



STEP Matters

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Diary Dates

- 4 May Talk 'Fantastic Fungi — Facts and Findings' by Dr Ray and Elma Kearney
- 18 April Blue Gum High Forest Walk (see page 2)

Fantastic Fungi — Facts and Findings

Date: Tuesday 4 May
Time: 8 pm
Place: St Andrews Church Hall (Vernon Street, South Turramurra)
Contact: John Martyn (9449 7962)

For over a decade, amateur mycologists, Dr Ray Kearney and his wife Elma, members of the Sydney Fungal Studies Group Inc (SFSG) documented their observations and photographically recorded fungi in the Lane Cove Bushland Park (LCBP). These records included well over 20 species of the family Hygrophoraceae of which many in the collections had been unclassified as new species.

In January 1999, Ray and Elma submitted two applications on behalf of the SFSG to the Scientific Committee established under the *NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*. For the first time in Australia, the Scientific Committee determined that the assemblage of more than 20 species in this family '...is likely to become extinct in NSW unless circumstances threatening its survival cease to operate' (*NSW Government Gazette*, Week 9, Item No 32, pp 1586–1589, 3 March 2000).

The companion application that sought to nominate the now nine holotype species of Hygrophoraceae as Rare Native Species, either as *endangered* or *vulnerable*, within the meaning of the Act, is now complete.

The LCBP, less than 0.5 km², the site of such an extraordinarily large assemblage of fungi in this family, has now been registered on the National Estate by the Heritage Commission.

These listings illustrate how initiative and keenness of observation of amateur mycologists when coupled with the taxonomic skills of a professional mycologist can achieve landmark decisions for conservation of fungi.

Just as many plant and animal species have become endangered by failure to take constructive action to protect them, fungi are equally threatened. The mimicry of fungal pheromones by orchids to attract mushroom gnats as pollinators, highlights the interdependent ecological role of fungi in our complex life support systems. Some species are mycorrhizal.

At STEP's next talk, Ray and Elma will present slides and posters to illustrate such wonders of nature and the interdependency of these brilliant rainbow-coloured species.

Blue Gum High Forest Walk

On 28 March, a perfect Sunday afternoon, leader Nancy Pallin and 31 walkers interested in learning about the Blue Gum High Forest Ecological Community had a delightful stroll through the heritage forest in Dalrymple Hay Nature Reserve and Browns Forest at St Ives.

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This was the type of forest that Governor Arthur Phillip walked through on his first inland expedition. Phillip and his small exploratory party 'camped at a steep valley where the flowing tide ceased and a freshwater stream commenced', today known as Bungaroo in Garrigal National Park. From there Phillip's party set out in a westerly direction through land 'covered with an endless wood' – this was evidently the Blue Gum High Forest, probably around Pymble. However they were 'unable to penetrate through this immense forest' and so had to return.

Today there is a well-defined walking track through this tall forest so we had no difficulty in negotiating our way.

Before setting off on the walk, Nancy Pallin, using maps and illustrations, presented a quick review of the importance, and of the threats to this, the largest and most diverse remnant of Blue Gum High Forest left in the world.

Tree names were placed at the base of species we encountered and the differences between the two dominant canopy species, Sydney Blue Gum (*Eucalyptus saligna*) and Blackbutt (*E. pilularis*) were discussed. There are quite a few other tree species growing in this ecological community and we saw two examples of one of the most beautiful of gums, the Grey Gum (*E. punctata*) with its matt steel-grey bark marked with patches of orange and cream, now rare in Ku-ring-gai.

The Grey Ironbark (*E. paniculata*) with its long straight trunk furrowed with hard grey bark is another tree which used to be prevalent in this former forest. Large numbers of the Grey Ironbark were logged in the early days of the Sydney town as its timber is one of the strongest hardwoods. It also provides a rich source of nectar for the honeyeaters and Grey-headed Flying Foxes which play an important role in pollination.

The *Allocasuarina torulosa* or commonly called Forest Oak with its drooping greyish foliage was an easy tree to identify. This tree provides an important food source for the endangered Glossy Black Cockatoo which feeds exclusively on the seeds in the Casuarina cones. The Forest Oak was once a source of wood for shingles that were used for roofing on Sydney's early buildings.

When looking up into the canopy of old growth trees we were fortunate to observe a number of hollows inhabited by lorikeets and rosellas. There were two very large old Angophoras which could well have been growing since pre-European times.

A small insectivorous bird we spied was the White-throated Tree Creeper which always moves in an upward direction on a tree trunk. It was zigzagging briskly up a tree probing under the bark with its long beak for insects, spiders or ants.

A juvenile Golden Whistler that had not acquired its beautiful adult plumage was spotted sitting on a branch close to the walking track. Flitting among the shrubbery was a White-browed Scrub Wren that makes its home in the understorey vegetation. This is also the area in which it forages for insects such as beetles and moths.

Although we didn't see any Spotted Pardalotes (see below) they were present high up in the canopy as Noela Jones was able to identify their calls. These tiny birds feed on insects, particularly lerts, which favour the leaves of eucalypts. Although pardalotes forage in the canopy they nest in holes in an earth bank.



The Powerful Owl, an endangered species, has been sighted in this forest and we speculated whether the patch of

large white droppings directly under a high branch of a Sydney Blue Gum could have been deposited by one of these.

Not many flowers were out, but the *Pseuderanthemum* or Pastel flower's delicate little bloom (see below) was found in several spots along the path edge. Another bright little flower was the golden yellow *Helichrysum scorpioides*. Although the flowering time of the Hairy Clerodendron (*Clerodendron tomentosum*) had passed, a few fleshy red bracts acting as seed covers were still evident. Patches of native maidenhair fern and native violets were discovered in moist shady areas.



The traditional cup of tea and time for a chat was enjoyed by many at the conclusion of a walk which had provided an opportunity to appreciate the wonders of this critically endangered* and very impressive Blue Gum High Forest ecological community.

Another walk in the Blue Gum High Forest at St Ives has been scheduled for Sunday 18 April at 2 pm. The meeting place will be in Rosedale Road, uphill from the Vista Street corner.

If you would like to join this walk please contact Neroli Lock on 9489 5794.

* In the Cumberland Plain Native Vegetation Mapping project 2002, the Blue Gum High Forest Ecological Community in existence today has been documented as less than 5% of the original extent. This fits the criteria to be listed as critically endangered under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act for which it has been recently nominated by STEP.

Council Elections

The recent local government elections were vigorously contested by a diverse number of candidates and resulted in the following composition of the new Ku-ring-gai Council:

Comenarra Ward

Elaine Malicki, Anita Andrew

Gordon Ward

Adrienne Ryan, Michael Lane

Roseville Ward

Maureen Shelley, Graeme Innes

St Ives Ward

Laura Bennett, Tony Hall

Wahroonga Ward

Ian Cross, Nick Ebbeck

We congratulate all the elected councillors and trust that the new Council will be able to work constructively for the benefit of the community, and in particular for a beneficial outcome of the interface with State Government on strategic planning. In this respect we acknowledge the efforts of former mayor Cr Ian Cross in an attempt to reach a workable accommodation with the Minister short of losing planning control.

There is much work to be done to achieve a least/worst outcome, to avert open slather development and to ensure that the municipality retains its unique natural character while undergoing an extent of unavoidable development.

With respect to Comenarra Ward we applaud the strenuous efforts of Cr Elaine Malicki during previous Council terms in ensuring that the ward's natural assets continue to be preserved, providing new facilities for the local community and preventing inappropriate developments.

We note that, although there may be personal affiliations with major political parties, there are no party-endorsed councillors.

STEP Activities and Public Liability

STEP's public liability insurance has come up for renewal and has caused the committee some headaches.

Apart from a considerable rise in premium, the insurer advised us that there were a number of preconditions which would apply if they were to cover STEP again. The main problem applies to our walks, talks being relatively straightforward affairs happening in controlled surroundings.

Among the insurer's conditions for walks the following apply:

- they must proceed along well-established tracks
- they cannot be longer than three hours
- they cannot be undertaken in wet weather
- there must be two guides on every walk, one to lead and one to bring up the rear
- there must be periodic body counts to ensure that no one is lost
- there must be one person on the walk who is qualified in CPR and has a first aid certificate
- walks can only proceed when it has been established by the leader that all persons are properly prepared with appropriate footwear and headgear
- only paid-up STEP members will be covered

With all those conditions applying the premium will be in excess of \$1300 per annum ... a considerable sum.

The committee considered that walks in the natural bushland were a necessary and intrinsic part of our *raison d'être*, the promotion of bushland conservation, appreciation and enjoyment of bushland and education of the public to those ends.

Consequently it was decided to continue with our program of walks for the current year, to be reviewed next year.

As a consequence of this decision, however, we now need to comply with the conditions imposed. The most difficult conditions are:

- We must have one person on the walk who is qualified in CPR and has a first aid certificate.

The committee would therefore like to hear from any member who holds those qualifications and would be willing to attend a walk by agreement with the organiser at the time.

- Only STEP members will be covered.

Members of the public wishing to join a STEP walk must become STEP members. However we are investigating the option of non-members signing a waiver.

The other conditions impose extra preparation on the guide and/or the committee, but are otherwise manageable.

Although the 'no wet weather' condition appears fairly sensible, one of the best walks was enjoyed last year in drizzling rain.

History of STEP

2003 was the 25th anniversary year of STEP's formation and your committee is planning a celebration of that milestone at the same time as the launch of the Middle Harbour Map.

For this occasion the committee is looking for somebody to prepare a history of STEP's activities, personalities, achievements etc for publication. STEP's archives are available for this task.

If you (that means you, whoever you may be) are interested in compiling this document, please contact Helen on 9144 2703 as soon as possible.

Climate Change

Margot Cairnes is a leadership strategist. In a recent column in *Engineers Australia* about attitudes to sustainability she quoted research carried out by Professor Robert Keegan, professor of education at Harvard University. She quotes Keegan as finding that '... about 75% of the adult population is incapable of independent thought'.

This is in the United States, of course, and we kid ourselves that the Australian population is more capable, but if we allow the argument to proceed, he continues:

When faced with issues like sustainability they have one of two key knee-jerk reactions. The first, coming from the 15% of the population stuck at egocentric levels of thinking is: 'Does this immediately affect me --today? If not it doesn't matter.'

The second comes from ... the 60% of the population (who) are only interested in what everybody else is doing about the issue. If other people aren't doing anything or aren't doing much then there is no need for them to act.

Thankfully 25% of the population is capable of thinking independently and longer term. For this minority, climate change is an issue. They are prepared to invest time and money looking for a solution.

The next bit in her analysis is the scary bit. Ms Cairnes says:

Unfortunately, these proportions are the same in the leadership population as they are in the general public. So only 25% of our leaders are interested in solving the problem, 60% are only interested if others are doing something and another 15% simply don't care.

Sometimes it appears that the 25% thinking leadership component is always in the subservient part of 'leadership'.

However the analysis also clearly identifies the task for those of the 25% thinking group: Education of the 60% follower group to generate a popular appreciation of the problem and a groundswell of pressure on the leadership to do something about it.

Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority

The SMCMA now publishes a quarterly newsletter called *Mambara* (Darug name for Geebung tree). Its aims are to cover policy research, education, legislation and advocacy. Items of interest from the first issue are:

Community Groups can Join Appeals to the Land and Environment Court

Last year the court allowed a local heritage group to participate in an appeal on the basis that their involvement was in the public interest and in the interests of justice.

This change to the law allows community members to have their say on controversial developments in situations where their interests may not be adequately represented by the council.

To join an appeal a community member must seek permission from the court.

For more information visit the Environmental Defenders Office's website at www.edo.org.au/edonsw or call 9262 6989 between 2.30 pm and 5.30 pm Tuesday to Thursday.

E-mail Discussion Group

An e-mail discussion group called *Sydney Nature Carers* has been formed to allow on-ground groups and interested community members to share ideas and knowledge, and to

receive the latest information on relevant workshops, funding opportunities, events and more.

If you would like to participate in the group, send your name and email address to SnaC-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

Environmental Events and Activities

17 April
AABR Bird Gully Guided Tour
Muogamarra Nature Reserve,
0418 420 608

18 April
Ku-ring-gai Bushland and Built
Environment Coach Tour
NSW Historic Houses Trust,
9518 6866

21 April
Lecture: A Weather for Wonderers
Julie Evans, Bureau of
Meteorology
Warringah Council's Hilltop to
Headland Lecture Series
9942 2542

18 May
Seminar — Utilising
Invertebrates in Ecological
Restoration Projects
0418 420 608 or aabr@zip.com.au

22 May
Holes in the Garden — Our
Bandicoots ... Friends or Fiends
1 pm to 3 pm Narrabeen Coastal
Environment Centre
9970 6905

9 June
Whales in Sydney
Geoff Ross (NPWS), 7.30pm to
10 pm, Cape Solander
9954 3176 (Peter Stevens)

16 June
Lecture: Nature Made Australia
Unique Quarantine Keeps it That
Way
Ross Rickard, AQIS
Warringah Council's Hilltop to
Headland Lecture Series
9942 2542

24 to 25 June
Conference — Bushfire in a
Changing Environment
Nature Conservation Council,
Angela Baker 9279 2855 or a
baker@nccnsw.org.au
