

HUT NEWS

"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow's People"



Megalong Christmas Party

Society members are again invited to join in the Bushcare Christmas Party at Megalong Valley Hall, Saturday 19 December, from noon. Food and (limited) drinks will be provided. Bring a fold up chair and some nibbles.

Last year's picnic was fun — lots of old and new faces, music from the Gang Gangs, and a great location, in the Megalong Valley Reserve beneath the cliffs of Medlow. The Reserve is on the left hand side as you go down through the valley. Pass the tea rooms on your right — if you pass the Megalong Valley Farm you have gone too far! When you arrive, look for the table with the Society's banner. Contact Christine 4787.7246.

DCR: A Huge Project

The Plan of Management for Digger Cooper Reserve, which includes a Rest Stop with parking for 15 cars and 2 coaches, and a 12m viewing platform that will allow 360° views from the highest point on the Reserve (963 metres) is now with the various authorities for approval.

We intend to revegetate about 11,000 square metres of degraded land using a combination of bushcare techniques such as brush matting and large-scale tube-stock planting. Seed collected from the Reserve and propagated at our Native Plant Nursery will be used for all tube-stock planting, to maintain the genetic integrity of the Reserve.

We will eventually be preparing grant applications to cover the cost of this huge project. In the meantime, we run an informal bushcare group on the site on the first Sunday of each month. We are attempting to control weeds and stabilise soil, and will also begin tube-stock planting once approval has been given by the land owner (Dept of Land and Water Conservation). Contact me if you would like to help. — Ross Coster 4759.1247.

Grant for Bushcare Group

The Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group has received a Small Projects Grant from the Urban Runoff Control Project of \$20,000. The money will be used to pay a consultant to develop plans for drainage works at the head of the catchment. Any remaining money could be used to begin implementing the plans. NPWS and BMCC will be involved in the project which will cover both their lands.

Next workdays: Mon. 14 Dec, 18 Jan.

THE DEADLINE
FOR THE NEXT ISSUE OF HUT NEWS IS
FRIDAY 11 DECEMBER

Walking Track Heritage Study

Two important Draft Reports were launched recently: **Blue Mountains Walking Track Heritage Study**, **Draft Historical Report** (prepared by Jim Smith), and **Draft Heritage Assessment and Conservation Guidelines** (prepared by MUSEcape Pty Ltd and David Beaver, Landscape Architect).

The Draft Historical Report is fascinating reading. (Sections have been published in past issues of *Hut News*). It is based on a comprehensive study of the Blue Mountains walking tracks, done over 20 years by Jim Smith. At the launch, guests were shown two photographs of Marlene Jones, the first in 1962 with her parents, the second in 1998 with her daughter Kelly Mirrigan. The photograph was used to demonstrate the significance of Blue Mountains lookouts and walking tracks to many Australian families.

The Draft Heritage Assessment and Conservation Guidelines will influence how well these walking tracks are conserved. Contained in the report is a series of tables which summarise some 350 tracks and give a description of each track and its significance — significant fabric (e.g. dry stone walls, stone steps), historical themes, and historic, aesthetic and social values. One of the most important notations after each track is a rating of conservation priority from 1 to 5, 1 the highest, 5 the lowest. These digits could be altered as a result of public comment and the place where the conservation priority rests will have a significant impact on how much funding and effort is put into conserving that track in the future.

To give a few examples of tracks which have been given a low rating: In North Hazelbrook there are seven tracks listed, every one rating a 3, 4 or 5. The same applies to South Hazelbrook's tracks. Sassafras Gully tracks at Springwood receive similar ratings, as do South Lawson's tracks.

These two draft reports and the Heritage Database forms will be exhibited for public comment until 31 January 1999 at NPWS Heritage Centre, Blackheath, NPWS Parramatta, Katoomba Library and Springwood Library. **We encourage people to read them and make submissions.** Copies of the draft reports may be purchased (\$10 each) from NPWS.

Learning About Insects

On Sunday 6 December, the Kids' Club will meet at Wentworth Falls Lake to **Discover Insects**, and have a Christmas Party. (Details are on page 4).



Jabiluka Update

Public Meeting: Sat. 12 December, Katoomba High School Hall, 7.30 pm.

Dr. Helen Caldicott will speak out on Uranium issues. Chris Doran of Wilderness Society will give us the latest on Jabiluka. There will also be songs.

Further news: The World Heritage Bureau is meeting in Kyoto until 5 December. On the agenda is the decision regarding the listing of Kakadu on the endangered list. People can fax the chairman, Ambassador Koichiro Matsuura, World Heritage Bureau, 0011 33 1 42275081 with a copy to WH Centre Chief, Berndt Van Droste 0011 33 1 456 85570, asking that Kakadu be listed as endangered due to uranium mining.

Annual Weed Sale

Buy a Christmas tree on Saturday 19th December, 8am until noon, at Jewels carpark, Katoomba.

Members of the bushcare groups and CORE will again be joining forces to weed out small radiata pines from reserves and roadsides in the Mountains, and will give them away for a donation.

If you can assist on Friday 18th December to cut trees, or help with your ute or trailer to collect a load, phone Ruth or Lyndal on 4782.1635.

"Hut News", the newsletter of Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc.

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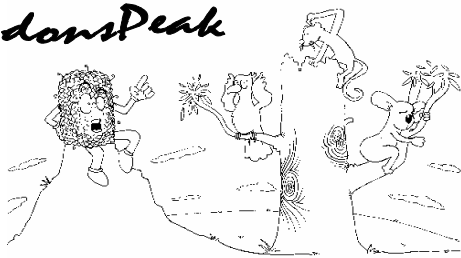
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Not the Councils' Court

Planner Wendy Morris told the Katoomba Planning Charette that it was easier for Councils to defend development refusals in Victoria than in NSW. 'Not true!' said experienced lawyer Jennifer Scott (Liberal), addressing BMCS and other local environment groups.

Whoever is correct, NSW Councils don't win enough refusal cases, under the present system.

'Petrolheads' vs 'Zealots'

As the 'Cars against Public Transport' battle hits congested Mountains towns, Daily Telegraph columnist Miranda Devine has produced a gem.

Miranda wrote that motorists pay for the roads many times over (not true, when you consider the social cost of congestion etc). She referred to those in favour of traffic calming and bus lanes as 'gestapo', 'zealots' or similar.

And she complained that bus travel means sitting next to 'smelly strangers'. (Nobody minds if you peg your nose while using public transport ... honestly!)

Same Old Act

A recent Environment Defenders' Office seminar heard of developers' frequent lawsuits against conservationists.

The current Defamation Law is archaic. It simply helps politicians and other public figures collect windfalls while silencing their critics. It should be replaced by a system of retractions and apologies with no cash damages.

Keep Up the Fun, Jim

Jim McLelland, 83, of Wentworth Falls, announced his retirement as a Sydney Morning Herald columnist last month. The founding Chief Judge of the NSW Land and Environment Court told his readers that he had made 'a few enemies' but had 'lots of fun'.

I'm sure everyone with a role in environment protection would like to reach 83 and be able to say that!

Happy retirement, Jim.

There's Trees and Trees!

Councillor Dick Harris went 'off his brain' after discovering Council workers had removed trees on a Medlow Bath property he owns (Gazette 18/11/98).

Councillor Harris has been a vocal critic of a proposed new Tree Preservation Order supported by BMCS.

— Don Morison.

A Journey to Jabiluka: (Pt.1)

Mataranka, Kakadu, Jabiluka, magic names, but the Jabiluka Blockade was not exactly magic when we arrived there in August this year. By day there were flies, at night, mosquitos. The conditions were primitive but we survived two weeks, not to mention the somewhat gruelling 4000 K trip in an old Nissan Urvan.

It was dusty but exciting as we walked across the site to our induction. This was given by the Mirrar Aboriginal people on whose land we were camping and, more importantly, on whose land the Jabiluka mine was situated.

The Mirrar issued us with passports, their permission to camp within certain guidelines and boundaries. There was to be no drinking or drug usage, no wandering over the boundaries, with one exception, Yvonne Margarula, the Mirrar elder had designated a tree and the area around it as women's space.

The next day we drove the 17Ks to the mine site entrance. Ahead lay the beautiful Ubiri Rock and escarpment, on one side the most magnificent wetlands, home to dozens of varieties of birds, on the other side lay the mine. What an obcenity! The words of Judy Small's song, 'The Futures Exchange' were with me all the time I was there:

And the silver that the men have paid
Who think they own the land
It is the silver of Iscariot
The silver of the damned
It is part of the accounting
For which we all must pay
Trading in our children's futures
For false promises today.

More next time.... — Sabine

Surviving in the Cemeteries

On Sat. 8 November, I was fortunate to attend at Monteagle, near Young, the inaugural meeting of the Grassy White Box Woodland Protected Area Network.

Grassy White Box Woodland once covered around 5 million hectares along the Western Slopes of NSW. Today, a few old cemeteries and narrow travelling stock routes make up the 75 hectares left. The rest has been lost to cropping or greatly modified by livestock grazing.

These tiny remnants contain important stores of plant species and genetic diversity. Beneath scattered trees of White Box (*Eucalyptus albens*) is a profusion of grasses and wildflowers: Kangaroo grass, Poa tussock, buttercups, Donkey orchids, Yam daisies, Chocolate and Fringe lilies.

Drs Kevin Thiele and Suzanne Prober, formerly from CSIRO, have been surveying and researching these tiny remnants for eight years. Dr Thiele stated that when Thomas Mitchell first discovered the woodland in the 1820's, he described it as "park-like". "The fields were gay with wildflowers". These woodlands were "Australia's fields". Most of these woodlands were taken up in the first ten years because of their appeal as "instant farms". Dr Thiele said, "The soft, good basalt soil became known by the graziers as the fat grounds".

These woodlands also contained the

significant staple of the Yam daisy (*Microseris lanceolata*). Accounts by Mitchell and Cunningham in the 1800's recount that Yam daisies were in such profusion that local Aboriginal women were seen harvesting as much as 100 wt (50 kg) of tubers in just two hours work. These species were very sensitive to grazing and now are quite rare.

The formation of the protected area network, plus the appointment by NPWS of a state-wide coordinator, is the beginning of a new era in conservation. The old philosophy has been dominated by the idea of "big National Park management" involving very large acquisitions. NPWS have historically seen the management of small areas as a problem. This new approach is community-based and co-operative, and involves the upgrading of Local Environment Plans and Voluntary Conservation Agreements (VCA).

The Grassy White Box Woodland will be listed as an "endangered ecological community" under Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 (NSW) and a Recovery Plan developed and implemented. The Plan will attempt to acquire the best remnants. Where acquisition is not feasible, VCA's and the Land for Wildlife program will be encouraged. Other initiatives involve Landcare groups and individual landholder goodwill.

The best remnants are Woodstock Cemetery (5ha) near Cowra and Monteagle Cemetery (4.5 ha) near Young. The best time to visit is from early October to see fields of Yam daisies, and early November, to smell the Swiss chocolate fragrance of the Chocolate lilies (*Dichopogon fimbriatus*) and see Donkey orchids (*Diuris* spp.) everywhere. With the good winter rains, this is one of the best seasons for a long time.

—Mark Williams, (Australian Network for Plant Conservation, Sydney Branch)

Gateway to the Wild Dogs

Carlton's "Green Gully" (Pack-saddlers), has been acquired by NPWS. Many bushwalkers will have memories of Carlton's farm and walks from there.

In 1990, my second year in Jim Smith's Outdoor Guides Course, we left Carlton's for a 3-day walk to the Wild Dogs. It was the first time I saw a Kurrajong tree, the first time I saw Glossy Black Cockatoos, feeding on the Casuarinas. Ben Esgate, one of the great Mountain bushmen, came along with us for a way, told us about the Aboriginals, how their pathways were on the western side of the ridge where it is more arid and the vegetation thinner, showed us lots of things. We camped at Mobbs Soak, and next day explored the Wild Dogs: a wander through the "Playground of the Dingoes", lunch at Splendour Rock — and the views!!!

Next day we descended Blue Dog Spur to the Cox. It was very dark and the stars were brilliant when we were only half way up Breakfast Creek with its many creek crossings and stinging nettles. The lights of Carlton's farm were a welcome sight then.. — Christine Davies.

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Looking Back

(From Newsletter No. 15, December 1973: "Walkabout with Graham")

Breeding Behaviour of Birds

This spring and summer we have seen some interesting examples of the breeding behaviour of birds. The Orange Winged Sitella and its nest were described in a previous issue. This small, greyish bird with an orange wing patch, builds a very neat cup nest in the fork of a Eucalypt.

The nest is cleverly disguised on the outside with flakes of bark and appears to be part of the branch. It is lined with grey-green lichen, the eggs are a similar colour, and the young covered with a light grey down, giving a splendid further camouflage when the nest is viewed from above.

In December, in Minnie Ha Ha Falls Reserve, we found such a nest containing three young. It was 50 feet up in a Peppermint Gum, the top branches of which had all been killed in a bushfire. Thus it was completely open to the sky and to the view of any passing crow, currawong or hawk.

It was most interesting to watch the behaviour of the parent birds when feeding the young. Sitellas feed on insects which they gather from under the bark on branches or trunks. They usually land at the top of a branch and work their way down.

A parent would arrive at the next tree from some way off, with an insect in its mouth. It would land on the top of the next branch to the nest, hop down it as if searching for food, poking its beak into crevices and behind bark flakes! Then it flies to the top of the nest branch, repeats the same ritual until it reaches the nest, feeds the young, carries on down the branch, then flies off.

In the Bush

A touch of decadence this month: an unexplained desire to explore the area west to north west of our sandstone region saw boots laid aside and road maps consulted.

The first foray was to Mudgee, said to be the second oldest town west of the Great Divide. It was settled 14 years before Melbourne, both places being planned by surveyor Robert Hoddle.

My return journey from Mudgee was by Rylstone and Kandos on a good scenic road running on the north side of Cudgegong Creek. A subsequent trip was out to Rylstone and back via Glen Alice, Glen Davis and Capertee.

The whole area is a sea of green. Actually the green starts once Victoria Pass is descended. The more the timber has been cleared the more the colour green prevails. When you pause and think, this is a most un-Australian colour and is the result of 150 years of clearing and cultivation.

The experts inform us that the removal of tree cover gives rise to salin-

There seems little doubt that this dummy food gathering behaviour is designed to mislead predators into believing that the Sitella is merely searching for insects in the normal manner. ** Graham Alcorn **

Lyrebirds were Plentiful

(From a letter received in response to an item in a recent edition of *Hut News*.)

".... It took me back to the days when Lyre Birds were plentiful along most creek lines, and in all rainforest.

"Barefoot, with my siblings, we would creep quietly down to near a creek bank — never to crack a stick — where the male bird was singing and dancing on his mound. On one occasion we watched him for two hours. Then, turning to leave the site, we discovered that we were quite close to the female, perched in a low shrub, from where she also was watching the show.

"The Lyre Bird's own natural song is really beautiful to hear: and the Whip Bird is usually his first imitation to follow it — then running on to a repertoire of numerous bird calls....." (Besse Bramsen)

Beauty of the Mountains

On 5 November we walked to The Walls Lookout (near Pearce's Pass), and the wild flowers were stunning. Far too numerous to list, flowers of every colour and every shade together formed a magnificent display, the components of the display constantly changing. At the end, perched on the edge of the cliff, were the purple Prostantheras, and beyond, the majestic sandstone cliffs which tower above the Grose River Valley.

A pair of Brown Falcons soared nearby, searching for food; a Wedge-tailed Eagle soared far across the valley towards the Fortress. One of the walkers read Denis Kevans' poem, "The Beauty of the World". It was an appropriate setting.

— Christine Davies.

ation, soil erosion, and that hoofed grazing changes soil structure and leads to further erosion — that cultivation causes a steady decline in fertility and palliative measures will give us cadmium, boron and aluminium poisoning in the near future. But what can we do? Our population has to be fed. Husbanding resources and practising sustainable production would be unpalatable to our present short term economic thinking and reliance on overseas trade.

But what a churlish and foolish way to enjoy the scene! Switch on the artist's eye and revel in the magnificent architecture and colours of the Wollemi sandstones' western escarpments. They are a perfect backdrop to the cultivated acres of green before them.

With the appropriate angle of the sun comes the famous

The Beauty of the World

I saw the beauty of the world,
The fists of diamonds fall,
Where water jumped the gleaming rock,
High on the mountain wall;
They sparkled in the dazzling sun,
As down the wind they blew,
I saw the beauty of the world,
But all I saw was you.

The honeyeater stretched her tongue
In the fluted crimson flower,
Her painted feathers rippling
In the thirsting midday hour;
She stole her children's honey,
And she sipped the blossom-dew,
I saw the beauty of the world,
But all I saw was you.

I saw you where the waterfall,
In silver tumbled down,
And the moon stood, gazing speechless,
At the long white wedding gown;
Unmarried still she wanders,
But she often comes to view,
I saw the beauty of the world,
But all I saw was you.

I saw a lizard gazing at
The rainbow in the mist,
Her leather lips were waving,
And her tail began to twist;
She capered round the clearing,
And she chanced a step or two,
I saw the beauty of the world,
But all I saw was you.

I caught the pride of lovely blooms,
Whose name was never known,
That jostle with the angry winds,
High on the mountain stone;
I saw in gargoyles mountain rocks,
The star flowers in a queue,
I saw the beauty of the world,
But all I saw was you.

Now walk towards me, singing,
From rocks where music springs,
Where the golden whistler's melody
In idle gladness rings;
Where blooms burst from the rocky
cliffs,
And the falcon streaks the blue,
I saw the beauty of the world,
But all I saw was you.

And when the beauty's vanished,
And in time I taste the dust,
And see the water trickling,
All bright with orange rust;
And my tears are gently shaking,
And my blood has turned to glue,
I will lose the beauty of the world,
But I will still have you.

(Denis Kevans)

Capertee blue haze, so tantalizingly difficult for the artist to reproduce. The eroded and stock-battered banks of the Capertee River provide exciting and colourful compositions as the stream (a trickle) winds its sinuous way along the valley floor.

One would be hard pressed to find more rural charm in any part of Australia.

— The Bunyip.

Welcome to New Members:

Marisa Allen, Hazelbrook
Patricia Warner, Lithgow
Patricia Dive, Lithgow

The Wilderness Advocate

The Colong Foundation's September 1998 edition of The Wilderness Advocate is enclosed with this newsletter.

Coping with Natural Cycles?

Why has there been such a dramatic increase in native bee numbers in the mountains this spring?

An article by Jacqueline McArthur in the Sun-Herald quotes experts from the Apiculture industry to describe how El Nino's effects of drought, unseasonable rain, and irregular flowering of Eucalypts, combined with a plague of bogong moths (which leave behind an odour which prevents the bees collecting nectar), have devastated the State's bee population over the past two years.

If these environmental factors are affecting bees kept for apiculture, they must also affect feral bees which have emanated from that industry. Could it be that the native bees are more able to cope with these natural cycles than the introduced bees, and with a decrease in competition have been able to increase their numbers?

Whatever the reason, native plants of the mountains would benefit from the presence of these hordes of tiny pollinators.

The article concludes ... "the bees are expected to return by late March when keepers predict a bumper crop of Salvation Jane" (Paterson's Curse is flowering now!).

Is the Currawong the Problem?

Last year, when the sparrows gathered at dusk to roost in a tree next door, a currawong found this a convenient place for a regular evening snack, until the sparrows decided to roost elsewhere. Every winter the red berries on the holly bush in the garden of another neighbour provide a feast for currawongs, as well as satin bower birds and others.

This November, mother currawong nested in a nearby pine tree. When I gave food scraps to the chooks she would come and sit politely on the fence and stare at me with big yellow eyes. It was hard to refuse a small handout.

In July, an ABC documentary "Wolves with Wings: The Currawongs of Mosman Bay", examined the domination of the Pied Currawong along the eastern seaboard region, focusing on Mosman Bay.

In the Spring edition of *LiveWIRES*, Kate Cottam & Kay Brooks of the Sydney WIRES Rescue Office discuss this program and tell us that before the arrival of Europeans, food shortages in winter kept the currawong population in check.

"The human presence in Mosman Bay has altered the ecosystem and the natural migratory patterns of the currawong. The introduction of plant species carrying fruit in winter, like privet and lantana, has meant that the shortening winter days no longer act as a sign for migration."

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
DECEMBER					5 Bushwalk	6 Bushcare 6 KidsClub
7 LeisWalk	8 Nursery				12 Bushwalk 12 Jabiluka Rally	
14 Bushcare 14 LeisWalk			17 MC Meet		19 Megalong Party	
JANUARY				25 BushPicnic		3 Bushcare
						17 Bushwalk
18 Bushcare	19 KidsClub	20 Bushwalk			23 MCMMeet 23 Bushwalk	
25 LeisWalk				30 GenMeet		31 Bushwalk

DECEMBER

- 08 (Tue) **Native Plant Nursery, Christmas Party.** 12 noon at Govetts Leap. Bring a plate (with food on it).
- 12 (Sat) **Jabiluka — Public Meeting.** 7.30. Katoomba High School (See page 2).
- 17 (Thu) **Management Committee Meeting.**
- 19 (Sat) **Bushcare Network/BMCS Christmas Party** (see page 1)

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES (Parents are welcome to come along.)

DECEMBER

- 06 (Sun) **Discovering Insects.** Meet 10 am, Wentworth Falls Lake, BBQ area. Bring something to share for a Christmas party. ☎ Jessica 4757.2783.

JANUARY

- 19 (Tues) **A Visit to the Tip** — see a car being crushed! (more next month)

BUSHCARE (Tools provided — bring morning tea and gloves. Contact Blue Mountains City Council to find out about other bushcare groups in your area.)

DECEMBER

- 06 (Sun) **Digger Cooper Reserve Bushcare Group** Meet 9 am at the Reserve. Contact Ross Coster 4759.1247.
- 14 (Mon) **Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group.** Meet 9 am Conservation Hut, Wentworth Falls. Contact Jessica 4757.2783. (following Monday if

wet)

JANUARY

- 03 (Sun) **Digger Cooper Reserve Bushcare Group.** (Details as above)
- 18 (Mon) **Valley of the Waters Bushcare Group.** (Details as above)

BUSHWALKS (Usually day walks — bring lunch and minimum 1 litre water)

Walks have been graded: 1-3 easy; 4-7 medium; 8-10 hard. If coming by train or in need of transport, contact the leader. If you would like to lead a walk or organise an excursion, contact the Bushwalks Co-ordinator, Jim Wallace 4784.3305.

DECEMBER

- 05 (Sat) **Glenbrook Gorge — Rock Hop.** Meet 9.30 NPWS entrance. Contact Jacqueline Reid 4739.8485. Grade M7. (Bring spare shoes.)
- 12 (Sat) **Wilson's Glen, beneath the Mitchell's Ridge Lookout.** Easy walking in the Kanimbla Valley, where we have permission to walk on private property. (There will be hot water available for morning tea, and for lunch under shelter if it is raining) Meet Mount Victoria Station at 9.30 (drive to Kanimbla Valley). Contact Jim Wallace 4784.3305.
- 25 (Fri) **CHRISTMAS DAY. A Bush Picnic.** Phone Meredith (4782.4823) if you are interested.

JANUARY

- 17 (Sun) **Grand Canyon.**
- 20 (Wed) **Empire Pass.**
- 23 (Sat) **Terrace Falls.**
- 31 (Sun) **The Jungle.**

LEISURE WALKS (Usually morning walks — bring a drink and morning tea.

DECEMBER

- 07 (Mon) **Overcliff/Undercliff Walk.** Meet 8.30 Wentworth Falls Station Stockyard carpark. Contact Kees Putting 4759.1958.
- 14 (Mon) **Leisure Walkers Christmas Party.** Lawson Swimming Pool park, from 11 am. Bring a plate. Contact Jan Cutler 4784.3079.

JANUARY

- 25 (Mon) (Leisure Walks Resume — details next month.)

"Winter bearing fruit trees combined with supplements to the currawong diet of high protein food such as steak, cheese, dog food and fruit from well meaning humans have enabled currawong numbers to steadily increase."

The people of Mosman Bay have created a 'Currawong Paradise', with manicured lawns replacing natural scrubby areas and tall trees, and ornamental fruit bearing trees replacing the native trees and shrubs. Increasing numbers of currawongs "form hunting

packs or flocks to intimidate rival hunters.... Perched on the aerials of the Mosman Bay skyline, where once they perched on tree branches, they mark their dominance."

"These bold and resourceful birds are not only forcing the smaller birds, such as silver-eyes and honey-eaters, out of their territory, they are also robbing the nests of baby birds, and tens of thousands of adult birds as well."

So what is the solution to the 'currawong' problem? —Christine Davies.