

# STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No. 98 Sept. 1999

## COMING EVENTS

**Spring Bushwalk** to the Cascades in Middle Harbour Creek.

STEP and Australian Plants Society are joining in this bushwalk, which will be led by Bill Jones, on **Sunday, 10th October, 1999.**

We will meet at the **Acron Oval** car park in Acron Rd., St. Ives (near Douglas St.) at **12.45 pm** for a 1.00 pm start.

The walk will take approximately **4 hrs.** and is classified as a **medium** walk as far as difficulty is concerned and involves creek crossings and a short, steep climb out.

The walk will take us on the **Lower Cambourne, Bare Creek and Cascades Tracks**, an area which is well known for wildflowers and is also a regular area for birdwatchers.

The Cascades area was a popular swimming and camping spot in the late 1920's. A sandstone wall was built in 1929 to dam the creek to create a deep pool for swimming. Only remnants of this wall can be seen today since it was washed away in the intervening time.

Bring adequate footwear, your hat and your binoculars (if you are inclined to watch birds), and bring your own refreshments to sustain you over the four hours.

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**STEP Annual General Meeting** - Our guest speaker for the Annual General Meeting will be NPWS Field Officer **Brendan Neilly.**

The AGM will be held on Wednesday, 20th October, 1999, at St. Andrews Uniting Church Hall, at the corner of Vernon and Chisholm Sts., South Turramurra.

The formal part of the meeting will comprise the President's and Treasurer's reports and election of officers. As usual this will be kept as short as possible, or as long as the members require it to be, and will then be followed by the guest speaker and concluded with tea and biscuits for further informal discussion.

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**Community Fair** - Ku-ring-gai Council will again hold the Community Fair on **7th November, 1999**, at Bicentennial Park as in past years. Keep your eyes open for further details before the event. STEP will be there again, and we will have copies of the new "Guide to Bird Habitats in NSW", recently published by the NSW Bird Atlasers Inc., for sale.

## Council Elections

Local government elections are now behind us, the Councillors elected in Ku-ring-gai being:

Wahroonga ward - Ted Roach and  
Ian Cross (both  
Independents)

St. Ives ward - Tony Hall and  
Laura Bennett (both  
Ku-ring-gai Preservation Trust)

Gordon ward - Bruce Coleman and  
Graeme Anderson  
(both KPT)

Roseville ward - Andrew Little and  
Elise Keays (both  
KPT)

Comenarra ward - Elaine Malicki  
(Ind) and  
Ian de Vulder  
(KPT)

Cr. Tony Hall has been subsequently

elected as Mayor, with his St. Ives ward colleague, Laura Bennett, as Deputy Mayor, at Council's first post-election meeting.



STEP congratulates all elected Councillors and trusts, with the rest of the community, that the new Council will work harmoniously for the good of the residents of Ku-ring-gai.

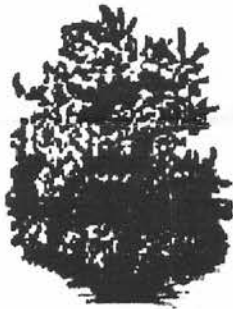
The election results were a strong endorsement for the candidates fielded by the Ku-ring-gai Preservation Trust Inc., and now places an enormous responsibility on Mayor Tony Hall to lead his team of six freshman Councillors to achieve the best possible outcome, not only in respect of the residential strategy, but in all aspects of good governance of the municipality. In its election materials the KPT emphasised its independence from vested development interests, and promised to enhance resident control. This platform appears to be based on the strong reaction from a section of the community to the previous Council's performance on the residential strategy. The community's expectations

places a heavy onus on the new Council to achieve a better outcome under very difficult political circumstances. The State Government obviously sees little political benefit in granting Ku-ring-gai special status or exemption from SEPP 53.

We trust that Council will act wisely in its deliberations on the residential strategy.

It would be ironic in the extreme if Council's approach to the residential strategy resulted in SEPP 53 being imposed on Ku-ring-gai.

Whatever strategy the new Council devises for its dealings with the State Government, we would hope that it would include a reminder that unless a limit is placed on metropolitan population the nature of the whole metropolitan area will eventually be changed to that of a mega-slum like Mexico City.



#### STEP Committee

One of the items of business at the AGM will be the election of the Committee.

Michelle Leishman regrets that she will be unable to stand for the Presidency again for the coming year, due to the imminent birth of her second child.

This leaves the presidency open, we have not had any candidates for the position, and we would welcome nominations from members.

Michelle has agreed to stand as a committee member, as have all other current members of the committee. In particular, Hugh Roberts has agreed to stand for Secretary/Treasurer again, and since he has done an outstanding job, we cannot imagine anyone challenging him for that post.



#### Pam Morse Grant

No applications were received for this year's grant for students and the funds will therefore accumulate until next year, when it will again be offered.

A report was received from the second of last year's grantees, and we publish it here for readers' information:

#### SPATIAL PATTERNS IN HERBIVORY ON *Acacia suaveolens* and *A. terminalis* at KU-RING-GAI CHASE AND ROYAL NATIONAL PARKS.

by Emilie Warner, School of Biological Sciences, Sydney University)

Herbivory (feeding on plant material) alters plant survival, growth and competitive ability and can therefore lead to changes in the distribution and abundance of plant species in natural populations.

The intensity of herbivory experienced by plants can vary in space and time due to factors such as site productivity, plant resistance to herbivory and seasonal variation in herbivore densities.

Australian Eucalypt forests are recognised as areas of high herbivory.

*Acacia suaveolens* (sweet-scented wattle) and *Acacia terminalis* (sunshine wattle) co-occur in open woodland habitats and are common in the Sydney region.

This study aimed to document levels of herbivore damage to leaf tissue for *A. suaveolens* and *A. terminalis* and to compare herbivory levels over both large and small spatial scales.

Plants were sampled for herbivore

damage (missing leaf tissue) at two sites in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park and two sites in Royal National Park.

For *A. suaveolens* estimates of herbivore damage were generally less than 30% loss of leaf tissue and were significantly different at the two sites at Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. For *A. terminalis*, estimates of herbivory ranged from 0-80% and were similar across all four sites. Two positions on each plant were also sampled to identify within-plant patterns in herbivory. The position of the leaves on the plant was found to have a significant effect on the level of herbivory experienced for *A. suaveolens*, however no such patterns were detected on *A. terminalis*.

This study identified for both large and small-scale spatial variation in herbivory levels. It is clear that the animals causing damage to the plants were chewing invertebrates (e.g. caterpillars), however, further investigation into herbivore populations would be useful for understanding the processes causing spatial variability in herbivory. The levels of herbivory and spatial patterns documented in this study provide a basis for further study into temporal patterns in herbivory. Such study would provide insights into the long-term effects of herbivory events, such as insect outbreaks, on plant populations. *Acknowledgements: Many thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Glenda Wardle, to STEP Inc. (through the Pam Morse Bequest Fund) for assistance in funding this work, and to National Parks and Wildlife Service.*



### Pied Currawongs

STEP recently hosted a talk by Dr. Richard Major, Research Scientist at the Australian Museum, on the effect of Pied Currawongs on urban birds.

Many people are aware of Richard's work through his appearance on television shows, including Burke's Backyard (Nine Network) and Wildscreen - Wolves with Wings (ABC Television).

The interaction between Pied Currawongs and other urban bird species is a fascinating urban ecology story, and one that is thought to be a major cause of the decline of small native birds. The fruits of exotic plant species such as camphor laurels and privets provide abundant food for Currawongs in autumn and winter, resulting in increased numbers of Currawongs. However, Currawongs also eat eggs and nestlings of other birds, in fact a breeding pair of Currawongs has recently been estimated to capture up to 2000 g of birds while raising one brood of its own. Before Richard began this research project, little was known of the relative importance of Currawongs as nest predators compared with other birds.



To carry out this research, Richard and his colleagues at the Museum enlisted the help of 2000 volunteers around Australia. Each volunteer placed an artificial nest (carefully constructed to mimic a willie wagtail nest) containing two artificial eggs made from modelling clay in their garden for up to 2 weeks. The beauty of using artificial eggs was that they recorded the beak or teeth imprints of the egg predators, allowing identification of the predator to be determined later.

The research showed that large birds were the dominant predator of the artificial eggs (49% of total predation), while rats, possums and cats accounted for only about 5%. Direct observations (where the volunteers saw the egg predation happening) showed that Currawongs were indeed the dominant predator of eggs, accounting for over 50% of observed predation.



Gardens with lots of tall trees and where Kookaburras were fed also had higher levels of egg predation by Currawongs.

So Currawongs do seem to be a major culprit in the decline of small native birds.

What lessons can be learned from this? Reducing the Currawong population by killing individual birds seems a very drastic step, and in isolation is unlikely to achieve much. The story of Pied Currawongs is an urban story, linked with the availability of fruits from exotic species and loss of habitat and protective cover for small birds.

Perhaps the best solution is to put our efforts into controlling exotic plant species and keeping our gardens more 'bushlike' and messy - thus providing protection and cover for small birds and the many other small animals of the bush.

So think carefully next time before you get out the clippers and whipper-snipper to do a bit of tidying up around the garden! Try planting some more native shrubs instead!

*Further Reading: Major, R.E., 1996 Australian Journal of Ecology 21, 399-409. Wood, K.A., 1998 Emu 98, 157-170.*

### Canoon Rd. Draft Plan of Management

Ku-ring-gai Council has prepared a new Draft Plan of Management for the Canoon Rd. Recreation Reserve. It is currently on exhibition at Council Chambers and at Libraries until 15th October, 1999. A public hearing/meeting will be held at Council Chambers on 14th October at 7.00 pm. To allow Council to prepare for the number of attendees it is necessary to call and advise of intention to attend (Guy Paroissien 9424 0946). Written submissions will be accepted until 29th October, 1999.

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### Wilderness 2000

The Colong Foundation for Wilderness, in conjunction with the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, the National Parks Association and the Total Environment Centre is undertaking the Wilderness 2000 campaign with the aim of securing further old growth forest in National Parks to bring the total high conservation value old growth forest to 2 million Ha by the year 2000.

The areas targeted comprise a total of 450,000 Ha in 13 different locations throughout the State. These areas are within the total areas being assessed for wilderness inclusion over the next few months. The reason for the Colong Foundation's urgency on this campaign is the process by which the assessment is proceeding. The State Government proposes to complete its Regional Forest Agreements before completing the Wilderness assessments.

Some of the areas to be assessed for wilderness are also within the scope of the Regional Forest Agreement assessment.

Tom Widdup from the Colong Foundation recently addressed a small gathering of STEP members to convey the message about the wilderness campaign.

He showed a series of slides of the location and the nature of the subject areas.

The Colong Foundation is calling for a completely transparent assessment process in both cases with the wilderness assessment preceding the RFA assessment to identify wilderness values before areas are set aside for forestry. The current approach would be putting the cart before the horse, and we might find the best wilderness values given over to logging quotas in an irreversible process involving Federal funding agreements. The campaign suggests that letters from conservation-minded individuals to the Premier and to the Minister for the Environment would help to persuade the State Government to adopt a more logical sequence in the assessment process. Letters could cover the following three points:

- \* Wilderness in native forests should be determined before the logging approvals are finalised.
- \* The wilderness assessments for these native forests should be publicly released as soon as possible, before the RFA's are determined, and not buried on the Minister's desk.
- \* These areas are the last undisturbed refuges for native plants and animals and must be kept free from logging, development and pollution. Letters should be addressed to:  
The Hon. Bob Carr,  
Premier of NSW,  
Level 40, Governor Macquarie Tower, 1 Farrer Pl., Sydney 2000.  
and  
The Hon Bob Debus,  
Minister for the Environment,  
Level 19, Roden Cutler House,  
24 Campbell St., Sydney 2000.



### **Mona Vale Rd. Corridor**

The land on either side of Mona Vale Rd. forms a vital fauna and flora link between Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park and Garigal National Park. Currently approximately 89 acres of this land, crown land which was previously ceded to the Metropolitan



Aboriginal Land Council, is being offered for sale for development purposes.

Negotiations between the State Government and the Land Council for a land swap to preserve this corridor have apparently broken down.

Two public meetings have been organised by Andrew Humpherson, MP for Davidson, to pressure the Government and the Land Council to resume negotiation.

The bushland along the Mona Vale Rd. corridor is of great significance in maintaining the integrity and the value of the adjacent National Parks. Ku-ring-gai residents and conservation groups, including STEP Inc., have been fighting a long battle against development of any of this land for many years.

The auction was originally set for 14th September, but has been postponed for a few weeks leaving an opportunity to lobby the Government for action, to work out a scheme by which the financial aspirations of the Land Council can be met without sacrificing this vital bushland link.

Further information can be obtained from Andrew Humpherson's office (9451 3822) and letters to Mr. Carr and to Mr. Debus should call for this land to be incorporated into the two National Parks.

### **Bird Habitats**

The Bird Atlassers of NSW Inc. recently published "A Guide to Bird Habitats in NSW, a 155 page paperback with over 200 photographs of habitats from throughout NSW, including three from South Turrumurra. To find suitable sites, typical of specific habitats, the photographers travelled over 6000 km.

Although the book is designed for bird atlassers, it serves a much broader application for educational purposes.

It is userfriendly, easily carried in the field and will stand up to wear and tear.

The authors are R.M.Cooper and I.A.W.McAllan.

Ian McAllan is a STEP member of long standing, who lives in South Turrumurra, born and bred and educated here and at Macquarie University.

Ian is now a freelance ecologist, who has undertaken work for State Forests, Taronga Zoo, The Australian Museum, the Victorian Museum as well as surveys for Lane Cove and Willoughby Councils. He is recognised as a leading researcher in his field.

STEP member Dariel Larkins has recently accepted the secretaryship of the Bird Atlassers, who are well advanced in the preparation of a Bird Atlas of NSW.

The Guide has a recommended retail price of \$32, receipts from it being used to contribute to offsetting the cost of publishing the Bird Atlas. The habitat guide is full of information, and worth every penny.

