



STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No 68, 28/9/ 1994

COMING EVENTS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - The Annual General Meeting will be held at 7.30 pm on Thursday, 13th October, 1994, at the St. Andrew's Uniting Church Hall, Vernon St., South Turrumurra. The agenda will consist of the President's report, the Treasurer's report and the election of the Committee for the next year.

ILLUSTRATED TALK by Dr. Alex Ritchie, of the Australian Museum, about one of the most exciting Fossil Discoveries, at Canowindra, NSW. The talk will start at 8.00 pm, after the AGM, and at the same venue. Try to be on time for the AGM, to secure your seat for the talk, so that you won't miss any part of Dr. Ritchie's presentation.

BUSHWALKS GUIDE - This is now likely to be launched on the first weekend in December. Finishing this guide off for publication has been a mammoth job for John Martyn, and has taken a little longer than first anticipated. But it will be worth the wait.



PUTTING CATS IN THEIR PLACE

Jennifer Schwarz reports:

On 31/7/94, a seminar on cats and their place in Australia was held at the Australian Museum.

Very different points-of-view were expressed by the various speakers and by members of the audience.

Vincent Serventy was chairman, and in his opening remarks said that he hoped the day's proceedings would lead to the formation of a policy for the control of cats. This proved to be a vain hope.

Cats play a very important social role. Advocating control does NOT mean eradication (an impossible task, anyway). It DOES mean trying to ensure that cats are OWNED and cared for responsibly.

Responsible ownership implies control, and is better for the cats and for our diminishing native animals. Given a chance, cats do kill birds, possums, lizards and so on, especially if left to roam between dusk and dawn.

FERAL CATS

Truly feral cats are unlikely to be found in towns and suburbs. They live absolutely independently of people and have probably been in Australia for five hundred years. 60% of their diet consists of rabbits. Cats in turn are preyed on by dingoes. Feral cats spread toxoplasmosis, which can be fatal to marsupials. Dr. George Mackay, of Macquarie University believes they may be genetically quite distinct from domestic cats and recruitment from the domestic cat population is at this stage unlikely.

DOMESTIC CATS

are fully owned and looked after, if they are desexed, vaccinated and kept confined at night. They should have minimal effect on wildlife, and should be happy and healthy. "SECONDARILY WILD" CATS are the most likely to blame for wildlife predation. These include the urban and suburban strays, and most farm cats. They cause a nuisance, fight, become ill and

spread disease. They depend on us for their existence, at least indirectly. Humans provide shelter, leave food out for pets, have rubbish bins and garbage tips, which attract rats and mice and generally contribute to the support of strays. And, of course we create the strays by allowing our cats to have kittens, which may be neglected or even dumped in the bush, thus adding to the secondarily wild population. That is not to deny that some people also rescue strays and turn them into well cared for pets. Each group of cats poses different problems. Garrique Pergl, who is Manager of Conservation and Recreation at Sherbrook Shire Council, told us of their strategies for control of domestic cats to protect the lyrebird.

Cats must be registered, identified, desexed and confined at night, and must not cause a nuisance to neighbours.

After initial concerns from owners, these measures are now generally supported.

Straying cats may be impounded and their owners fined (a last resort only).

Despite their apparent success, similar measures have not been taken up by other Councils.

Feral cats need further investigation and must be treated as part of the overall feral animal problem.

"Wild" cats are the highest priority for urban and suburban wildlife.

Interdependence

Again, they cannot be looked at in isolation; foxes and rabbits are interlinked with cats. Cats and foxes prey on rabbits. If you remove one predator, another will take its place. If you remove rabbits, but not cats and foxes, then cats and foxes will kill more native species.

But cats pose more particular problems, they are not only very efficient predators, but they also hunt in trees and they kill for the sake of killing, rather than purely for food.

Their control is essential for the survival of our native fauna.

The Contrary View

At this point in the seminar a few very vocal people in the audience reacted strongly to any mention of "controlling" cats. In their view any suggestion of control implied hatred of cats and the wish to eradicate them.

Mrs. Mathilde Kearney-Kibble, of the Animal Welfare League took a more moderate approach, but was ignored, and the seminar faltered.

What is your view?

Do you want wrens nesting in your garden? Do you want blue-tongue lizards eating your snails? Do you want bandicoots foraging for grubs? Possums to survive, and maybe koalas making a comeback? Even if you know the difference between the insect-eating marsupial mouse and the ordinary house mouse, a cat will not differentiate between them.

Cats make wonderful pets, but the challenge is to keep them in their place!



1994 SPRING

BUSHWALK

John Martyn reports:

The 1994 spring bushwalk was probably the poorest attended of any in recent times (only 14), which is a real pity, because the weather was great, the wildflowers plentiful, if not spectacular, and the route was a fascinating one.

Perhaps coinciding with Fathers Day had something to do with it, and we will try to avoid such a clash in future.

Nevertheless, it was good to see those who did come along.

If you missed out, perhaps you would like to try the walk by yourself sometime. Take the STEP map, walk down the firetrail from the Canoon Rd. car park to the Lane Cove River, walk upstream a short distance, cross and follow Devlin's Creek past Whale Rock to Day Rd. Picnic Area. From there cross Byles Creek and turn right, following a narrow steep track up to the pylon. You can then return along the ridgetop to the Lane Cove River. The walk is about 5 km long and takes about 3 hours at a leisurely pace.

The walk is fully described in the forthcoming Field Guide, which is now scheduled to be launched in early December.

The first part of the walk down from the car park and along Devlin's Creek followed the northwest edge of the big fire. This year is not the best one to see the floral results of that fire. Next year should be better. Blue Sun Orchids (*Thelymitra ixioides*) were plentiful near the start, but more on the unburnt side. The best wildflowers were in the section from Byles Creek up to the pylon and in places back along the ridgetop. *Phebalium dentatum* was in full flower in moist sheltered sites. Also very showy were three species of Grevillea, especially the scarlet *G. speciosa*, and the Grey Spider Flower (*G. buxifolia*). *Leucopogon ericoides* growing along the return descent of the

firetrail from the ridgetop, epitomises the Australian bush, with contrasting massed soft white flowers among needle leaves. Specimens of three rare or threatened species were seen on the ridgetop, Scaly Bark (*Eucalyptus squamosa*), *Darwinia biflora* and Black-eyed Susan (*Tetradlea glandulosa*). The Pennant Hills ridgetop is ripe for a bushfire. The last big one was in 1976 and the scrub is very rank and thick. It will be a danger spot if the weather maintains its present pattern. It is so dry that the Lane Cove River and Devlins Creek have almost ceased to flow, the latter being just a chain of pools, and also the clearest it has been for ages.



THE ROLE OF NATIVE FAUNA IN THE FIRE REGIME

Talking about the risk of bushfire in the Pennant Hills ridgetop area acts as a reminder of our longterm project to pursue potential reintroduction of native fauna to the Lane Cove valley, and the coincidental attempts by Dr. John Wamsley to launch an Earth Sanctuary in NSW.

John Wamsley has always maintained that the presence of a viable population of native grazing fauna in the bush, as it might have been 200 years ago, reduces the undergrowth fuel available for wildfire. It would therefore be very beneficial to suburban Sydney in addition to its intrinsic value as wildlife.

It's an encouraging thought, and an incentive to pursue our project.

ENVIRONMENT IN CRISIS

STEP is a member of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, and recently participated in a conference organised by the NCC entitled "Environment in Crisis".

The conference was attended by hundreds of delegates from all the member organisations throughout NSW, and dealt with all the environmental concerns in this State.

24 different topics were discussed in a series of workshops set up for that purpose.

The topics were:

- 1 Sustainable agriculture, & landcare
- 2 Rivers, lakes & water management
- 3 Ocean and marine
- 4 Climate change, ozone depletion
- 5 Biodiversity & endangered species
- 6 Coastal issues
- 7 Forests and woodlands
- 8 Wetlands
- 9 Land tenure, Crown land etc
- 10 Native land & environment issues
- 11 National parks & other reserves
- 12 Adequacy for conservation of NPs
- 13 Urban bushland
- 14 Wilderness
- 15 Transport & landuse planning
- 16 Fire management & bushfires
- 17 Introduced animals and plants
- 18 Hazardous and toxic chemicals
- 19 Waste minimisation
- 20 Mining & extractive industries
- 21 Environmental education
- 22 Environmental Protection Auth.
- 23 Local Government
- 24 Planning & Environmental Impact Assessments.

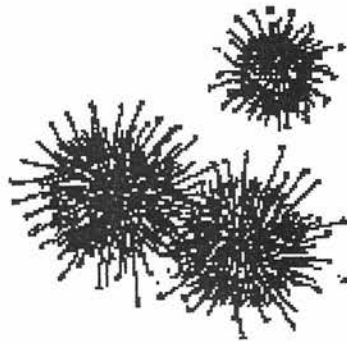


The purpose of all discussion was to identify clearly all the matters which were of major concern to the environmentally conscious community. Each workshop was given the task of distilling its deliberations into a few action

points, which were then considered by the plenary session. It was decided earlier that only items which received 95% plus support from the plenary session would be included in the summary statement, and only 5 points were to be included for each topic.

The discussions were very lively indeed, but due to the rules having been set the outcomes were disciplined and sidetracks were cut off relatively quickly.

Since the conference, the NCC has published the results in the form of a summary and with a view to allow the environment movement to use this summary in lobbying the candidates at the next State election in March, 1995.



Of the 24 topics the ones of interest in our urban environment produced the following action points:

Urban Bushland

- * Recognise the intrinsic value of remnant bushland.
- * Protect all remnant urban bushland from loss, destruction and development, through legislation and provision of adequate funds and resources.
- * Ensure ecologically sound management of all remnant urban bushland, to rectify past and prevent future degradation, through legislation and provision of adequate funds and resources.
- * Incorporate an ecologically sound approach to fire management as part of overall bushland management.

Transport and Landuse

- * Enhance and expand public transport statewide, particularly rail
- * Impose a moratorium on all

activity related to the M2, M5 extension, Warringah expressway, Pacific motorway, Liverpool/Hornsby link, North-east Gosford by-pass, and inquire into conduct related to these and other road initiatives; restructure the RTA to remove its influence on planning; and facilitate integrated transport and landuse planning.

- * Integrate consideration of real and total road costs into transport planning, restore legal aid to community groups, commit government to reducing - not just monitoring - air pollution, noise impacts and damage to bushland and wetlands, and institute transport and demand management strategies.

- * Give major priority to low and zero emitters in transport planning

- * Maximise use of existing rail infrastructure.

Fire Management

- * Provide training in ecological principles and environmental assessment throughout the bushfire brigades, with particular emphasis on fire control officers

- * Ensure that all Section 41A plans are reviewed by a competent ecological authority, to review all plans' prescriptions with regard to the necessity for implementing them, and their ecological impact
- * Impose on local government, planning and building controls for fire protection within subdivisions
- * Reject the principle of broad acre prescribed burns as a control measure in wilderness areas.

Introduced Animals & Plants

- * Enforce ecologically based controls on the introduction of new plant and animal species

- * Legislate to set priorities for feral animal control and ensure that ecologically based weed and feral animal controls are in place by end of 1996

- * Establish well-funded community education programmes highlighting ecological problems associated with weeds and feral animals, by end of 1995.

Copy of the booklet is held by the Committee.

Dr. ALEX RITCHIE

of the

Australian Museum

will present an

ILLUSTRATED TALK

at St Andrews Hall,
cnr. Vernon and Chisholm streets,
South Turrumurra

Thursday 13th October at 8 pm (after the AGM)

SENDER: STEP Inc
PO Box 697
Turrumurra 2074

CANOWINDRA, NSW

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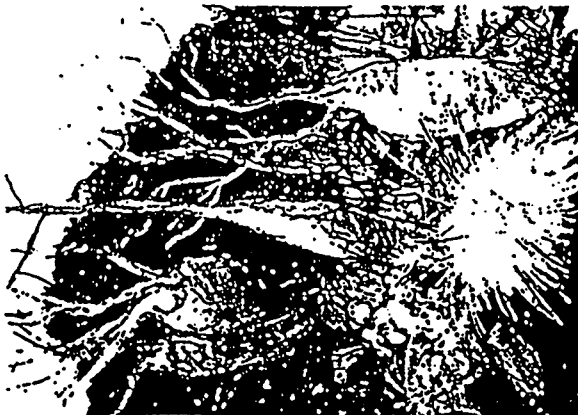


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PHIL HELMORE & HELEN WORTHAM
19 VERNON ST
TURRAMURRA 2074



Ku-ring-gai Art Centre
Recreation Avenue, Roseville



*takes pleasure in inviting you to
the opening of*

**"A Brush with the Bush
and Magic Moments"**

*an exhibition of paintings by
Yvonne Langshaw*

*Official opening by Sue Sleggall B.Art
on Friday 7th October, 1994 at 7pm*

*The exhibition will be open on
Saturday, 8th October from 10am to 5pm
Sunday, 9th October from 10am to 5pm
and the following weekdays
from 9am to 4.30pm*

The exhibition closes on 20th October

Admission is free and everyone is welcome

**THE ART CENTRE WILL BE OPEN
FOR SPRING TERM ENROLMENTS
THROUGHOUT THE WEEKEND**

President Bruno Krockenberger
47 Bowen Ave.,
Turrumurra 4491985

Secretary Judy Meacham
37 Balmaringa Ave.,
Turrumurra 4492843