



STEP INC.

Community Based Environmental Conservation

NEWSLETTER

No 48, December 1990

STEP COMMITTEE

We inadvertently left one of our new committee members, Bob Cross, off the list published in the last newsletter. Apologies Bob!

REGENERATION IN THE LANE COVE VALLEY

The Water Board has perhaps been the greatest single cause of degradation in the Lane Cove Valley. The damage has come from the following causes,

- . The initial construction of construction roads and camps to, and sewer mains along, the river and creek beds. This removed canopy, brought in nutrient rich fill, destroyed the existing ecology and overall caused massive physical and chemical disturbance.
- . The constant overflowing of sewer manholes in periods of heavy rain. This leads nutrient rich effluent to pollute the soil.
- . The constant returning to carry out maintenance necessitating work on access roads and further disturbance.

All of this has produced massive weed invasion, especially along the river bed. The Water Board has always refused to recognise that it had any responsibility for rehabilitation. Last year, however, a breakthrough occurred and the Board moved regeneration contractors onto the river just below the Comenarra Parkway. The initial results are excellent. The Board is soon to let contracts for further regeneration to extend their work to Browns Waterhole. The intention is to continue down to the weir at Fullers Bridge and along Bluegum Creek.

STEP has made a submission to the Board on this and will work towards the eventual goal of a plan of management for the whole valley in which all the land owners, users, and managers in the valley can participate.

This success is due to the constant pressure on the Board and the Government from many people and to a general shift in community priorities but credit must go to those in the Board, the Government and especially to Tim Moore for implementing this farsighted initiative.

GARDEN WASTE

In a recent letter to the editor of a local paper STEP questioned the community's practice of producing huge quantities of garden waste and expecting to be able to dispose of it cheaply at Council tips. We have been taken to task for this in some quarters and would appreciate feedback from any members who have an opinion.

While we don't expect gardeners to begin tearing out their trees and plants which need constant pruning we believe that, in a city such as Sydney, there is no such thing as a free tip. Waste disposal must surely be paid for either by the disposers paying the true cost of operating the tip, or by commercial enterprises taking the material for recycling just as happens for metal and other waste.

We don't see, however, why the community could not use more plants which don't need pruning, why all inappropriate trees under powerlines should not be removed and replaced with trees which won't interfere with the lines and why more clippings cannot be composted or simply returned immediately as mulch. Obviously this won't happen overnight but a move to the user pays principle will at least mean that waste is minimised and that those who produce none or very little will not be subsidising the rest.

While we DEMAND cheap tipping as a right, Councils will have more and more difficulty finding tips for our increasing population and the pressure to utilise bushland areas will continue unabated.

PUBLICATIONS - Christmas Present Ideas

"Australia's Great Escarpment Forests - South-East Region"

This is a 20 page booklet on the South East Forests and East Gippsland complete with clear maps, satellite photograph and a colour Tantawangalo poster. Send \$6 (includes mailing) to The Nature Conservation Council, 39 George St, Sydney 2000.

The STEP Map "Walking Tracks in the Upper Lane Cove Valley"

This professional map, printed by the Central Mapping Authority, is available for \$6 (including mailing) from STEP, PO Box 697, Turrumurra, 2074.

"Making Your Garden Bush Friendly" this is a 16 page colour booklet written by Lynne Mcloughlin and Judith Rawling. It describes our two dozen or so worst weeds and methods for dealing with them. There are 27 colour photos. The section on the safe and effective use of herbicides will be especially helpful. Send \$2.50 (includes mailing) to STEP.

Taronga Zoo's Guide to the Care of Urban Wildlife. Erna Walraven. Allen and Unwin, 157 pages, \$24.59hb, \$19.95 pb. (from bookshops, not STEP). This book is for those who are interested in the animals which do, or could, live in your backyard.

Bush Regeneration, Recovering Australian Landscapes. Robin A. Buchanan. Tafe Student Learning Publications, 1989, 259 pages. The science of bush regeneration has come a long way in the past 15 years and Robin Buchanan has been involved for all that period. Robin has of course had a close involvement with STEP. For instance she was consultant to us in the production of our book South Turrumurra Bushland and has helped us with our recent submission for a Save the Bush grant. This is a wonderful book for a great variety of people. It will be appreciated by those who wish to know more about the ecology of the Australian bush, by those who want to know a little or a lot about bush regeneration and by those who are learning bush regeneration or who are experienced regenerators.

South Turrumurra Bushland, A Plan of Management for South Turrumurra Bushland, STEP, 53 pages, 1985, \$10. This is the second edition of the landmark STEP publication which has had a real impact on the development of bushland management in Ku-ring-gai. It covers the eastern area of the Lane Cove Valley from the Comenarra Parkway at Thornleigh to down past Browns Water Hole. The species, bird and reptile lists are comprehensive and of course are applicable to the Valley in general. This book covers the history, geology, vegetation and fauna of the Valley and goes on to look at the management problems and solutions. Many maps and photos.

Taken for Granted, The Bushland of Sydney and its Suburbs Doug Benson and Jocelyn Howell, Kangaroo Press and the Royal Botanic Gardens, 160 pages. \$35 (bookshops), or \$39 (by mail from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Mrs Macquarie Rd, Sydney 2000). This book gives insights into the bushland of Sydney past and present and helps make clear the implications for its future. Many photos to illustrate the way things used to be and the current situation.

CATS and DOGS

So many of the enjoyable things in life are fattening, illegal, sinful or environmentally unsound and of course cats and dogs can intrude into the last category. Now this is a very difficult subject so we must make it clear from the start that STEP appreciates the valuable part that pets play in many peoples lives. We are not against people owning pets, probably most STEP members and most of the STEP Committee own a cat or dog or both. This does not mean, however, that we should prohibit discussion on the unintended consequences of pets and what to do about them.

Cats, even well fed cats, stalk and kill lizards, snakes, birds, possums etc. Feral cats are a real problem throughout Australia. We recommend that you have your cat desexed and have it wear a bell to lessen its effectiveness as a killing machine.

Dogs evidently kill a lot less wildlife than cats, animals such as wallabies and koalas which they do kill, however, have been eliminated from most urban bushland. If we wish to reintroduce wallabies, koalas and other such animals back into areas such as Davidson Park and the Lane Cove Valley we clearly must ensure that dogs aren't allowed to hunt them. The current dog laws go a long way towards providing this protection.

Both dogs and cats are, however, one of the main sources of pollution in urban bushland through their faeces which add nutrients, especially cumulative phosphorus. Nutrients are one of the main causes of weed invasion of bushland so for so long as we keep adding them to the soil we are assuring continuing weed spread.

Our recommendation to people with pets is to keep numbers to a minimum, to have small animals rather than large ones, to bell and desex cats and to pick up any dog faeces deposited in or adjacent to bushland.

BUSH CONSERVATION - A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

So many of us have been through the problem of where to start in helping to conserve urban bushland. Some of you doubtless joined STEP in the hope that someone would tell you what it is all about.

Of course there are as many ways of attacking the problem as there are interested people. Some want no more than to give moral and financial support to organisations such as STEP - that's great and you need read no further. Others want to get more involved and to you we offer the following suggestions.

Some Basic Principles

1. Appreciate that bushland is not trees or groups of trees. It is an ecosystem consisting of plants of many sizes, of soil, of insects, fungi, bacteria, animals and watercourses and other such components which are all interdependent and interrelated. Remember that anyone can plant a tree but the regeneration of a bushland ecosystem is work for sensitive, thoughtful, trained and patient people.
2. Appreciate that the Australian bush has evolved in the absence of many of the effects which we have on it. The bush was never farmed, subjected to fertilisers or logged. It has only had fire to contend with and has evolved adaptive mechanisms to that. Nutrients can poison the soil, disturbance can upset the layering from the surface mulch to the subsoil, too frequent or too infrequent fires can make species locally extinct and so on.
3. Introduced plants are weeds and many are opportunists which have evolved in, and adapted to, high nutrient levels and physical disturbance. They thrive in chemically or physically disturbed soils.

Attempts to remove weeds by conventional gardening/farming techniques only damages the native ecology and create further disturbance which encourages more weeds. Thus its better not to do anything than to do the wrong thing.

You can be involved in bushland conservation on two levels. The first is to behave so you don't make matters worse and the second is to become a regenerator -either amateur or professional.

Rules for not Making Things Worse

This is of necessity a pretty negative set of instructions.

1. Don't allow nutrients to get into bushland. This means taking care with nutrient laden materials such as fertilisers, detergents, pet faeces, imported fill etc.
2. Don't grow plants in your garden which are invasive. There are plenty of lists of the worst plants which include wandering jew privet, honeysuckle etc. Pampas and Rhus are now illegal plants.
3. Don't do anything in the bush unless you are absolutely sure of the consequences. This includes dumping weeds or removing weeds, it includes removing firewood and bushfire hazard reduction and it includes removing plants, flowers and rocks.

Rules for Making Things Better

The best way to help to reverse the harm that has been done to urban bushland is to learn something about regeneration. This isn't at all hard and can be done at various levels.

1. Join a local volunteer group. To do this in Ku-ring-gai ring Tein McDonald at Council on 4980888. There are many groups all over the Municipality which you could join.
2. Do the National Trust course in bush regeneration. This is a straightforward and enjoyable course generally run over about ten half days. It is the way many present amateur and professional regenerators started out. Ring the Trust on 258-0123.
3. Read about regeneration and teach yourself. Robin Buchanan's book referred to in this newsletter is a good way to start.

4. Do a TAFE bush regeneration course. There is a basic course 1526, "Bushland Weed Control" followed by course 1556, "Bushland Regeneration Certificate". For details ring Ryde College of TAFE, 808-8278.

One thing we can promise you is that if you do do a regeneration course the bush will never again look the same to you.

Whatever you do please remember that you must not experiment with the bush - if you aren't completely sure of what you are doing then don't do anything.

GOOD LUCK!

STEP wishes all its members a very happy Christmas!

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