



"Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow"

**Blue Mountains Conservation Society
Monthly Meeting
SATURDAY, 24 September, 10 am
Mid Mountains Community Centre, Lawson**

WILDLIFE AWARENESS AND PROTECTION

Julia McConnell

We live in a World Heritage Area and value the bush, but how many of us are fully aware of the diverse wildlife that shares our gardens and reserves. Most of these creatures are small, shy, or nocturnal. What protection do they have against the threats caused by human activity?

At our monthly meeting on Saturday 24th September Julia McConnell will speak about Wildlife awareness and protection.

Cats are a major threat to wildlife in our community. Our native wildlife is very vulnerable and government legislation is woefully inadequate. Blue Mountains City Council has responded over the past few years with useful projects such as the Companion Animal Management Plan and Keeping of Animals Policy, dog off leash areas, planned draft wildlife protection areas and some educational initiatives. However, over all there is a lack of legislation and funding for this problem. Powerful lobby groups represent the pet industry, but our wildlife has no voice.

The current legislation – Companion Animals Act 1998 provides almost no restrictions on cats that are legally able to wander 24/7. Our local Council has virtually no power to Act in relation to problem cats and definitely no power whatsoever in relation to wandering cats.

Julia and Bill McConnell are herpetologists and independently licenced wildlife carers who have been involved in wildlife rescue for the past 24 years. Bill and Julia are founding members of the Hawkesbury Herpetological Society and spent more than two decades working for a wildlife group. Julia has been the Treasurer of the NSW Wildlife Council for the past four years. Bill and Julia have lived at Bullaburra since 1984 and provide a free service to the community which is called Reptile Rescue and Education Service. They will respond to all wildlife rescue situations.

The meeting will start at 10 am. Come along at 9.30 for morning tea.

Gold coin donation. Visitors are very welcome.

The Superb Blue-wren is one of the better known visitors to our gardens. Photo by Helen Lambert



Monthly meetings

Our September monthly meeting will be a week earlier than usual because of the October long weekend, and it will be held at the Mid Mountains Community Centre in Lawson.

We have been trying Saturday morning meetings in places other than the Conservation Hut. There is mixed opinion among members of the management committee what is best: Friday night at the Conservation Hut or Saturday morning somewhere else?

Do you have an opinion and would like to help organise our monthly meetings? The position of Meetings Coordinator is vacant.

Contact Tara or Christine if you can help. Contact details are on page 2.

50th Anniversary

On Saturday 29 October Blue Mountains Conservation Society will celebrate its 50th anniversary.

A tree planting ceremony will take place during the afternoon. One of our longer serving members will be invited to plant a tree or shrub in the John Buki Garden, in the grounds of the Conservation Hut. There will also be a birthday cake to share.

This will be followed by a dinner at the Conservation Hut, starting at 6 pm with drinks and nibbles.

The dinner will be for members and their guests and cost will be \$35 per person.

Main course will be a choice of a meat or vegetarian dish. There will be music, songs and good company.

There will be limited numbers so please book early. A booking form is on page 3 of this newsletter, or you can book online on our website: www.bluemountains.org.au

Enquiries to Liz van Reyswoud 4757 2694.

"Hut News", the newsletter of
Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc.
P.O. Box 29, Wentworth Falls, 2782
Phone 4757 1872

Email: bmcs@bluemountains.org.au

Web page: www.bluemountains.org.au

President: Lachlan Garland: 0415 317 078

lachlan.a.garland@bigpond.com

Senior Vice President: Tara Cameron

0419 824 974 taracameron4H@gmail.com

Second Vice President: Don Morison

8230 2116 2vp@bluemountains.org.au

Treasurer: Bart Beech (h)4739 9947

(f)9688 1440 (w)9896 9512

bart.beech@invensys.com

Administration Officer: Rob Baigent

4759 3104 rob.baigent@bigpond.com

CC/Sustainability Officer: Lis Bastian

4787 7533 ebastian@stoplaughing.com.au

Environmental Education Officer:

Gary Humble 4784 1648 0427 841 078

gazhumble@gmail.com

Lithgow Regional Subcommittee Coordinator:

Chris Jonkers 6355 1179

chrisandjulie@active8.net.au

Meetings Secretary: Michael Maack

4751 3623 maack@ozemail.com.au

Membership Secretary: VACANT

Monthly Meeting Convenor: VACANT

National Parks/World Heritage Officer:

Brian Marshall 4784.1148

briannamar@bigpond.com

Plant Nursery Manager: Kevin Bell

ph/fax 4787.6436 kevinbell@eftel.net.au

Publicity Officer: Peter Green

4751 9474 peter@pwgreen.id.au

Website Officer: Alan Page 4784 1704

webmaster@bluemountains.org.au

Bushcare/Threatened Species Officer:

Clive Heywood Barker 0413 577 160

ozbundu@hotmail.com

Gardens of Stone Officer:

Karen McLaughlin 6355 2835

karen.mclaughlin@aussiebroadband.com.au

Project Officer-Food and Environment

Craig Linn craig.csmc@exemail.com.au

Bushfire Representative: Hugh Paterson

4751.2303, mob 0427 512 303

goodbush@pnc.com.au

Walks Convenor: Maurice Kerkham

4739 4942

mauricekerkham@hotmail.com

Landuse Officer: Ann Cantwell

4751 3215, cantwell@eftel.net.au

Newsletter Editor: Christine Davies

4787 7246 hutnews@bluemountains.org.au

HUT NEWS EDITORIALS

The deadline for the next issue of Hut News
is **21 September 2011**

MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES

Lachlan Garland 0415 317 078

membership@bluemountains.org.au

PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782

BUSHCARE GROUP

The Valley of the Waters Bushcare
Group meets second Saturday of each
month, 9am till noon. Tools and gloves are
available. Bring a drink, a snack and a hat.
New members are always welcome. Phone
Karen on 4757 1929.

Nursery News

All Fixed: We are fully operational again following repairs to our glasshouse and the shade-houses at Lawson and Blackheath. In the meantime the plants have been growing happily so we have good stocks of a variety of plants to tempt you. Our Lawson nursery at the corner of Park and Cascade Streets (see a map on the Society web-site) is open Wednesday mornings and, beginning in September, on Saturday mornings as well. At the August Blackheath Market we realised a profit of \$301.50. Come and visit us at this market or the Lawson Markets on the 1st and 3rd Sundays respectively of the month. We continue to offer tubestock and 65mm pots at the bargain price of \$2.50, larger pots from \$4 with some amazing 50cent tubestock specials. Don't miss out!

Featured genus: This month it is *Goodenia* named in honour of Samuel Goodenough (1743-1827), a clergyman and avid botanist. Born in Hampshire, he later attended Christ College, Oxford where he graduated with a B.A. in 1764 and an M.A. in 1767. When the Linnean Society, which is still in existence, was established in 1787, he was one of the framers of the constitution and served as a vice-president on several occasions. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1789 during the Presidency of Sir Joseph Banks. As a clergyman he tutored in classical studies but botany remained a lifelong interest which continued when he became bishop of Carlisle from 1808 until his death in 1827. His studies on the genus *Carex* are regarded as classic. There is a nice little anonymous epithet written after he delivered a sermon to the House of Lords in 1809.

"Tis well enough that Goodenough
Before the Lords should preach
But, sure enough, full bad enough
Are those he had to teach"

Goodenias are herbs or small shrubs with yellow flowers and are distributed widely over all the mainland states except Western Australia. We currently offer two local species, *G. bellidifolia* (the Daisy-leaved Goodenia) and *G. ovata* (the Hop Goodenia). The former is a common small plant with a basal rosette of glossy, green leaves from which a flower stem, up to 30cm long, rises and bears pretty yellow flowers in spring/summer. It makes a good rockery plant and we have it available in 65mm pots for just \$2.50. *G. ovata* is an erect shrub with glossy green, slightly sticky and aromatic oval shaped leaves (hence "ovata" or "egg-shaped"). When the bright yellow flowers appear in the leaf axils in Spring they provide a conspicuous contrast to the leaves. We have this plant in tubes and larger pots. A prostrate form will be available later in the year. Again, later, we will have available another two species, *G. heterophylla* and *G. decurrens* and these will be described when they are ready.

Kevin Bell, Nursery Manager



Volunteers
sell native
plants at
BMCS
stall
at local
market

Coal Seam Gas (CSG) Community Meetings - Very Successful!

Community meetings at Wentworth Falls and Springwood to "Defend Our Water" and stop Coal Seam Gas were extremely well attended and clearly supported by attendees. In Springwood it was standing room only!

The meetings organised by Blue Mountains Conservation Society and Transition Blue Mountains were held at the Conservation Hut on Monday 15th August and at Springwood Neighbourhood Centre on Tuesday 16th August. They were part of a state wide speaking tour by Michael and Julie McNamara from the *Northern Rivers Guardians* group as part of the *Lock the Gate* alliance against CSG. In the words of Michael and Julie the tour is to "focus community attention and concern on coal seam gas mining" and "promote the National Day of Action on coal seam gas mining" to be held on Sunday 16th October, the start of National Water Week. (See separate box on this page)

Michael and Julie's message could not have been clearer. Unbridled CSG represents a direct threat to our water and to the integrity of our food producing land. CSG can irrevocably damage aquifers, pollute water ways and the environment in general, and with its extremely high green house gas footprint needlessly hastens global warming when we have better and cleaner renewable options.

Many in the audience were shocked by the video footage and facts presented, with several expressing their outrage that the industry continues to be allowed at all, let alone that it is continuing to grow with government support. It was also brought home to the audience that this isn't just a rural issue; CSG exploration is commencing in the Putty area and CSG drilling is slated even for the inner urban area of St Peters – as such, no community should feel it's not relevant to them.

Appreciation for Michael and Julie's efforts in bringing these issues to communities around NSW was very clear and at the end of the night the collection bucket for the Lock the Gate alliance was very well filled. The Society's sincere thanks go to all who turned out at the meetings on what were very cold winter weeknights indeed.

Relevant links:

<http://defendourwater.blogspot.com/>

<http://northernriversguardians.org/>

<http://lockthegate.org.au/>

<http://midwesterncommunity.org.au/?i=205>

**The Greater Blue Mountains World
Heritage Experience**
www.worldheritage.org.au



For Your Diary!

Sunday October 16th
**National Day of Action
against Coal Seam Gas**

Key Theme: "Defend our Water"

The Lock the Gate Alliance, of which Blue Mountains Conservation Society is a member, is planning a national day of action in capital cities and regional areas throughout Australia.

Details of local events and participation in the Sydney Rally will be announced over the coming month on the society's web site, via email, and in the October Hut News. Watch for further information, and stand united behind the banner:

"Blue Mountains says NO to CSG"

Blue Mountains Conservation Society 50th Anniversary Celebrations Saturday, 29 October 2011

3.30 pm. Tree Planting Ceremony at the John Buki Gardens, Conservation Hut. All welcome.

6pm Dinner at the Conservation Hut for members and their guests. BYO drinks. A non-alcoholic punch and nibbles will be provided. Main course will be a choice or meat or vegetarian dish. Cakes for dessert (cooked by our wonderful volunteers). Music, songs, good company! Cost \$35 per person.

To book for the dinner please complete the form (below) or go to www.bluemountains.org.au to book online. Numbers limited so please book early.

To: 50th Anniversary Dinner
Blue Mountains Conservation Society
PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls. 2782

I am a member of BMCS and wish to make a reservation for _____ people for the 50th Anniversary Dinner on Saturday 29 October 2011. (Please print)

Name _____

Address _____

_____(Postcode)_____

Cost is \$35 per person

Cheque/money order enclosed \$ _____

Music Hunter Presents:

The Big Gig

In support of

Transition Towns BM

Sat 24th Sept

Mid Mountains Community Hall Lawson

Yummy Food & Drink available

4.30 Coal seam gas mining talk

5.15 Malachi's original songs

6pm Peggy van Zalm Band

8pm Natalie Tomlins

9 till 10pm KOOYEH

Fruit Tree fundraiser: pre-order with your tix & pick up on the day!

Tickets \$20 or \$45 per Family.
Megalong Books, Turning Page,
MMNC Lawson 4759 2592



The Impossible Dream

According to a recent article in The Age, The Housing Industry Association claims that the carbon tax will add \$5-6,000 to the cost of each new dwelling. An annual population growth rate of 300,000, and, say, 3 people per dwelling, creates a requirement for another 100,000 houses per year just to match growth, additional to the backlog. The HIA is thus saying that, at a \$23 / tonne for CO₂ emissions (260 tonnes per dwelling), housing demand consequent to population growth will cause the emission of an additional 26 million tonnes p.a. or, in the next 9 years, 234 million tonnes or 46% more than the 160 million tonnes that the government claims will be saved by its scheme.

This harks back to Copenhagen when the then Minister Wong had the effrontery to advise the world that Australia couldn't be expected to meet greenhouse gas emission targets because we are a rapidly growing population (implying that it was out of the government's control), blithely ignoring the immigration and tax policies that sought and encouraged population growth.

Clearly the government must either markedly reduce net migration to that of previous decades, or abandon the pretence that it can reduce carbon emissions.

Peter Green.

There is a Petition on the back page of this newsletter...

This petition and the following letter were forwarded to the Society by the Nature Conservation Council of NSW (NCC). We can help get the target number of signatures!. Please sign the petition yourself and collect other signatures and send it to NCC (address below) before 30 September.

1 August 2011

G'day!

The NSW Premier has pledged the 'People's Parliament' on Tuesday to bring on urgency motion debates in parliament if 10,000 signatures are gathered on a petition on any issue.

We think it would be great to see a debate on the need to better protect our people and planet from the mining and polluting industries.

To get the ball rolling, we've created the enclosed petition. At the centre of the 'prayer' to the lower house of the NSW government, are these three requests:

Reform legislation to strengthen the protection of our natural heritage, including biodiversity and geodiversity, from extractive and polluting industries.

Identify areas that should be off limits to mining and gas activities, including our valuable agricultural land, bush land, drinking water supplies and underground aquifers.

Reform legislation to protect the health and well-being of local communities from extractive and polluting industries and develop a stronger monitoring and compliance regime for mining and gas activities to protect human health.

We all need these changes to assist our individual campaigns across the state of NSW in the fight against mining, particularly coal and coal seam gas.

We invite you to play a part in getting 10,000 signatures on this important petition. It will be easy if all the groups across the state commit to getting a certain number signed. We've attached two versions of the petition for you to make copies of so you can get started; either is fine to use as long as you copy them exactly as they are.

We encourage your group to speak about why the three asks will help your local campaign and be sure to let people who sign know their signature will help to get a debate happening in parliament.

Please contact Justin McKee justin.mckee@ethicalintegration.com or phone: 0404 824 020 for a copy of the petition if you don't have one and also to confirm how many signatures your group can commit to getting. **Return signed sheets by post to the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, PO Box 137, NEWTOWN NSW 2042 by 30th September 2011.**

We look forward to working together! Thanks for your time,

Carmel Flint, Warrick Jordan, Justin McKee and Bev Smiles.
Nature Conservation Society of NSW

SPRING IS HERE

Sunshine has come to the Mountains recently, and the thrust of Spring, Two Yellow-faced Honeyeaters bathe in our bird bath.

Throughout the dreamy day they sing, Nothing spectacular, no thrushes they, but sprightly, cheerful, burgeoning, Chip chip, chipper, chipper, chipper, chip chip,

I think they have a nest somewhere. Spring is here.

Graham Alcorn, "Romantic and Unashamed Poems", published 1998



Protect the Gardens of Stone

“Say NO to open cut mining!”



Your support is helping to protect the Gardens of Stone

We are thrilled to announce over 1,000 letters calling for the Gardens of Stone region to be protected within a State Conservation Area have been presented to the NSW Premier and the Minister for Environment. These letters also call for Coalpac's destructive consolidation project to be rejected.

Recently the Society received a letter from the NSW Minister for Environment Robyn Parker acknowledging our concerns about the extraction of coal in the Gardens of Stone area and the importance of securing a lasting conservation outcome.

It is important the campaign to protect this precious area continues. We must encourage the Minister to achieve the very best outcome by finishing the job thoroughly!

Over 200 of your letters addressed to our Local Members of Parliament have been presented over the past month. We look forward to receiving more! These help greatly to ensure your local voice is being represented to key decision makers in government.

Some great letters from supporters have been printed in local and state papers. We thank the individuals such as Anne Dillon, Peter Green and Brian Marshall for putting their words forward. We encourage everyone to follow in their lead by writing a very simple letter to your local paper.

The Environmental Assessment Report for the 'Coalpac Consolidation Project' is currently being adequacy tested by the NSW Department of Planning; we therefore expect it to be placed on exhibition for public comment at any time.

We are doing all we can to make sure every piece of important information is available to the Department to ensure proper process. For example, we have called for an independent flora assessment into the Cullen Valley Mine and consolidation proposal area after local botanists identified the existence of a threatened species in one of Coalpac's mining lease areas. Our thanks to Chris Jonkers and Julie Favell from the Lithgow Environment Group for their efforts!

With your support the campaign to protect the Gardens of Stone is moving forward. Every action you take is helping to ensure the best possible option for the long-term protection of biodiversity in the region.

Pagodas under threat identified as 'internationally significant'

With your help, we've been working to oppose the 'Coalpac Consolidation Project' that among other things will threaten the stability of the sandstone formations known as pagodas, if it proceeds.

Pagodas are distinctive sandstone formations that come in two forms, 'smooth' and 'platy'. I was excited to read a scientific paper published recently that outlines the international significance of the platy pagodas we're trying to protect.

The paper highlights that platy pagodas are an *"uncommon and significant geomorphic landscape feature, and are distinguished by the extent and regularity of their ironstone banding"*.

The authors note they are *"not aware of any other rock formations in Australia or overseas that mimic the geomorphology of platy pagodas"* identifying the platy pagodas as significant, even by world standards.

Pagodas are a biodiversity hotspot, offering habitat protection to plant species that may have otherwise become extinct in some cases. A beautiful example is the rare Pagoda Daisy.

Pagodas can be easily ruined. Subsidence from longwall coal mining for example can cause a ground surface drop of up to 1.5 metres; when this happens the pagodas crack which leads to their total or partial collapse.

Parts of the core of pagoda country have been incorporated into areas such as the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage area for example, but the majority remain unprotected.

Justin McKee, Gardens of Stone Campaigner



Photo: Rare Pagoda Daisy on platy pagoda (Karen McLaughlin)

Scientific Research for the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area

Ian Brown, August 2011

The Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute (BMWHI) and the OEH (NPWS) recently co-hosted another in the series of BMWHI Research Forums which aim to bring together researchers, managers and policy makers around critical issues for the conservation of the GBMWA. More than 30 participants spent an afternoon on 2 August 2011 at Blackheath focusing on diverse issues and threats to the future of the GBMWA. Researchers showcased their work on natural and cultural heritage, sustainable development and community engagement. A central role for BMWHI is that of facilitator and convenor: helping to bring together the expertise that can lead to solutions for challenging problems in the GBMWA.

The presentations were all relevant to the Institute's flagship programs of *Coping with Climate Change*, *Healthy Ecosystems and Communities* and *An Effective Buffer Zone*. Cheryle Yin-Lo (BMWHI) launched off, speaking on 'creative arts as a catalyst for environmental stewardship' with reference to her PhD studies and the arts programs of the BMWHI. The rest was science.

Predators.

Not the movie, but Rosalie Chapple (BMWHI) presenting Jack Pascoe's three-year PhD studies into the apex predators of the Blue Mountains, both native and introduced. These include dingoes/wild dogs, quolls, cats, foxes, goannas and large forest owls. Jack looked at their distribution, abundance, diet and activity patterns, teasing out how they interact and affect each other. The three study areas were Big Yango (Yengo NP), Wolgan Valley (Wollemi NP) and Burragorang Valley (several adjoining reserves, and Warragamba Special Area).

Foxes, in particular, are known to have had a big impact on medium sized native mammals, many of which are now extinct. Pascoe's work suggests that dingoes eat fewer of these mammals than foxes do, and they also compete less than foxes with other native predators, notably quolls. He concludes that wild dogs/dingoes play an important role in the WHA in maintaining native ecosystems and wildlife species. This, and previous studies¹, suggest that fox control can benefit quolls and other threatened native mammals such as Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies, while dingoes are a lesser threat and help to suppress fox populations.

Carbon storage.

Floret Parker's Masters of Environmental Management project scoped the potential for carbon storage in the native vegetation communities of the WHA. She reported that the volume of carbon storage in forests increases with ecosystem integrity (another argument for conservation) but warned that maximising carbon storage may risk compromising other key values.

Catchment values. Kym Moore, another Masters student, is studying how the economic value of the World Heritage Area's 'ecosystem service' of supplying clean water might be evaluated (and paid for in hard

management cash?...one might hope). Her work has come up against the abject failure of economics to develop appropriate frameworks for valuing and accounting for such 'externalities' and 'intangibles', but it might be possible at some point in the future.

Bioenergy buffer zones

The GBMWA does not have a formal buffer zone. In many areas antithetical land uses rub directly up against the park boundary. Crelis Rammelt (UNSW/BMWHI) is part of a team that's been looking at how growing trees as a bioenergy crop could be a driver for revegetating parts of the Central Tablelands, and perhaps assist in providing buffer zones to parts of the WHA. In this scoping exercise they not only studied environmental parameters to identify the most likely areas, but also landholder attitudes and what barriers existed to taking up emerging opportunities.

Fire and climate change

We've all heard the dire predictions that human-caused climate change will lead to bigger, hotter fires more often in the GBM. Higher temperatures and no increase in rainfall is a simple equation. It seems that while the large swathes of dry sclerophyll forest might be 'okay', the much smaller areas of wet sclerophyll (tall forests), rainforest, streamside communities, tree-dwelling mammals and other sensitive species (of which there are 'oodles', apparently) will be under more threat.

Kate Hammill (NPWS) has been working to get a handle on how different fire intensities affect different communities. She and colleagues have studied air photos and satellite imagery to map intensities for five major fire seasons in the GBM, from 1993 to 2007. This will be coupled with on-ground analysis (by Clive Heywood-Barker) of plant communities to complete the picture. From such a baseline, and if this arduous work can be continued into the future as fires occur, a comprehensive picture of vegetation changes in response to fire can be developed.

Phytophthora dieback

Introduced *Phytophthora cinnamomi* 'rootrot' fungus is a serious emerging threat to the ecology of the GBM, as it can cause sickness and death in many native plant species. It is largely incurable, although intensive hygiene and fungicide treatment at an infected Wollemi Pine site has reduced the infestation over 8 years.

Michelle Barton (NPWS) has been investigating how to mitigate this threat. The bad news is that of 162 soil samples taken from the GBMWA so far, 45 have proved positive. Most of these are around the main Blue Mountains plateau, which was already known to be seriously infected, but also in some more remote locations such as the Colo River near Bob Turners Track. This is unsurprising since the spores are transported by human activities, on vehicle tyres and footwear. Bushwalkers take note!

¹ Mitchell and Banks, *Austral Ecology* (2005) 30

(Continued on page 7)

Scientific Research for GBMWA

(Continued from page 6)

Michelle suggests the most effective strategy will be to focus on protecting remote areas. NPWS activities have been identified as a key spread risk, because park vehicles travel widely throughout the GBMWA. She is proposing to recommend strict hygiene for park staff, firefighters and contractors. (This would seem to be overdue, since the Botanic Gardens Trust prepared control guidelines for the Sydney Metropolitan CMA in 2008). Hopefully the program will extend to an education campaign for bushwalkers, 4WDers, cyclists and other travellers.

Zoe-Joy Newby (University of Sydney PhD student) has assessed the habitat preferences of *Phytophthora* against environmental parameters across the GBMWA. The aim is to develop a risk model for the region to help target control efforts.

(NOTE: Phytophthora hygiene is relatively easy: clean dirt off vehicles and footwear, and spray with a solution of 70% methylated spirit in 30% water.)

Trip to Wombeyan Caves

During August, 13 Thursday interpretive bushwalkers visited Wombeyan Caves Reserve.

We left my home in Blackheath, next door to the Blue Mountains National Park, drove via Oberon for three hours, and into the Blue Mountains National Park! Our accommodation was in cabins with shared main meals in the camp kitchen.

The surrounds were peaceful, with birds including Eastern and Crimson Rosella, lots of Noisy Miners. It was unusual to see so many male Bower Birds.

On the way back from a walk to an old marble quarry we stopped beside a grassy field where a large mob of Eastern Grey Kangaroos was grazing, and sat there for a long time. The roos got used to our presence and ignored us, grazing, scratching, a small joey running around and back to its mother ... it was magic!

For \$27 (or \$20 concession) we could see three caves—the self-guided Figtree Cave, and two others. The Wombeyan caves are very different to those at Jenolan and far less touristy. I found the Figtree Cave and the guided Wollondilly Cave delightful. In 1904 a trench was dug to enable access between two sections of the Wollondilly Cave. This wouldn't be allowed in these more enlightened times, but it was fascinating to be able to explore this lower section where the formations (in geological times) are younger.

We had the guided tour to ourselves and our guide was great, happy to have people like us who asked lots of questions and were interested in the geology and history. One of the differences between Wombeyan and Jenolan is that lava eruptions at Yerranderie flowed to Wombeyan, not Jenolan. Limestone plus heat makes marble, so marble was quarried at Wombeyan, but there is no marble at Jenolan.

The second guided tour was the Junction Cave, which I didn't do. I'm told it was also good. This cave is a Bent-wing Bat nursery during the summer months, where the females come to give birth and raise their young to independence. Christine Davies.

The Conservation Hut

The Katoomba and District Wildlife Conservation Society (the original name of the BMCS) was formed in 1961, when a group of concerned residents met to determine the action that they could take to help protect the Blue Mountains environment.

The Society rented a derelict tea room at the Valley of the Waters picnic area at Wentworth Falls.

The building, privately erected in 1930, but then owned by the Blue Mountains City Council, was renovated by Society members.

The restored building, subsequently known as the Conservation Hut, was officially re-opened by the Minister for Conservation on 28 July 1963.

The Society operated tea rooms at the Hut during school holidays and at weekends until the Hut was demolished in 1990.

As well as being a venue for light refreshments, the old Hut was used as an information and education centre. Displays were presented on aspects of the Blue Mountains ecology and local conservation issues. The Hut took on a museum type atmosphere with its varied displays.

The Hut was the headquarters for the planning and execution of the environmental protection campaigns waged by the Society in the first three decades of its existence.

Monthly public meetings were held in the Hut, where conservation matters were discussed, and members were addressed by a guest speaker.

The Hut was demolished and replaced in 1993 by the current building.

Bird Walk in the Megalong

I love driving down into the Megalong, with the changing vegetation along the way. First there are the twisted Eucalypts at the top. I was surprised to see that, even in this more sheltered part of Blackheath, trees had fallen during that wild wind storm in early July.

Then there is cool rainforest—Coachwoods with lichen-patterned trunks, and lovely tree ferns. This is where my car slows right down. Sometimes I see a lyre-bird cross the road. On the edge of the rainforest are the tall Mountain Ash, *Eucalyptus oreades*. (*Oreades* in Greek mythology are the nymphs of the mountains.) These trees are so beautiful.

There are different trees again, these ones adapted to granite soil. The valley opens up. There are paddocks with cows and horses and towering above are golden cliffs. It is like being in another world.

Our walk was from the cemetery near the Old Ford Reserve towards the Cox's River. 29 species of bird were seen and heard including a Jacky Winter and a male and female Scarlet Robin. Maned Wood Ducks were in a tree! These birds are common around Blackheath, often grazing on the grass in the streets, but never in trees. Carol told us that this is where they nest.

To cap it all off we had lunch in the Megalong Tea Rooms. A very nice day! Christine Davies.

Hazards for Owls Meredith Brownhill

Recently, when camping at Algebuckina, on the Oodnadatta Track in South Australia, Sue and I heard a Barn Owl at night, which was both pleasing and sad at the same time. I was glad to hear the Owl and know it was present, but I felt sad and troubled about the dead Barn Owl I had found the day before, dead and hanging on barb wire.

As the breeze blew, the owl's good wing lifted and floated in the breeze, the owl looked alive. As I took it off the barb wire, its eyes were surrounded by the softest and finest feathers I have ever seen. Its chest feathers were soft and fine too and I cried, as I thought about the hideous death of this beautiful creature, struggling to get free from the barb, yet each movement of struggle entangling it further. It must have got caught on the wire when swooping down to catch prey in the night.

On Cooper's Creek I saw a beautiful Nankeen Night Heron, dead and hanging on a barb wire fence too, and then I remembered seeing a dead kangaroo hanging upside down with its foot caught on the top strand of barb wire some years ago.

Blue Mountains government agencies built a fence with two strands of barb wire around a swamp in North Katoomba, not so long ago. Wildlife injuries and deaths could, and probably do happen in the Blue Mountains too. In this World Heritage Area with so much wildlife, barb wire is a hazard.

BARB WIRE NEEDS TO BE BANNED

When camping on Cooper's Creek up north, the next owl I heard was when I was awoken by a dingo howling and then the sound of 'woof woof' followed by a differently pitched "woof woof". I listened to the dingo howl and this 'woof woof' sound, and lay in my tent wondering if a whole pack of dingoes were surrounding my tent!

In the morning, Sue said "did you hear the Barking Owl last night?" Thereafter I enjoyed the "woof woofs" as I listened to a female and male Barking Owl calling to each other.



(Photo by Meredith Brownhill)

Missing c. Don Morison 2011

Upon a shaded bushland stair
I see a girl who isn't there
A peal of laughter, glint of hair
How can I say she isn't there?

The air is still, the scrub is dense
The webs unstitch the present tense
The mood of absence is immense
Why is the girl there – in what sense?

The daubed dawn makes my brain unlock
Now teams of searchers lurch in shock
Their nostrils twitch, their sharp ears cock
They test each tree and scour each rock.

Each searcher takes his solemn brief
And sees the girl skip like a thief
And loose her freckled handkerchief
And tremble like the spider's leaf.

She greets each sight with trilling tone
The cliff face carves her face in stone
She smoulders like a burning cone
She bathes in plunge pools quite alone.

Round campfire's coals at close of day
My team of searchers sadly say
Still missing – missing in a way
We hope she never goes away

In my dark mind, blonde memories play
I beg her never go away.

National Parks to be given national status

National Parks Association of NSW CEO, Kevin Evans, has welcomed moves by Federal environment minister Tony Burke to add Commonwealth protection to Australia's national parks.

"Stronger Federal protection for national parks is a groundbreaking move that will ensure the long-term integrity of Australia's most loved natural places and vital habitat for threatened plants and animals," Mr. Evans said. "It will also make sure that politically motivated interference in park protection, including proposals for inappropriate tourism infrastructure, mining, cattle grazing and hunting will be more difficult in the future.

Minister Burke announced that he has written to all states and territories seeking their views on a plan to amend federal laws to better protect national parks.

NPA encourages the NSW government to cooperate with the Federal environment minister on his proposal. "Under the proposed federal law, states will still be in control of setting park boundaries, and there will be no change to existing activities in parks," said Mr. Evans.

Mr. Evans said, "What it does mean is that the protection offered by state laws will be backed up by national law. Our national parks will be truly part of our national heritage, securely protected by all Australians, for all Australians, for all time.

Source: National Parks Association of NSW
<http://www.npansw.org.au/>

Loose Feathers, with Carol Proberts

Early spring is a time of anticipation for birdwatchers. The summer migrants are on their way south and will start arriving soon. In the meantime, the sedentary, or resident, birds are getting a head start on nesting. The elaborate breeding season songs of some of our best songsters are already filling the air as they re-establish territories, and twigs, bark and loose feathers (no pun intended!) suddenly become interesting as birds' hormone levels change and they begin to craft their nests.



Photo: Grey Shrike-thrush (Carol Proberts)

I was reminded that spring is on its way while standing on a mountains railway station recently. A glorious stream of mellow notes coming from a nearby tree transformed the mundane act of waiting for a train into a sublime experience. This was a Grey Shrike-thrush - a drably coloured but bright-eyed bird which is neither shrike nor thrush, but related to the whistlers. For most of the year its call is a short, unremarkable phrase but in spring, it becomes one of the most inspired songsters you'll ever hear.

Another outstanding avian vocalist is the Chestnut-rumped Heathwren, a small shy bird of heathland. In mid-August I heard one during a visit to the pagoda rock formations along Gardiners Gap trail in the Ben Bullen State Forest (the area described in the August Hut News, under threat from mining). The heathwren's clear silvery song contains much mimicry, like a miniature lyrebird, and sounds truly magical as it wafts across the ridgetop in the still morning air.

We've already seen some early arrivals of migrants this year, like the Channel-billed Cuckoo which comes down from New Guinea to breed in our area. Some of the other long distance travellers to keep an eye out for in coming weeks include the Sacred Kingfisher, Koel, Olive-backed Oriole, Rufous Fantail, Black-faced Monarch, Satin and Leaden Flycatchers and the Dollarbird.

Not all birds are preparing to nest. The mature male lyrebirds have finished displaying and moulted their tail feathers. For a period of time they have no tail whatsoever. When this happens they become considerably shyer, as if ashamed of their sudden lack of splendour. At this time the immature males take over the display mounds, practising their song and dance routine. The adult males will re-grow their tails over a period of about 12 weeks. Meanwhile, any females who are breeding this year will already have an egg or chick in the nest.

For most birds, the next few months are the crucial ones when the business of nesting and raising offspring takes place. An exciting time for birds and birdwatchers alike!

Carol Proberts origma@westnet.com.au

Membership Application Form

(Use capitals please—even for email address)

Name(s) 1.
2.
3.

Address:
.....PC

Phone(s)

Email

MEMBERSHIP FEES (please circle one item)

Single \$30 Concession (Senior/Student)\$20
Household \$35 Concession (Senior/Student)\$25
Corporate (open to negotiation) \$100

Bushwalkers only:
(\$20 per walker per annum) \$.....

Donation (tax-deductible) \$.....

Send my copy of Hut News by
Please tick box mail internet only

TOTAL AMOUNT INCLUDED \$.....

Note: All fees include GST at the relevant rate.

Would you like to be involved in any of the following activities or working groups? (Please underline): Land use/development issues; Environmental Education; Threatened species issues; Web or database management; Plant nursery assistance; Bushcare; Publicity/photography; Water quality/sourcing studies; Society administration.

I/We agree to support the aims and objectives of the Society as set out on reverse side of this membership application:

Please sign if named above.

Signature(s) 1.
2.
3.

ENQUIRIES: Phone (02 4757 1872)
Email: membership@bluemountains.org.au

Please cut out and forward this form with your cheque or money order to:
Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc.
PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls NSW 2782

Eco Homes Tour

Saturday 15th October

Visit some of the most fascinating 'green' homes in the Upper Blue Mountains
Straw, earth, active solar systems and more!
Look, listen, learn - discover how others have done it. Be inspired!

A fun and informative bus tour led by
ECodesign Architect Nigel Bell.

Limited places available.

Book: <http://www.ecohomestour.com.au>

All proceeds go to Katoomba Public and High Schools environmental programs.

BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Blue Mountains Conservation Society is a community organisation working to achieve the preservation and regeneration of the natural environment of the Greater Blue Mountains.

The Society believes that World Heritage status provides an opportunity for local community members to become custodians of the unique biodiversity and scenery of the Blue Mountains.

The Mission of the Society is to help conserve the natural environment of the Blue Mountains.

The Aims and Objectives of the Society are to:

- Disseminate and foster an understanding of the ideals of Conservation.
- Promote the need for ecological sustainability.
- Protect the natural environment—flora, fauna, habitat, water, land and air.
- Actively oppose those human activities which degrade or destroy the natural environment.
- Repair the adverse effects of human activities upon the environment.
- Encourage the love of the natural environment by conducting a regular program of bushwalks.
- Increase the pool of expert knowledge about the natural environment, through meetings, excursions, research and other activities.
- Provide information to the public on matters of Conservation, especially through the Conservation Hut at the Valley of the Waters, Wentworth Falls.
- Maintain close and friendly relations with like-minded groups.

Welcome to new members

Carole Lethbridge, Wentworth Falls

Bill Burke, Katoomba

Maria Vandersman, Katoomba

BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY

'Like' us on Facebook: Blue
Mountains Conservation Society
Follow us on Twitter: bmcnsnw

Down the Wallaby Track — a backward glance, with John Low OF STRANGE BEASTS AND ROARING IN THE NIGHT

When soldiers from the 4th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, set out on a cross-country training march from Ingleburn to Katoomba in early October 1953 they were issued with weapons and ammunition and warned of a strange animal recently seen by timber cutters in the bush between Warragamba Dam and Katoomba. The Army's own investigators had found a series of large paw prints in the vicinity of Mt Harris and Erskine Gap that could, the press was told, "have been those of an animal the size of a large lion."

Giant dog and cat-like beasts (often these characteristics blended within the one animal) make up a common motif in the folklore of the Blue Mountains region, finding expression most recently in sightings of the 'black panther'. In 1912 bushwalking pioneers Myles Dunphy and Bert Gallop found two carcasses on the Six Foot Track they took to be dingoes but, on closer inspection, appeared much larger and their feet and lower legs to be feline. Two years later in the region of Long Swamp Dunphy encountered a live specimen, a large "sandy, lion-like animal" that fled "with great bounds". Closer to the present, in 1995, ex-military participants in a survival training course awoke to "an horrendous scream" in the bush near Glenbrook. They spotted what they took to be a dark coloured dog but, when it bounded off (leaving behind a 6 inch paw print), they were surprised how agile and cat-like it became.

Sometimes seen, such beasts are more often heard, particularly and more frighteningly, at night. Bernard O'Reilly of Long Swamp wrote of "a fearsome night sound" that invoked an "unreasoning terror". His brother Herb heard the beast while checking his traps ("a series of horrible coughing grunts, not unlike those of a lion, but far greater in volume") and a century later the ranger David Noble, of Wollemi Pine fame, had a similar experience near the Kowmung ("a cross between a tiger's roar and a pack of hyenas"). At Sodwells, just west of the Mountains, mothers were reported to have kept their children "home from school on many occasions on account of the alarming roaring heard at night in the district".

Though reports are not usually couched in supernatural terms, a sense of something malevolent and other-worldly occasionally intrudes, inviting comparison with the bogey-beasts of British folklore stalking hapless travellers in the form of spectral dogs. O'Reilly wrote of his monster as "a beast of darkness which came from the caverns deep down in the heart of the mountains and returned there before dawn". Ranger Noble's sounds were "sinister" and the creature encountered by the 1995 survivalists tracked them throughout the following day, "its green eyes flashing" and its unsettling presence felt during their final night in the bush.

Whatever the explanation for these strange encounters - ferals, escapees, ancient marsupials - it is surely wonderful and reassuring to know that the Blue Mountains is still wild and mysterious enough to produce them.

John Low (johnlow@iprimus.com.au)

Reference: For those interested, a recent book, "Australian Big Cats: An Unnatural History of Panthers" by Michael Williams & Rebecca Lang (2010) assembles numerous reports, including those I've mentioned, and assesses them in relation to the recent 'panther' phenomenon. The Blue Mountains City Library has a copy available for loan.

BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY BUSHWALKING ACTIVITIES

Membership of the bushwalking group is open to Society members. The BMCS Bushwalking Guide which explains the numbered grades can be found on the Society's website www.bluemountains.org.au or can be posted on request. For more information call Maurice Kerkham 4739 4942 email mauricekerkham@hotmail.com or write to PO Box 29, Wentworth Falls 2782. **Late changes to the program will be published on the website.**

SATURDAY WALKS: Usually a full day longer walk at a faster pace. Before attending ring the designated contact person or the Group Co-ordinator Jim Percy 4758 6009 or email jp34@tpg.com.au

- Sep 17 **Magic Point – Kamarah.** Varied Walk. Off-track, Great Views. Some scrambling. **Bring** Protective clothing – 1.5lt water. Contact **Hugh** 4757 3145 after 8pm or 0423 309 854. Party limit: 8 Book in as early as possible. Ring leader for time. 4.5km Grade 3. Map **Mt Wilson**
- Sep 24 **Mt Twiss with a twist.** Contact **Bill** 4758 8545. Meet Linden Observatory Glossop Street 8am. 14 + km, mostly on track. Grade 3. Map Springwood.
- Oct 1 **Jinki Ridge to Jungaburra.** Some off-track. Spectacular views. Some exposed climbing. Bring Protective clothing – 1.5lt water. **Emanuel** 47571090 after 7pm. Meet Mt Victoria Railway car park 8.00am. Car shuffle required. 5.5km. Grade 3-4. Map Mount Wilson.
- Oct 8 **Faulconbridge Point.** Leader Bob 4757 2694. Meet 8.30 Faulconbridge Station carpark. Distance 12 km, Grade 2. Map Springwood

MONDAY LEISURE WALKS: Short Day walks of 3-5 hours, suitable for walkers of an average fitness. Bring morning tea and lunch and adequate water. The Group Co-ordinator is Judith Dyer, 4758 6310, judithbushwalker@hotmail.com

- Sep 12 **City walk. Rail to River walk, Chatswood.** Surprising walk through bush and beside creeks. Meet Central Station 9.30. Heather 4739 1493. Grade 2.
- Sep 19 **Bus Trip, Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens.** Book and pay Keith 4736 1010 \$12 p.p. Contact Christine 4757 2864. Grade 2.
- Sep 26 **The Amphitheatre, Hazelbrook.** 4th attempt! Meet Hazelbrook Station 9am. Contact Ken 0423 40 200. Grade 2.
- Oct 3 **Fortress Ridge.** Stunning views of Grose Valley. Meet Leura Station car park 9.30. Car Share. Contact Phil 4787 5560. Grade 2
- Oct 10 **Rocket Point, Tablelands lookout and NEW cave !** Meet Wentworth Falls Car park 9.30. Contact Kate 47591943. Grade 2
- Oct 17 **New city walk in Lavender Bay and option of climbing bridge pylon.** Meet Central Station 9.30. Contact Ros 4733 3880. Grade 1/2

THURSDAY PLEASURE WALKS: Walks of 2-3 hours conducted at a leisurely pace to suit walkers on the day. Bring morning tea, adequate water and lunch if noted. Group Co-ordinator is Gail Schwedler 4782 1215 platypusprotected@yahoo.com.au

- Sept 8 **Katoomba Cascades to Silver Mist.** Cascades and clifftop walk with wonderful views. Meet Katoomba Station car park 9.30 am. Contact Joan c/- 4782 1215. Grade 2.
- Sept 15 **Nepean River Walk.** Easy walk around the river. Lunch at O'Donohue's Pub. Meet Emu Plains station south side 9.45 am. Contact Barrie 4782 9235. Grade 1.
- Sept 22 **Silver Mist to Solitary Restaurant.** Clifftop walk with many lookouts. Meet Katoomba Station car park 9.30 am. Contact Joan c/- 4782 1215. Grade 2.
- Sept 29 **Conservation Hut to Den Fenella.** Descent through varied vegetation habitat overlooking Jamison valley. Meet Stockyard Carpark, Wentworth Falls 9.45 am. Contact Marie 4787 1257. Grade 2.
- Oct 6 **Evans Crown.** Walk through bush to spectacular boulder formations. Rock climbing. Meet Mt Vic Station 9.45 am. Car pool. Petrol contribution required. Lunch Tarana Pub or BYO. Contact Barrie 4782 9235. Grade 2/3.
- Oct 13 **Nature Trail, Wentworth Falls.** Interesting level terrain at first. Lots of steps back to the Hut. Meet Stockyard Car park, Wentworth Falls Station, 9.30 am. Contact Chris 4757 2864. Grade 2.

Yatra for elders...

A yatra ('pilgrimage') is a day of mindful silent walking and meditation. Diana Levy initiated these walks in 2010, and has led two so far. The elders yatra is very gentle, the walk 2 to 3 hours long. We will also do tai chi with teacher Donald Elniff. The silent walk in a beautiful valley will give you an idea of what is meant by 'Gardens of Stone'.

When: Sunday October 9, from 9am to approx. 3pm, **register by September 31.**

Meeting place: 9 am, Lithgow station. **Cost:** \$20 to cover basic expenses + dana (gift)

Contact: Diana Levy by Oct 14, (02) 4751-3935, .0432619305, diana.r.levy@gmail.com

Yatra for youngsters...

A longer day of mindful walking, seated meditation and swimming. Cost and contact as before.

When: Saturday Oct22, from 8am to approx. 4pm., **register by October 14.**

Meeting place: Linden railway station carpark 8am.

Mountain Retreat

I talked to a currawong
this morning
his golden eye
on mine
In the crisp quiet
we exchanged
soft sounds

Mist lifting
on ancient
lichen covered trees
damp footsteps
silenced on leaf mould

The only sound
the endless chatter
and song
of birds.

Rosemary Lewis,
27/5/85