



# STEP INC.

Community Based Environmental Conservation since 1978

P.O. Box 697 Turrumurra 2074

## NEWSLETTER

No 54, November 1991

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM was held on the 26th Sept & those not able to attend missed a great talk by Jocelyn Howell co-author of Taken for Granted. She gave a most lucid description of the vegetation of the Sydney region & discussion of management issues.

### STEP COMMITTEE

The committee for the next year sees the departure of Yvonne Langshaw after many years service (see the President's Report) & the election of Neroli Lock.

The committee is John Burke, Sue Jones, Bruno Krockenberger, Hal Cogger, Bob Cross, Glenn Johnson, Neroli Lock, John Martyn, Judy Meacham, Geoff Suggate & Helen Wortham.

### W.A. WILDFLOWERS

As promised in the last newsletter John Martyn will be giving a talk on the wildflowers of Western Australia. John has travelled extensively in WA for twenty years or so & has a great understanding of the country & some excellent slides. Join us at 8pm on Thursday 7th Nov at St Andrews Hall, cnr Vernon & Chisholm Sts Turrumurra.

### Twin Creeks Bushwalk

The bushwalk led by John Martyn

on 13th Oct was good value. About 50 people turned up. We would like to hear from any member who has a favourite walk which we could include on our agenda for next year.

### COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Ku-ring-gai has ten aldermen. Of the eight positive endorsements made by STEP in our last newsletter five were elected. There is not one rabid anti-conservationist left on Council. This is of enormous importance to us.

We congratulate all those elected & especially the new aldermen. Being in power isn't always easy, however, & we hope that our endorsed candidates are able to maintain the humility & the purity of purpose necessary to let them focus on the issues rather than on one another.

### St IVES FREEWAY RELEASE

The freeway corridor through bushland from Killeaton Street, St Ives to Belrose has been released. This corridor was largely in the Davidson State Recreation Area bushland & crossed Middle Harbour Creek near The Cascades & then followed Frenchs Creek. The State Government is to be congratulated on this far sighted action as are those who lobbied for it.

### THE BROADWAY

The last Council approved the preparation of a Local Environmental Plan for development of housing along the south eastern section of the Broadway at Wahroonga. The proposal involves a joint venture between Council & the Government as both own part of the affected land.

The sites have their boundaries on the Lane Cove Valley Freeway corridor & are on the top of a ridge over bushland. If the freeway is ever built the sites will be subject to probably more noise than the F-3 produces on the other side of Wahroonga.

If, on the other hand, the the freeway is not built then we shall have another ridgetop development where the bushland will threaten the homes through fire & the homes will, in turn, degrade the bush through nutrient runoff & firebreak clearing.

STEP has made a submission in response to the LEP.

### SPRING BIRDS IN KU-RING-GAI

*Here is another of Dariel Larkins' articles on birds around the area.*

There were some interesting responses to the winter bird notes in this Newsletter. Several people reported Rose Robins visiting their gardens. The rose robin is an unobtrusive but attractive little

bird, the male slaty-grey above with a rose breast, the female brownish grey with whitish wing bars. In winter Rose robins move from rainforest & other dense forest habitat into open forest, & this explains their seasonal appearance in local gardens edging bushland.

A Wonga Pigeon was reported from Lucinda Ave. Wahroonga. The call of this pigeon is one of the haunting sounds of the Australian bush but is best heard from a distance, as at close range its persistent 'wonking' may not be appreciated! This 'wonking' is a male advertising call & may be repeated over 200 times. In contrast, the female has little to say. In general Sydney sandstone flora does not attract Wonga Pigeons. Records of them from Wahroonga, together with Satin Bowerbirds & occasional Green-winged Pigeons, result from thicker vegetation on good soil an in shady gullies & creeks.

During the winter, while looking for owls at the head of the Lane Cove Valley, Ian McAllan & I disturbed a Scaly Thrush in dense undergrowth. We were as surprised as the thrush at this encounter, because as far as we know this is the first record of the Scaly Thrush in the Valley. The Scaly Thrush is a litter feeder, & the unusual influx of these birds into the Sydney region last autumn & winter was probably due to the drought.

Spine-tailed Swifts returned from Siberia in October & may be seen hawking after flying insects, often on a hot afternoon when a storm is building up, alternatively gliding & stroking with a few quick wingbeats. Flocks vary in size from a few birds to many thousands. A mass of swifts preparing for migration is a remarkable sight, with birds at all levels from just above the trees to heights where they are barely visible, & probably higher still beyond the range of sight.

Newsletter No 47 reported Bill Lane's Grey Butcherbird, banded in Pennant Hills Park on 12 June, 1972, as then an immature bird. Nowadays we describe an immature bird as being one year old. A number of residents in South Turramurra now claim this bird as their own since it regularly visits their gardens.

Some fears were held for its safety after the January storm but happily 'Butch' survived & was positively identified in Canoon Rd in April. Evidently hatched in the 1971 season 'Butch' is now 20 years old.

### BUSHFIRES

The bushfires in mid October with the terrible loss of life & property have thrown doubt on the hazard reduction work done by councils & property owners. The minister for Police & Emergency Services, Mr Pickering went on the 7.30 Report on Oct 16th to blame the "greenies" for not allowing hazard reduction burns. This presumably means us & it is therefore worthwhile to have a look at the position in Ku-ring-gai.

STEP, KuBES & Council's Bushland Management Working Party all support the policy contained in Council's SEPP 19 Plan of Management which in Section 5.4 states that the priorities are the protection of firstly human life & then property & then the environmental integrity of the bushland. This has been the position of STEP since 1978.

We suspect that the position is similar in Baulkham Hills & that Mr Pickering's comments are therefore irresponsible.

In Ku-ring-gai Council has crews clearing fuel by hand behind properties throughout the year. Every year it also draws up a program for control burning & has it approved by the relevant fire authority. This program identifies

the most urgent areas for hazard reduction.

It often occurs, however, that bad weather prevents the program from being completed & that areas have to be held over to the next year.

### Environmental Concerns

Of course there have been many matters to be resolved regarding procedures for control burning in bushland. Questions such as the optimum frequency & temperature of control burns have been discussed. Any burning regime which kills plants before they have time to set seed will lead to local extinctions & temperatures which are not hot enough to stimulate or release the seeds will inhibit germination.

It has also been necessary to develop techniques of control burning which minimise physical disturbance of the bush.

There is still a lot to be learnt about fire behaviour & the ecological consequences of different fire regimes. Research is continually being carried out, however, & management measures adapted accordingly.

### The STEP Method

Years ago STEP realised that hazard reduction was a matter of reducing the available fuel & that burning was only one way of doing that. It therefore developed a method of selective hand clearing whereby councils or homeowners could reduce fuel loads.

It involves removing excessive leaf litter & other fine fuel & shrubs. This is done intensively near properties & progressively decreases so that it merges with the bush at an appropriate distance from property. It should be carried out under the supervision of someone who has an understanding of bush ecology & regeneration.

This method is very useful to control fuel buildup between control burns. Anyone wanting a copy of Helen Petersen's paper on this please ring.

### What We Should All Do

Those of us who live near bushland have a responsibility to ensure that we have done whatever we can to reduce hazards. Unfortunately planners have allowed us to build our suburbs on fire prone ridgetops & are still doing so.

The precautions that should be taken are mentioned in the brochures put out by the Bushfire Council & local councils. They involve keeping gutters clean, removing fuel from near houses etc. Many people with pools keep a petrol or diesel pump & hose.

For advice on these matters you should consult Council.

### The Risk

While bushfires carry real risks for property & life we are fortunate in this area to have an excellent volunteer brigade & the losses in Ku-ring-gai to date have been small. Let's hope that vigilance, good practices & the fire fighters can keep it that way.

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### TWIN CREEKS FISH

*Committee member John Martyn has provided us with the following report in his series on fish in our waterways.*

Recent observations suggest that reduction & disappearance of native fish in Twin Creeks Reserve may not be totally due to pollution. Gudgeon, & even galaxias can be found concentrated in deeper, sheltered pools which are protected by large boulders or overhangs. 15 fish ranging from 3 to 10 cm were counted in a pool about 300 m downstream from Browns Field, while none could be found in the

more open stretches, even under stones.

One probable explanation is that sheltered pools have provided protection from the frequent savage floods of the past three years. Also these locations tend to lie downstream from small rapids or cascades which would oxygenate the water, moderating the effects of pollution. Fish in less protected sites would have been swept into these holes, or washed downstream out of the area altogether. Nonetheless there has still been a dramatic overall reduction in fish numbers in recent years, particularly in the upper reaches of the creeks, & pollution from sewage leaks, stormwater, & swimming pools is still likely to have been a major cause.

*John has been in touch with Dr Frank Burroughs of the Ecology Department at Macquarie University. His students have carried out ecology field exercises in the Lane Cove Valley, including Twin Creeks, & were surprised by the large number of aquatic species they encountered. Apparently about 50 were recorded, mainly invertebrates.*

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### UTS at LINDFIELD

You may remember from previous newsletters that the University wishes to put an access road through bushland from the UTS to Lady Game Drive. This will bisect an excellent tract of bushland & thus degrade it.

The road has been a matter of contention for many years & the issue appears to be driven by two forces.

The first is that the residents living on the present access routes have had an ever increasing problem with traffic dangers, noise, & ancillary nuisances such as beer cans in their gardens & the like. Their position is very understandable, especially as they

have evidently often been told by the university that every expansion would be the last.

The second is the wish of the university to expand. Although its current position is that a planned new library is the last likely expansion, it relates this to "current government policy" & hence the position will change whenever policy changes.

As a result of opposition to the road the UTS has produced a list of alternatives & invited comment.

A public meeting was held on 18th Oct & many of the problems & proposals were discussed. Greenies again got a bad reception from some residents who feel that the road will solve all their amenity problems.

It is obvious, however, that there are many residents who do not believe that the road alone will help in anything but the short term. This is because they believe that the hidden agenda of the University is growth & that the second road will lead to an increase in numbers until the existing access road is more congested than it is now. Under this scenario the bushland will be degraded & the traffic made worse - a double loss for the residents.

At the public meeting there was a very strong feeling that the best way would be to penalise parking at the university by charging for it or restricting it while providing a good shuttle bus service from the nearby railway stations. This is certainly worth a try but unless the university limits its population to the current numbers there will be further pressure on the streets & on the bushland.

This has been a brief summary. Any member wanting more information or wishing input into the submission which STEP will be making please call John Burke.

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### NRMA ELECTIONS

The NRMA elections are on & we believe that the Motorists Action Group offers the best option for development of a balanced rather than a cars only transport policy. A brochure is enclosed.

walking map of the Lane Cove Valley is a professional presentation which makes a great present for anyone with an interest in bushwalking. Send \$6 to STEP or ring Judy Meacham on 4492843.

Happy Christmas. We shall be back with fresh environmental vigour in the new year.

#### President

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#### Secretary

Sue Jones  
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### GOODBYE 1991

This is our last newsletter for 1991 & we wish all our members a

### CHRISTMAS PRESENT TIME

Don't forget that the STEP

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