



# STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978 No. 57 June 1992

## OUR URBAN ENVIRONMENT - THE STATE OF PLAY

The goal of the environment movement is different to that of many organisations because our objectives are primarily long term. We are concerned about how the world will look and function in 100 and 1,000 years time and beyond. The goals of most of our commercial and political leaders are very short term by comparison. Politicians generally look no further ahead than the next election or two & not many businesses will sacrifice short term profits for profits many years on. Not many businesses have a corporate plan looking more than 5 or 10 years ahead.

These factors bring the environment movement into sharp conflict with much of the community and explain the bewildered reaction from many who simply cannot comprehend our behaviour. It is convenient for some, of course, to impute political and subversive motives. This resolves their bewilderment by allowing them to give us a label that they can understand and feel comfortable with. They can then extend their rationalisation by blaming us for the ills of the world such as unemployment or poor economic growth. We all love to have a scapegoat.

As the people come closer to understanding the environmental imperatives, however, and join the clamour for change there is more and more real progress being made. The past ten years have brought changes in attitudes which can only be described as revolutionary. But the war isn't won yet, there is still a front line where idealism battles with greed, where the rights of future generations are trampled in a rush to short term profit. In this context we review below the state of things in and around Ku-ring-gai with a few examples.

### THE BAD NEWS

#### Urban Development

The State Government has absolutely no vision for what Sydney should look like in 50 or 100 years. There is no policy covering the most important factor of population growth and our planners are stumbling around making decisions on the run. Environmentalists had a report on western air quality released and a western land release was cancelled, environmentalists have drawn attention to the desperate state of the Hawkesbury-Nepean river system and the government reacts.

Without having any idea of what population they are planning for, successive State Governments have embraced urban consolidation. This sounds like a wonderful idea until you realise that it is a fruitless, hopeless and irresponsible exercise if it is simply to lead to consolidated urban sprawl as our population climbs inexorably. We will see our lifestyle in Ku-ring-gai downgraded by dual occupancy and medium density without seeing any benefit. The sprawl will take longer to come but come it will.

#### Mona Vale Road

The strip from St Ives to Terry Hills is one of the last bushland ridges draining into Port Jackson and has National Park on both sides. We think that future generations would appreciate having this left in as close as possible to its natural state - a bushland parkway to provide relief from urbanisation. The Government disagrees and thinks that its a good place for a bus depot and sand and gravel outlet.

#### Urban Freeways

There is a wealth of evidence that urban freeways do nothing to relieve peak hour congestion while there is ample evidence that they degrade the quality of life for many. There is plenty of evidence that good public transport is the best way of supplementing the road system to provide a total optimum solution to our congestion problems. In the absence of a workable population policy for Sydney it is undisputed that a freeway such as the proposed F-2 will provide the mechanism for rapid population growth which will ensure that the road creates more traffic than it can handle. Yet our Government is determined to build the F-2 & retain the F-3 corridor from Pearce's Corner to Ryde.

Continued next page.....

## THE GOOD NEWS

### Recycling

Sydney has very few years of landfill capacity left unless new tracts of pristine bushland are to be appropriated as tips. The Government and the Councils seem to be recognising this, however, and recycling activity is growing. Ku-ring-gai is now introducing weekly pickups for recyclables.

### Bushland Management

All councils in our area have developed bushland management capabilities which they didn't have 10 years ago. There are programmes such as Ku-ring-gai's Bushcare which is harnessing the energies of 500 volunteers. There is a TAFE course in bushland management and research being done. The future looks good.

### The Water Board

Very few expected the monolithic uncaring MWS&DB to transform itself into the caring and sensitive Water Board. That is an overstatement but there are great improvements in performance and attitudes. For instance there is an ongoing programme of bush regeneration along the Lane Cove river which aims to repair the damage done by the sewer mains. The regenerators are doing a very good job and the river is losing the dense weed fringe which has made it so unattractive for so long.

### Total Catchment Management

The TCM and Landcare programmes are having an effect throughout the State. These will be slow to develop a real impact in the cities but nevertheless have great potential for long term results.

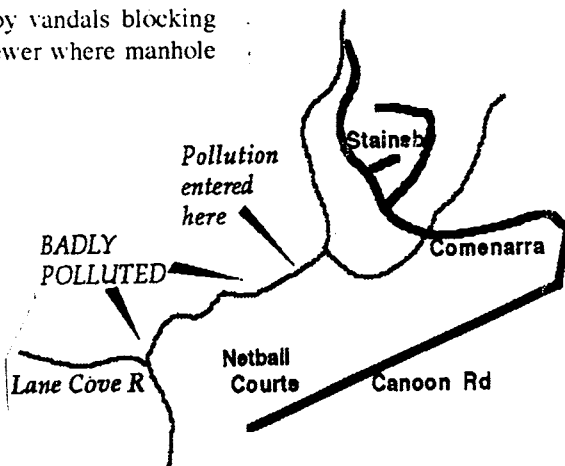
### POLLUTION IN LANE COVE RIVER

On the weekend of April 11th sewage overflowed into a creek downstream from the Comenarra Parkway and caused extensive pollution of the creek and the Lane Cove River. This was reported on the ABC news bulletins on April 15th.

It was caused by vandals blocking with stones a sewer where manhole

covers had been dislodged by previous storms. The pollution, while serious, was localised and the Water Board acted promptly to rectify it.

STEP inspected the site and has written to the Water Board advocating that the manholes be made more vandal proof.



### MANY BUSHWALK

Our April bushwalk was well attended with over 70 starters. Thanks to Fred and Yvonne Langshaw. We hope to arrange our spring bushwalk to learn something our reptiles, frogs and birds. **Watch this space.**

### NEWSLETTER NEWS

The editor is often helped mightily by articles from Darrel Larkins and John Martyn. If anyone else has something of interest please write it up and send it in!

We would also like to hear if there are some types of subjects you would like to hear more about.

This newsletter is a little late and there are more things to say so the next one may follow in July.

### THE UTS, LINDFIELD - Access Road to Lady Game Drive.

In the last newsletter we reported on our response to the University's Review of Environmental Factors. Since then we have had meetings with the UTS, the residents' representative, and the Lane Cove River Trust. We believe that the Trust has now made a recommendation to the Minister which points to various deficiencies in the REF and recommending that the road not be approved as now proposed.

# SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE FISH FAUNA OF THE UPPER LANE COVE RIVER SYSTEM by John Martyn

In gathering data for the field and bushwalk guide to be produced by STEP, I have walked many of the creeks in the upper Lane Cove Valley (which total at least 35 km in length) and have a reasonably comprehensive picture of the fish fauna and water quality. The conditions are not as good as one would like, there is low-level sewage contamination and intermittent stormwater pollution in most creeks, but conditions are far from terminal. This may be a testimony to the resilience of Australia's aquatic fauna, which, before white man arrived, had to survive low oxygen levels due to drought, temperature extremes, and floods, and may be well adapted to face the rigours of sewage and stormwater pollution. Thus we may be luckier than we deserve.

## Four Natives

So far four native fish species have been identified with reasonable confidence, and two others are probably also present in the river system. The four are *Galaxias maculatus* (Jollytail, Native Minnow, or Native Trout), *Gobiomorphus coxii* (Cox's Gudgeon), *Retropinna semoni* (Smelt) and *Anguilla reinhardtii* (Long-Finned Eel). According to John Paxton of the Australian Museum both species of eel (Short-Finned Eel *Anguilla australis* as well) should be present, and the Flathead Gudgeon (*Philypnodon grandiceps*) has also been reported. Introduced species include Mosquito Fish, and Koi or Goldfish (Avondale Dam). Large goldfish occur above the weir in the Lane Cove River Park.

The best place to see the most native species is the main Lane Cove River upstream of Devlins Creek. The optimum time is summer and autumn during a long dry spell when there is clear water and good light. Jollytail or native trout are easy to spot because they are active midwater to surface fish. They swim alone or in two's and

three's in the larger pools, and they also hover motionless near the bottom in the current in the manner of a trout. They are about 10 to 15 cms long, and slender, looking a bit like a garfish without a beak. In autumn and winter they breed in estuaries, laying their eggs on grassy banks on a spring tide. The eggs hatch on the next spring tide 2 weeks later. The fish has an amazing global distribution including populations in W.A. and Lord Howe Island, New Zealand, Chile, Argentina, and the Falklands.

You will need to look harder to see smelt. They are a small, slender, almost translucent fish, only about 4 to 8 cms long, and they swim a bit deeper than Jollytail. They are very active and congregate in small schools. Do not confuse them with the introduced Mosquitofish, common in Devlins Creek.

## Plenty of Gudgeon

Gudgeon are widespread; most if not all specimens seen appear to be the Cox's variety. They prefer stony pools with large boulders and plenty of cover. They can exceed 10 cms in length and are a robust little fish with conspicuous pectoral fins sticking out at a high angle from the body. They are light brownish-grey to sandy coloured with four or five irregular, faint, darker blotches or speckled patches on the back, and a dark, irregular, longitudinal band the full length of the flank. Because they are bottom-dwellers, and generally lie still, they are easily missed unless disturbed. They seem to disappear in late Autumn, but in fact just tend to hide more under boulders and banks. According to Gerald R. Allen's book *The Freshwater Fishes of Australia* they have been observed out of water climbing wet surfaces of dams and waterfalls, and so it is no surprise to find them in streams such as Boy Scouts Creek well upstream of several waterfalls and rapids. This mobility may explain their disappearance from many smaller tributaries in

recent years. Presumably they are capable of returning

You may see eels almost anywhere at any time since they also can travel across wet surfaces out of water, but Devlins Creek with its large pools is probably the best place, despite its often cloudy water. (Duckys Waterholes in Devlins Creek is the best place to see Long-Necked Tortoises).

## Feral Threat

The threat of introduced fish species to the native fish is hard to evaluate. Mosquitofish (*Gambusia affinis*), which are livebearers, compete for food and eat fish eggs and fry, and are potentially a threat to gudgeon and smelt which breed in the local creeks. Jollytail and eels breed in salt water and so are not as vulnerable. So far Mosquitofish have only been seen in Devlins Creek, the tributary below Avondale Dam, and the main Lane Cove River downstream from Devlins. Goldfish and/or Koi are sometimes reported in the larger pools such as Browns Waterhole, and are present in Avondale Dam. Since they prefer still or sluggish water they are not a threat in the upper catchment.

## How to Find Them

If you want to know what fish live under the rocks in your local creek, take a lightly weighted handline of very light line, a tiny long-shanked hook with the barb filed off or flattened, and some worms from the garden or compost heap. Find a rocky pool with holes and rock ledges, and drop your bait in close to cover. If you catch anything return it quickly to the water unless you can't identify it, in which case you should freeze it and take it to the Australian Museum. If you hook an eel you will be in for a lively time. Please contact John Martyn of the STEP Committee (488 8339) if you catch anything interesting. Good Fishing!

.....See back page drawings.....

## BIG WET IN WILDFLOWER COUNTRY

John Martyn

Western Australia's 1992 wildflower season will be exceptional in many areas, and anyone who is contemplating a holiday trip to see them, or who has promised themselves that they will go one day, should definitely try and make it this year.

Vast areas in the Murchison,

Goldfields, and Wheatbelt districts have experienced record and near-record autumn rainfall. Pastoral, mining, exploration, and tourist activities have been brought to a virtual standstill for long periods by severe thunderstorms and widespread general rain which recurred through most of March and early April. The areas most affected are those which feature spectacular displays of ephemeral flowers such as everlasting daisies, and the

countryside should be a vast sea of white, yellow, orange, and pink with patches of mauve and blue.

Late August is the peak for the ephemerals, but the amazingly prolific and varied sandplain shrub flora of the Wheatbelt fringes should continue the spectacle well into October.

*Dr John Martyn is a STEP committee member who spends a lot of time in WA*

### President

John Burke  
116 Browns Rd  
Wahroonga, 487 3680

### Secretary

Sue Jones  
40 Howson Ave  
Turramurra, 449 4718

### Treasurer

Bruno Krockenberger  
47 Bowen Ave  
Turramurra, 449 1985

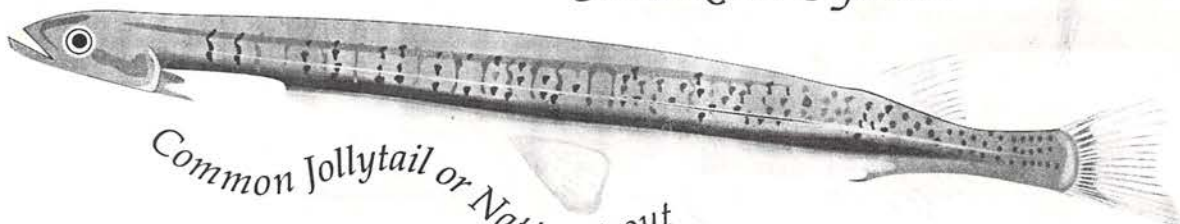
**SENDER;** STEP Inc.  
PO Box 697  
TURRAMURRA, 2074

Financial to July 92      4  
PHIL HELMORE & HELEN WORTHAM  
19 VERNON ST  
TURRAMURRA 2074

*Cox's Gudgeon*



*Two native freshwater fish of the Lane Cove River System*



*Common Jollytail or Native Trout*