

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"



Members old and new, guests and visitors simply must not miss the **BMCS Monthly Meeting, Friday 27 May at 7.30pm at the Conservation Hut, Wentworth Falls.** We have two exciting events in store for you:

Birds of a Blue Mountains backyard: changes over the last 20 years

If we are lucky we have got to know many of the birds that flit, feed and flee in our backyards. But are we aware that the times they are a changing? Peter Smith is going to fill us in, and this is the feast he promises:

"My partner, Judy Smith, and I are consultant ecologists. We have lived in the Blue Mountains since 1980 and at our present address at Blaxland since 1984. In my talk on 27 May I'll be giving an account of the birds of our backyard and the adjacent bushland, showing lots of slides and describing the dramatic changes that have occurred over the last 20 years.

There has been a big increase in the number of bird species that we see or hear each month. In the early years, 1985-1988, we recorded an average of 38 species per month. This has steadily increased over the years. Since 1999 we have been recording an average of 58



species per month, a 53% increase since the 1980s.

One group of birds that has been increasing are species that are favoured by urban environments. Some of these are introduced species – the Red-whiskered Bulbul and Common Blackbird. Most, however, are native urban species such as the Noisy Miner, Rainbow Lorikeet and Crested Pigeon. The other main group of increasers are birds associated with wetter forests. Examples include the Powerful Owl, Brown Cuckoo-Dove, Lewin's Honeyeater, Golden Whistler and Bassian Thrush. By contrast, a number of birds associated with dry woodlands have declined at Blaxland since the 1980s, including the Peaceful Dove, Buff-rumped Thornbill and Weebill.

In my talk I want to show what can be learnt from simple long-term bird monitoring and I want to find out if other people in the Blue Mountains have noticed similar patterns of change."

Then after supper we will officially launch the new publication by the Blue Mountains Conservation Society,

Groundwater: lifeblood of the environment

Readers of *Hut News* will have been following the groundwater articles published over the past eight months, the final of the series appearing in this edition. These have been collated into a booklet for wider distribution.

The series was inspired by the absurdity of the current situation, where measurement and restrictions apply only to water supplied from dams but not from groundwater. The Society saw the need for a greater community understanding about groundwater, realising that if we don't call a moratorium on its extraction, at least until we better understand it, we may see its exhaustion, leaving our hanging swamps dry and our waterfalls only flowing after heavy rain.

Research has been undertaken by our Groundwater Subcommittee, and the booklet was written by BMCS President, Brian Marshall. It will be circulated to all levels of Government and their relevant departments, to Opposition parties, to environment groups, consultants, water drilling companies, and locally to universities, secondary schools, tourist organisations, and bushwalking clubs: and may even find its way into your dentist's waiting room!

Copies will be available for those attending the meeting. This is an opportunity to recap on the issue, to appreciate and perhaps applaud the work undertaken by your Committee, and vitally, to begin spreading the word on a droughty concern that is becoming more and more serious every month.

Please contact the Society (PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782, Fax 4757 1753, email bmcs@bluemountains.org.au) if you would like a copy of the booklet posted to you.

Nursery news

Our autumn sale proved a big success with eager buyers snapping up lots of bargains and contributing \$1620 towards the Society's environmental campaigns. The raffle was won by Helen Rogers of Springwood.

Our aging nursery at Blackheath will be closed for sales during June and July to allow much needed refurbishment but there will be outstanding closing-down bargains every Tuesday morning until the closure.

Beginning in May our Lawson nursery at Livingstone Street behind Mt Hay Technology will be open for sales on Wednesday mornings from 9 am to noon. Please park around the corner near the large nursery gates. As well as a variety of affordable plants suitable for mountains' gardens, there will be many specials to tempt you. Come along and have a look!

Garden plants going wild: Agapanthus

This hardy perennial lily from South Africa is popular for its display of blue and white summer flowers. It produces numerous small black shiny seeds which can wash down waterways and its dense root systems form large continually extending clumps which displace all other vegetation. It spreads rapidly into bushland down drainage lines and will also grow in dry areas.

Bushcare workers were distressed when Agapanthus were planted as part of the landscaping at Shell Corner by RTA contractors. The following email received by our bushcare officer Clive Barker on 14 April 2005 is good news:

"Dear Clive, I refer to your email concerning the planting of weed species at Shell Corner, Katoomba.

In view of the fact that agapanthus is found to be self seeding and regenerating in the Blue Mountains environment, the RTA has decided to remove all the agapanthus planted at the Shell Corner road project and replace them with a more environmentally appropriate species.

The RTA also agrees to inform all landscaping consultants working for the RTA that agapanthus is not to be used in any future Blue Mountain road projects. This measure will minimise agapanthus becoming a noxious weed impacting on this World Heritage site. Kind regards, Jagtar Rakkar, RTA Customer Services."

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Bushfires, Broom and the Grose Valley

On the way to success ...

Over the past 14 months there has been a massive community effort to attack a Scotch Broom invasion triggered by the December 2002 bushfire. 14.5 km of creek-lines in the north Katoomba/Leura area have been weeded, removing over six million broom plants. Volunteers and professional bush regenerators put in a massive 6818 hours to achieve this result, with about a third of this being contributed by volunteers.

BMCS members responded to the call for help by coming along to special Broom Blitz events, Great Grose Weed Walk events and participating as members of Bushwalking Clubs. Other local residents and TAFE students have assisted. The dedicated ongoing efforts of the regular members of the four Bushcare Groups in the catchment has been the key to the target being reached.

The next step

This natural bushland, with its beautiful canyons, hanging swamps and waterfalls is now regenerating, free of the major threat which faced it only 14 months ago, but the job has not yet been finished. There are plans for further work to weed out the smaller broom plants and other weeds like blackberry and buddleia that have also flourished as a result of the fire. Whilst the effort required will not be so great over the next three years, it will be needed to ensure the job is finished and no weeds survive to produce more seedlings.

Another Broom Blitz event is being organised by Katoomba Creek Bushcare Group and Blue Mountains City Council on Sunday 15 May, 9.30 am to 3.30pm, meeting in Mort Street, North Katoomba. Tools, training and lunch will be provided on the day. It is essential to book with Lyndal Sullivan (4782 1635 ah) or Brit Rollo at BMCC (4780 5623 Fridays) by 11 am, Friday 13 May.

Government Departments working together

Council, NPWS and Dept Lands have pooled an unprecedented amount of funds and staff effort to respond to the crisis, as well as attracting grants. A total of \$153,080 has been contributed by government agencies to achieve this result. A further grant of \$88,724 from the NSW government will make it possible for works to continue over the next three years by paying professional bush regenerators to work in the more difficult areas.

Coordinated Resident Action and Education

The long term success of all this work will depend on how well North Katoomba and North Leura residents care for the remaining bushland on their own land and remove those weeds which travel into the bushland. Residents living near creek-lines are particularly important. Council is assisting residents develop plans for their own land to help protect good vegetation, rehabilitate degraded areas and control weeds. Another series of workshops entitled "Mountain Living" will be run to provide residents with information, on-site training and access to financial assistance to undertake works.

longwall mines – not even half the safety zone required.

NAG members fear that the Nepean River will suffer the same fate as the upper Georges, the Cataract and the Bargo Rivers nearby. All of these have been cracked open in hundreds of places by subsidence and have also suffered from rock falls, ongoing methane gas emissions and pollution from upwelling ground water. NAG fears that the already unacceptable levels of salt and other toxins being pumped into the Nepean from existing BHP collieries will be significantly added to by more pumpouts from the new longwall mines.

NAG asks that you support our



Katoomba Creek bushcare members and local volunteers working on one of the many beautiful waterfalls on Katoomba Creek in March 2005. In foreground Nicolette Suiter, Martin Haley and Moyo Haley.

demand for a moratorium on new coal mines and extensions of active mines until the NSW Government invests in effective mine planning, monitoring and compliance. This would involve regional monitoring, adequate environmental studies of cumulative impacts and uniform conditions of consent. We suggest you write to the following ministers: The Hon Kerry Hickey, Minister for Mineral Resources, Level 19, Governor Macquarie Tower, 1 Farrar Place, Sydney 2000; The Hon Bob Debus, Minister for Environment, PO Box A290, Sydney South 1232.

For more information email Leonie Kelly at leoniekelly60@hotmail.com

Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group meets at 9 am on the 2nd Saturday of every month. Tools are provided. Bring morning tea, gloves and drinking water. Contact Karen 4757 1929.

BHP's new plans opposed

Leonie Kelly, Nepean Action Group

The Nepean Action Group (NAG) is bitterly disappointed at BHP Billiton's new coal mine plans for the area near the upper Nepean River at Douglas Park, announced at a community meeting organised by the company on 30 March.

NAG had requested BHP to leave a protection zone of 1km around the river. This distance is based on scientific research of subsidence effects cited by the NSW Scientific Committee in its report of November 2004. But the company's latest plan leaves a distance of only 180m to 400m between the riverbed and the proposed 300m wide

GROUNDWATER

Article 8: Do we ever learn? By Brian Marshall

The Sydney Morning Herald (SMH, Thursday 17 February, 2005) contained details of a legal battle between Coca-Cola and some impoverished villagers in southern India. The court has to decide “whether villagers from the bottom of the social hierarchy have the right to deny water to the world’s most omnipotent commercial brand”. Apart from claims that the Coca-Cola plant’s bio-solid waste (supplied to local farmers as a fertiliser) has leached into and contaminated groundwater, the farmers ascribe the scarcity of water in their relatively shallow wells to Coca-Cola’s thirst. Coca-Cola conversely attributes the farmer’s water scarcity to three years of poor monsoonal rains. Yet commonsense tells us that drought conditions must lower the watertable, thereby potentially increasing the impact of large-scale extraction!

Coca-Cola’s plant is the biggest in India and produces Coke, Fanta and bottled water. To do this, it extracts 500,000 litres of water per day (activists estimate three times this amount) from deep-bore wells. That this should have an impact on the groundwater regime is not surprising. However, from the previous seven articles it should be clear that groundwater distribution and flow are complex, so I pass no comment on the rights or wrongs of both parties’ assertions. This notwithstanding, two items in the SMH article are particularly instructive from a groundwater viewpoint. First, Coca-Cola says: “We have no interest in locating a \$25 million plant over a supply of water that’s going to run out”. This is true! Their plant is consuming deep-bore water and may not suffer, but the debate concerns the impact of their exploitation on shallower wells. Second, Coca-Cola rejects the farmers’ water-supply claims and Dr Bharat Sharma (International Water Management Institute) seems to agree: “If an aquifer has good recharge, then the amount of water Coca-Cola is using should not be a problem”. This statement, though valid, is gobbledegook! It seemingly masks inadequate knowledge of: (a) the rate of recharge, (b) the sustainable yield, (c) the distribution of

the watertable with depth, (d) the geometry of and linkage between shallow and deep aquifers (if separate!), and (e) whether recharge is dominantly lateral or vertical (for each aquifer).

Parallels exist in the Blue Mountains. As cited in Hut News (Issue No 210, January 2005), shallow bores at Clarence Village are drying up, yet deeper wells have been sunk for commercial bottling of ‘boutique’ water, and other local industries (sand and coal extraction) pump out large volumes of groundwater. Unfettered exploitation of groundwater, especially in the upper Blue Mountains, threatens vulnerable swamps and their biota, and it compromises surface base flow, indirectly affecting the tourist industry and ultimately impacting on Sydney’s water supply. As in India, seemingly inadequate geohydrologic knowledge (above and article 7) inhibits local and regional evaluation of the ramifications of groundwater exploitation.

The Sydney Metropolitan Water Plan (MWP) states: “...Reserves of groundwater are located in many parts of greater Sydney such as the Botany sand beds... groundwater can be used ... to water gardens and for other non-drinking purposes ... Another potential source of groundwater... may come from the Sydney and Hawkesbury sandstone aquifers. Quite large volumes may be available but the water is not easily accessible ... groundwater could potentially be used as a short-term measure in droughts. Four million dollars (\$4 million) will be spent in immediate investigations to establish whether groundwater can usefully provide supply augmentation in droughts. These investigations will both increase our knowledge about groundwater reserves and could provide up to 13 billion litres of water to supplement dam supplies for immediate use”. The dearth of geohydrologic knowledge is obvious as the MWP cites potential sources, and oscillates between the need for data (\$4 million – and the rest!) and ‘guesstimates’ of yield (up to 13 billion litres).

The Society has written to Ministers Knowles, Debus and Sartor regarding the MWP. Extreme concern is expressed over the environmental and commercial impacts (e.g. to tourism, small businesses and the manufacturing industry) resulting from exploitation of groundwater. A locally lowered watertable compromises swamps and reduces flows to creeks, waterfalls and reservoirs; excessive groundwater extraction in the Cumberland Basin could compromise existing industrial use



Lake Burragarang at around 40% capacity. Not only aquifers under stress. Ron Withington, 2005

through marine incursions and also induce subsidence (Venice is a classical example!). In general, the Society is totally opposed to the unsustainable use of groundwater whereby natural discharge and engineered extraction exceed short-term natural and artificial recharge.

How do we exploit groundwater without adequate local and regional data? The answer is that we don’t! Article 7 canvassed the roles of Council and DIPNR in developing a comprehensive geohydrologic database for the Blue Mountains as a prerequisite to producing a Greater Blue Mountains Groundwater Management Plan. This is being pursued. On a separate front, the 2004 Annual Conference of the Nature Conservation Council (NCC) passed the Society’s motion calling on the NSW Government and relevant authorities to: “(a) provide a clear commitment to the policing and enforcement of existing groundwater regulations and conditions; (b) place a moratorium on the drilling of new bores and cap existing groundwater extraction at current levels until ecologically sustainable use (which does not degrade groundwater dependent ecosystems) can be identified for each catchment at both local and catchment-wide scales; (c) require the metering of all existing and future bores; (d) charge for all urban groundwater extracted, at rates at least commensurate with the local Water Authority; (e) ensure non-urban stock and domestic groundwater bores are metered and rated appropriately; (f) require an environmental assessment and licensing system which will impose an ‘ecologically sustainable’ extraction limit; and (g) apply the precautionary principle until an ecologically sustainable use level is understood.” The motion has gone to Minister Knowles; the Society and NCC are campaigning for its enactment.

Do we ever learn? Yes, but commonly through selecting short-term expedient options and using ‘spin’ when disaster eventuates. The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area deserves more than this ‘trial and error’ approach. The Society will ensure that it gets it. In the meantime, the free lunch (for some!) continues and the environment bleeds.



Phantom Falls on Narrowneck. Water in another form. Ron Withington.

Office assistance needed

Can you spare a half day a week/fortnight to help with office duties in the Society's office at the Conservation Hut, Wentworth Falls? For more information contact our Administrative Officer
David Bowskill 4757 3416
davidbow@tpg.com.au

Old scribbly gum to stay



Last month we published "Soliloquy of a Scribbly Gum", a poem by Steven Ridd.

Philip Hammon of Scenic World has emailed to correct a misunderstanding about the fate of the tree used to illustrate the poem which is on

the Scenic World property.

"The tree photographed shows a red ring. That ring signifies that that particular tree has been documented, and checked, and that it will therefore be preserved."

Philip Hammon is a member of Blue Mountains Conservation Society. He comments "Scenic World became a member of the BMCS because our business depends on tourists being able to appreciate the beautiful area that surrounds us, and we wish to contribute to its conservation."

Plant study group

A plant study group has recently been formed and more participants are welcome. We will be sharing information and learning how to identify plants as a group and visiting different locations. Being very enthusiastic, we have agreed to use species names and botanical terminology to describe flowers, leaves etc.

Bring a magnifying lens, plant books and morning tea.

We meet the third Sunday morning of every month. Next study day is 15 May, 9.30am to 12.30 at the Conservation Hut. Contact person: Meredith 4782 4823.

Wednesday walks

Details of Wednesday walks will be emailed to interested bushwalkers. If you wish to receive an email report of the next couple of Wednesday walks contact Bob at mcreysw@bigpond.net.au. If you are interested in walking on Wednesdays and are not on email please ring Bob on 4757 2694 to find out what will be on in the near future.

MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES

Elizabeth van Reyswoud
Phone 4757.2694

Email: mcreysw@bigpond.net.au

Post: PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782

BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY BUSHWALKING GROUP

Our bushwalking group provides a range of activities. Membership of the bushwalking group is available to members of the Society. For further information contact the Activity Coordinator (listed) or Bushwalks Conveyor Bob van Reyswoud. **Cost of insurance and affiliation fees for bushwalkers of \$15 per member is payable with your membership renewal.**

Monday Leisure Walks: Usually 'Short Day' walks of 3-5 hours suitable for walkers of average fitness. Graded Medium, i.e. can include some short rock scrambles or some short section off track. Bring morning tea and lunch, plus carry at least 1 litre of WATER, 2 litres on warmer days.

May 09 Empire Pass, Lawson. Gullies and creeks. Meet 9am Lawson Bowling Club car park (near station). ☎ Norm 4784 1554.

May 16 Glenbrook Creek scramble. Some rock hopping! Meet 9am railway commuter carpark Glenbrook. ☎ Allan 4739 2767.

May 23 Pulpit Rock. Grose Valley views. Meet 9.15 Neighbourhood centre, Blackheath. ☎ Norah 4757 4058.

May 30 BUS TRIP to St Albans on the Hawkesbury. Historic area. Bus departs Springwood Depot 9am, pick up on Hawkesbury Road outside Springwood Country Club. Book your seat with Allan 4739 2767. BBQ.

Jun 6 Birdwood Gully, Springwood. Meet 9am entrance to multi storey car park, Springwood. Contact Laurel 4784 1554.

Thursday Pleasure Walks: These easy to medium grade walks are conducted to suit the walkers on the day. Times given are approximate. Slower walkers are catered for and on longer walks there is an option of a slower group to complete a section of the walk. Phone the contact for any enquiries about the program, starting times and transport issues.

May 8-9-10 Camp at Newnes. This was deferred from last month due to rain. If you want to come and do not wish to camp a cabin can be hired. For more details and to register for the camp ☎ David on 4757 3416. Meet 9.30am Mt Victoria Station on May 8.

May 12 Walls Lookout near Pearce's Pass. Undulating walk through heath with expansive views. Meet 10am Mt Victoria Station. ☎ Marie 4787 1257.

May 19 Minnehaha Falls, Katoomba. Level walk to top of falls, steep descent to base of falls for those who wish to go further. Opportunity to view progress of regeneration after 2003 fires. Meet 10am Gearins Hotel Katoomba. ☎ Joan 4782 2218.

May 26 Glenbrook Gorge. Walk from NPWS Centre to track leading to Gorge. Extent of walk determined on the day. Car shuffle if required. Meet 10am entrance to Glenbrook Station on Burfitt Pde. ☎ David 4757 3416.

Jun 2 Wonderland Track to Sunbath, Medlow Bath. Easy walk on old tracks below the Hydro. Meet 10am on Highway outside the Hydro. ☎ Terry 4787 6918.

Weekend Bushwalks: Always discuss with the contact if the walk you would like to do is medium/hard or hard, before attending. If this is your first walk, or you are in any doubt, discuss with the contact or Bushwalks Convener Bob van Reyswoud, 4757 2694, email mcreysw@bigpond.net.au

May 7 (Sat) Bell Exploratory walk to Wollangambe River. Meet Mt Victoria station at 9.00 am. Medium/Hard? ☎ June 4787 7312.

May 14 (Sat) Gooch's Crater. Medium. Meet Mt Victoria station 8.30am. ☎ Bob 4757 2694

May 21 (Sat) Numantia Falls and beyond. Medium. Meet Faulconbridge station 8.30am. ☎ Liz 4754 4966.

May 28 (Sat) Blue Gum Forest via Pierces Pass. Hard. All day work. Meet 8.30am Mt Victoria station. ☎ Bob 4757 2694.

Jun 4 (Sat) Noble Canyon and Glow Worm tunnel. Medium. Bring torch. Meet Mt. Victoria station 8.30am. ☎ June 4787 7312 or Bob 4757 2694.

Mount Wilson activity

Nights 20-23 June, walks 21-24 June

There are several comfortable beds left in the Mt Wilson Study Centre for nights 20-23 June inclusive (\$22 per head per night). I and other experienced BMCS walk conductors will put on a range of activities for the learning and enjoyment of small groups of BMCS members in this delightful part of our own backyard.

Did you know that the Wollangambe canyons' access track traverses several ecosystems including basalt-soil plateau top, sandstone slope and riparian? Have you visited the windswept heathland and unusual Grose Valley views of the Banks wall? Where else but on the abandoned tourist drive formation at Bowen's Creek

can you get up close with cliff-face vegetation without any stairs?

Include early mornings, sunsets and a night prowling in your Mount Wilson experience by booking a bed in the restored former schoolhouse and teachers' residence (our previous successful food plans with communal meals some nights will apply). To book, send \$15 money order deposit to Don Morison, PO Box 170, Katoomba 2780, enquiries 02 8230 2116.

Welcome to new members

Peter Carroll, Hazelbrook
Denis and Janis Creer, Springwood
Josephine Morris, Katoomba
Sheila Seppelt, Leura