricted attendees to 20 at a time in booked time slots. It's a pleasure to meet with residents to show them the nursery and talk about growing native plants, and we commend the attendees for their enthusiasm and patience. Between them, our 75 attendees took away 321 plants comprising 12 native species.

In October, we ran our popular seed propagation workshop where participants learn techniques for propagating native plants from seed, including specialised seed treatments through to potting up seedlings. What an enthusiastic and attentive group we had this year! They did a great job with the seed sowing and we already have trays of *Acacia suaveolens* and *Melaleuca hypericifolia* germinating in the polyhouse.

Clare McElroy Bushcare Nursery Supervisor

Caption: Close-



Caption: Newly germinated *Banksia serrata* seedlings sown by workshop participants, 27 October 2020.

WEED TO WATCH RED NATAL GRASS (Melinis repens)

This edition of Weed to Watch sure is a pretty one! As I take my usual drive down the M1 my eye catches a magnificent red wave being blown about by the speed of the cars... on closer inspection the wave is the beautiful flower spikelets on a tussock of grass!

The beautiful flowers turn out to be a native of Africa called Red Natal Grass or *Melinis repens*. This species forms open tussocks and is a short lived annual or perennial reaching up to 1.2m in height. Red Natal Grass can be characterised by the upright flowering stems that reach 7-17cm long and are covered in numerous silky hairs that create the fluffy appearance of the seed heads. The early flower begins reddish or purplish in colour and once mature often ends up turning pink to white.

The leaf blade can be folded or flat with 1mm hairs emanating from small outgrowths called tubercles. The leaf is usually 5-30cm long and 3-6mm wide.

Regarded as an environmental weed in most of Australia, this grass is widely naturalised in this country. Red Natal Grass is a common weed anywhere that has been disturbed ie. roadways, railway tracks, footpaths, and also a pest in pastures and crops. The fluffy seeds are often wind dispersed but can also stow away in agricultural produce or lodge in clothing and cars. Red Natal Grass is a weed in local bushland as it displaces native vegetation and prevents the natural regeneration of native species. In North Sydney LGA, Red Natal Grass can be found at Tunks Park, the Coal Loader, Waterhen Navy Base, Carradah Park, Balls Head area and is also prolific along rock ledges on the Warringah expressway.

Red Natal Grass can be hand removed. Make sure to crown out the entire root structure with your knife and place in the green waste bin to be mulched down by Council's waste



disposal contractor, Suez in their Eastern Creek Organics Processing Facility.

For further information visit;
plantnet.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au
weeds.brisbane.qld.gov.au/weeds/red-natal-grass

Emma Hyland - Bushcare Officer

THE BOX

By Trish Kroll - Sydney Wildlife

I noticed a brushtail possum, out in daylight high in the trees of Harry Howard Reserve, Wollstonecraft. She was grooming her joey in her pouch and going about business as normal, but in broad daylight. This otherwise perfect possum was certainly blind – cataracts in both eyes.

This is a more common problem than you might think. Many cats carry toxoplasmosis which is a parasitic infection they can spread to other animals or humans through their faeces. A possum sharing territory with a wandering domestic cat can be rendered blind from toxoplasmosis.

A blind possum cannot survive in the wild and is vulnerable to predators, but she can raise her baby if taken into care.

My first instinct was to encourage her to stay put so she could be trapped.

I rang North Sydney Council for help, and Ramin Khosravi, Council's Bushland Project Officer and a Sydney Wildlife Rescue member, like myself and my husband Michael, downed tools, picked up the only nesting box readily available, and an apple, and brought them to us in the reserve. Michael spent the rest of the afternoon attaching the box in an accessible position in a tree we could observe from our balcony.

We did observe it. Following the scent of the apple, it squeezed its way into the (slightly too small) box and was taken into care to raise its joey in safety.

Instead of taking the box back, Ramin

arranged for it to be attached high up in the same tree where we can watch it from our balcony. Better than TV, especially during a pandemic. It has been a lot of fun watching who would win the lease on this wildlife real estate. We watched keenly while a pair of King Parrots inspected the box over and again. It was not to their exacting specifications, so they gave up. The next temporary tenant was a young adult Brushtail. She loved the location and had a keen eve for gardening, often sampling our balcony crop of bok choy and lettuce. We had a good laugh after our attention was attracted by squawks raised in anger as a pair of lorikeets stuck their head in the box, woke her up and discussed the residence in heated terms.

cont. over

GREEN EVENTS CALENDAR

BOOKINGS must be made for all events at: www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au/greenevents or 9936 8100 unless otherwise stated

The Bushland Team is committed to providing activities and events where social distancing measures can be applied. Please refer to the events listing on the North Sydney Council homepage and Green Events page for the most up-to-date information.

JANUARY

- 20 Family Bush Walk | Wednesday 10.30am to 12pm
- 21 Family Kayak | Thursday 10.30am to 12pm FEBRUARY
- 10 Introduction to Bushcare | Wednesday 10am to 1pm
- 14 Introduction to Bushcare | Sunday 10am to 1pm MARCH
- 6 Bat Count | Saturday 5pm to 8pm
- 11 Bushcare Convenor Meeting | Thursday 6pm to 8pm
- 20 Cuttings Workshop | Saturday 9.30am to 12.30pm

APRIL

- 13 Family Bush Walk | Tuesday 10.30am to 12pm
- 17 Bushcare Stall Produce Markets | Saturday 8am to 12pm
- 20 Annual Adopt a Plot meeting | Tuesday 6pm to 7pm
- 20 Native Bee Webinar | Tuesday 7pm to 8.3opm

MAY

- 9 Trees for Mum Day | Sunday 9am to 12pm
- 20 Nursery Visit | Thursday 8am to 1pm
- 22 Eucalyptus ID Walk | Saturday 10am to 1pm
- 30 Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Walk | Sunday 9am to 3pm

cont. from p7

Well, guess what? Look who won. Presumably the possum was growing too large for the entrance hole and attention grew from the lorikeets. They've moved in.

It's not only terrific for the wildlife to have

nesting boxes to make up for what was naturally theirs, but it's added value for the human lives that live amongst the wildlife. It's encouraging to see wildlife returning to our munici pality. Give them a secure and well-positioned nesting box, and they will come. I'm working on having a King Parrot box where I can watch it. How good would that be?



Caption: Lorikeets inspecting newly installed nest box in a large Camphor Laurel tree in Harry Howard Reserve, installed by North Sydney Council's Tree Team.



Did you know North Sydney Council Bushcare has a Facebook page? Like us at www.facebook.com/bushcare



To be informed of interesting environmental education videos visit Envirotube on Youtube channel https://www.youtube.com/user/greenstylenorth

For more information or to make a booking for any of these workshops or special events please contact the Bushcare Officer on 9936 8100. Printed on 100% recycled paper.