

# STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No.86 September 1997

## COMING EVENTS

**Annual General Meeting** -- Our 19th Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday, 15th October, 1997, at 8.00 pm at St. Andrews Uniting Church hall on the corner of Chisholm St. and Vernon St., South Turramurra.

The meeting will deal with the usual agenda:

- Apologies
- Minutes of the Previous AGM
- Business Arising from the Minutes
- President's Report
- Treasurer's Report
- Business Arising from Treasurer's Report
- Election of Officers
- General Business

This is not expected to occupy more than 30 minutes, after which we will be privileged to hear Dr. Noel Tait from Biological Science Department at Macquarie University talk about "Overlooked Invertebrates".

Please come along to hear our speaker, but also to elect your Committee, or vote them out if you wish.

### Muogamarra Nature Reserve Walk

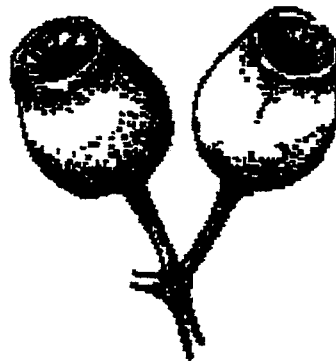
On Sunday 14th September about thirty people joined the STEP bush-walk through the Muogamarra Nature Reserve.

Unfortunately, the 'flu epidemic had taken its toll of the volunteer guides and because of the short staffing we did not have a guide to ourselves. The whole group of about 60 was too large to benefit from the guide's commentary. Nevertheless it was a fine day, the views were spectacular and the wildflowers did not stint their display, many waratahs in full flower being evident even on the way in. We took the track to Lloyd's Trig, which involved a bit of rock scrambling over the last part, but the top of the fairly large rock formation provided a good place to have a breather and enjoy the views.

### Blue Gum High Forest

The NSW Scientific Committee has now confirmed that it "...has made a Final Determination to list the Blue Gum High Forest occurring on the northshore and in the northern suburbs of Sydney, in the local government areas of Lane Cove,

Willoughby, Ku-ring-gai, Baulkham Hills, Hornsby, Ryde and Parramatta as an Endangered Ecological Community under Part 3 of Schedule 1 of the Threatened Species Conservation Act."



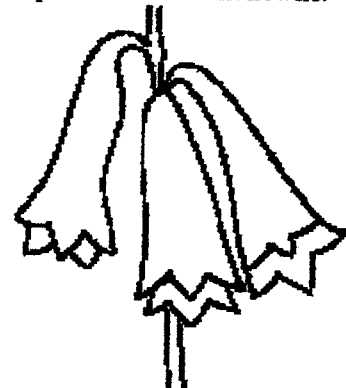
### Local Observations

If you have not taken the time for a walk in the local bush during the past month or so, you will have missed one of the best displays of wildflowers for years.

After the rain and warmer weather towards the end of August, there was a virtual explosion of growth and flowering. Several different yellow pea flowers (eggs and bacon) and some late flowering wattles

gave a golden glow, with white *epacris* and *leucopogen* providing contrast, pink boronias, red white and pink grey grevilleas weaving a vivid tapestry over the hillside. Orchids were also flowering well in all their different forms, hidden in the leaf litter, standing up from the sandstone clearings, falling out of trees or sprawling over rocks. To add to the spectacle birds in bright courting plumage set the trees and shrubs alive.

Migrating visitors are also here, gang gangs have been heard "creaking" and honey eaters have appeared in large numbers to take advantage of the flush of nectar from the proliferation of wildflowers.



## STEP Committee

Three members of the Committee will be retiring from the Committee this year.

Geoff Suggate joined the Committee in June 1983 and served as Treasurer from 1983 to 1991. Over the last year or so he has been our representative on the Council Parks and Reserves Advisory Committee. Geoff is currently the longest serving member of Committee and after 14 years, 8 as treasurer, we can understand his wish to free himself to spend time on other things. Many thanks for your contributions over the years, Geoff. Sue Jones joined the Committee as Secretary in 1986 and continued as Secretary until 1993. She proved to be a very well organised and efficient Secretary supporting four Presidents in that time.

Currently she is still our Membership Secretary, having computerised the data base and maintaining it for years. Sue has decided that she needs to have time to devote to other endeavours. Thank you, Sue, for your hard work, effective contributions and guidance to other members. The Committee won't be the same without you.

Ron Seymour, who joined our Committee last year, is also resigning since his business commitments have made it impossible to contribute in the way he wanted. Thanks Ron. As for the remainder of the Committee, Bruno Krockenberger is stepping back from the Presidency. After four years it is time for a change of the guard to avoid the organisation suffering from atrophy, and time for a younger person to bring renewed vigour to the task.

Bruno is available for reelection as a Committee member to provide continuity and support for the new President for the next year. Other current members are also available for reelection to continue in the roles they have been playing. Hugh Roberts as Treasurer and now also as General Secretary and

Membership Secretary.

Jennifer Schwarz as representative on the Lane Cove Total Catchment Management Committee.

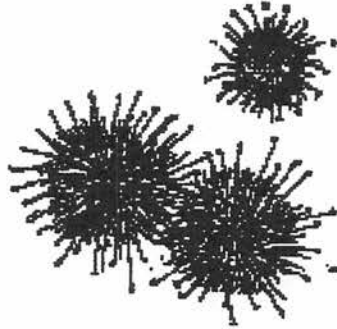
Michelle Leishman as representative on the Council's Bushland Management Advisory Committee.

Helen Wortham as Minute Secretary and Publicity Officer.

Neroli Lock and John Martyn as members of Committee, currently without portfolio (but we have some ideas).

This means that we have seven candidates and the constitution allows for up to fourteen including the executive officers, plenty of scope to introduce new blood into the Committee.

So please come along to the AGM and nominate your candidate.



## Camphor Laurels

John and Isolde Martyn spent a holiday in Lamington National Park and the North Coast and John noted the ubiquitous presence of camphor laurels. He wrote:

*Visit the Nimbin - Byron Bay area on the North Coast of NSW in September and the vivid, almost iridescent green fuzzy thickets on the hillsides and roadsides will catch your eye. This is not the effect of smoke from locally grown illegal substances filtering the light, but the bright lime green new spring growth of camphor laurel trees - gone feral.*

*This species, very familiar on the North Shore, has found its natural home in the rich volcanic soils,*

*humidity and abundant rainfall of this region. An acquaintance, who grew up in this area likens the scene to England in spring to early summer with deciduous trees breaking leaf. He finds this landscape of his youth more comfortable and familiar than dry eucalypt forest. The tree's dense, lush crown are its main attraction as a park and garden species.*



*However, the invader, ably assisted by that black and white berry eating bandit, the Currawong, has established a foothold to the exclusion of nearly every other type of tree. Dense stands of camphor laurel have spread across neglected farmlets in this area popular with hobby farmers and alternate lifestylers. They shade and poison the ground and seem to have no natural enemies - and you can't just walk around pulling them up like thistles. Obviously this is one weed that we can never turn our back on or become complacent about in our local bushland on the North Shore. Its retention in gardens and reserves throughout the North Shore is a sword of Damocles hanging over our native flora.*

Finally, John comments: *You would hope to escape from weeds by ascending to the World Heritage rainforests of the Lamington National Park. You would hope that it is as pristine an environment as one could get in Australia, but Mistflower (Ageratina riparia) got there before you, choking the creek beds just like it does in the Lane Cove valley.*

### The Broadway Bushcare Group

We repeat here, with some pride, a report which recently appeared in the Hornsby and District Advocate, since it involves STEP members doing an excellent job of bush regeneration and care, yielding wonderful results.

The Broadway Bushcare Group is convened by Harry Lock, who is enthusiastically supported by Neroli Lock and Pat Stewart and other local residents.

They work at it every second Sunday come rain or shine..

During the last nine years they have cleared the bushland reserve near Leuna Ave, Wahroonga, of lantana, blackberry, morning glory and other weeds. They have removed virtual mountains of dumped garbage.

Wattles, banksias and a great variety of other indigenous native flora, much of it supplied by Ku-ring-gai Council, have been planted in previously denuded areas, whereas elsewhere the bush has been helped to recover through the local seedbed. The end effect is something of which Harry and his team can be proud.

The group's efforts have also helped to reestablish local fauna, including an echidna and its offspring.

Satin bower birds, pardalotes, wrens, finches, thornbills and many other small birds have been seen lately, and the group is appealing to residents to keep their cats indoors at nights to avoid the slaughter of wildlife.

The group is also excited that the local stands of casuarina have attracted black cockatoos, who rely on their seeds as food source.

In a project of this nature, although the group has achieved a lot, there is always room for more volunteers, and Harry would be delighted to hear from anyone interested in joining the group (Harry Lock 9489 5794). Even if you don't live in that area and are interested to see what can be achieved, Harry would probably be only too pleased to show you his pride and joy.



### New Weeds

While major weeds such as privet, lantana, balloon vine and *Ehrharta* continue to provide the biggest threat to local bushland, a subtle encroachment of less common exotics is taking place. Some of these are West Australian natives, others are common garden plants. Many are not thought of as a problem, at least for now, but in the 'megadiverse' garden flora of our North Shore, where there are microclimates for growing just about anything, there will always be surprises in store for our bushland.

Here are some examples:

Both garden species of the South African Iris *Dietes* have been observed in dry ridgetop in West Pymble, while their relative, the blue flowered *Aristea ecklonii*, planted in water gardens, can be found in moist hollows bordering Fox Valley.



The mauve peafflowered native indigo grows in Sheldon Forest, but so does its exotic relative *Indigofera decora*, the summer wistaria. Indian hawthorne, *Raphiolepis*

*indica*, is widespread through Sheldon Forest and clearly has the capacity to compromise the high conservation value blue gum high forest, always more threatened because of its richer soils.

The small delicate shrub *Cuphea hyssopifolia* selfseeds readily in the garden so it is no surprise to find it in bushland, mainly along watercourses, its small leaves and flowers blending easily with native plants.

Were it not for its blue flowers, the WA native bluebell, *Sollya heterophylla*, would be difficult to distinguish from local native Pittosporaceae such as *Billiardiera scandens*. It is quite common around the Canoon Rd netball courts.



### Nepean Turtles

The Nepean River population of the *Emydura macquarii* turtle differs from most other populations of this species, according to the preliminary findings of a recent study.

Apparently the population structure is quite different from that which exists in other river systems.

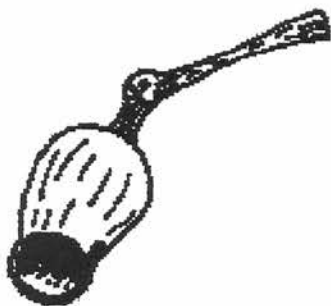
\* There are very few old turtles despite the lack of predators. Around 87% are under the age of eight years compared to a maximum of 30% in other systems.

\* Seventy percent of adult individuals are males, though there are plenty of juvenile females.

\* Nepean River turtles mature at half the age of those in other systems.

The reasons for this unusual structure could be either that the species is an introduced population,

or that the population may have crashed in the past and is now making a comeback. The latter explanation would open up interesting speculation about the reasons for a population crash. The study has been carried out by David Judge, a Masters degree student, under a grant from the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust.



### Forest Parks Countdown

Peak conservation groups including the Australian Conservation Foundation, the NSW Nature Conservation Council and the Total Environment Centre are conducting a campaign to:

- \* protect as national park approximately 150000 hectares needed to establish a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system,
- \* protect Coolangubra wilderness for all time,
- \* replace clear-fell logging with new ecologically sustainable forestry practices, and
- \* end export chipping by the year 2000.

These groups are concerned that neither the NSW nor the Federal Governments are gearing up to deliver this outcome.

They claim little effort has gone into reforming logging practices, essential research projects have been cut due to lack of funds, forests are being reclassified as plantations so that they can be woodchipped, and moves are being made for streamside erosion strips to be counted as part of the reserve system.



### Lismore Muttonwood

The Comprehensive Regional Assessment (CRA) process, which forms part of the forest strategy has shown just how little is known about NSW forests. It has been found, for instance, that the resource figures for the Urbenville Management Area, west of Kyogle, which were used in last year's forest use decision were 80% higher than they should have been.

The CRA process has also confirmed the long held concerns about the immense diversity of our forests.

In this context the preliminary studies of threatened plants in the Upper North East of NSW have found populations of the Lismore Muttonwood (*Rapanea sp. a*), which was previously thought to be extinct.

Also located were three new populations of the endangered vine *Tylophora woollsii*, whose last known population was destroyed a few years ago by road works. The eight week survey of the region collected data on a total of 43 threatened and 180 significant plant species, including many previously unknown populations. This result shows the inadequacy of the current information and the vital need to undertake further surveys before any further destruction is permitted, to ensure that threatened plants are duly considered in the decision making process.

### Hidden Agenda?

While the CRA process has so far not looked at the environmental impact of small-scale clear-felling

and other practices such as 'gap and cluster logging' and 'group selection', State Forests is apparently promoting "cable-logging".

This practice is used in Tasmania and involves dragging or hanging logs from overhead cables like flying foxes.

This means that it is less damaging to undergrowth and soil than conventional logging, but it allows logging on steeper slopes, which would otherwise be off limits.

Conservation groups fear that the hidden agenda is to allow logging very steep slopes in the remote and rugged areas of the Great Dividing Range. Tasmanian conservationists, however, report that in place of the first problem, a much bigger problem is created, the steepness causing erosion and slumping of whole hillsides.



### NSW Leads Australia

But it is not all bad news.

The NSW forest assessment process may not have been as effective as it should have been, it appears that it is still better than that in any other state.

The Regional Forest Agreement for East Gippsland, in Victoria, has failed to protect important areas at Goolengook.

It failed to resolve World Heritage clear-felling and has allowed continuing subsidies to the industry for the destruction of the public asset.

The Victorian Government excluded all non-government stakeholders from the decision making forums. This behind-closed-doors approach has also been adopted in Tasmania and WA.

The participation in NSW of industry, conservation and Aboriginal groups is preferable.