

# STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No.109 August 2001

## COMING EVENTS

**1. Festival of wildflowers** -- Ku-ring-gai Council's annual Festival of Wildflowers will be held at the Wildflower Gardens at Mona Vale Rd., St. Ives, on **Saturday 25th August and Sunday 26th August, 2001**. It will include bush activities, environmental displays and guided walks. The walks will take you on a Wildflower Discovery or on a Habitat Hike or even on a Bush Murder Mystery adventure.

The Australian Plant Society will present a display of the unique Australian wildflowers. Watch a native plant propagation workshop. Meet a Flying Fox or a Blue Tongue Lizard or a Diamond Python. The children can have lots of fun at *Kids Bush Corner* with fun bush activities and fabulous face painters.

As usual STEP will be there with its display stand to support the conservation of our bushland and will dispense information and have its publications for sale, particularly the new map of the whole Lane Cove valley. We hope to see you there.

**2. Spring Bushwalk** -- On **Sunday 23rd September** we will undertake the Blue Gum Walk through the Berowra Valley under the guidance of Bill Jones.

We will meet at 1.45 pm in Valley Rd. near its junction with Rosemead Rd., Hornsby. The walk is a medium grade of difficulty and will start at 2.00 pm.

It is a circular walk passing a variety of soils and their associated vegetation communities. Near the start it crosses Waitara Creek and enters the Blue Gum Forest. The Blue Gums in this part, and again later, grow in deep, rich, volcanic soils.

Parts of this area were previously used and evidence of the sites of the original cottages and consequent weed infestation is clearly visible.

As the track goes up towards the sandstone ridge top the vegetation changes.

Angophoras, Sydney Peppermints and Old Man Banksias start to appear. The track slopes down again to Waitara Creek to its junction with Berowra Creek. A short distance along Berowra Creek the track goes past Joe's Mountain into Old Man's Valley with its Blue Gums and then on to Rosemead Rd. and the starting point.

Bring drinking water, a hat, sunscreen and, if you are so inclined, binoculars.

**3. STEP Annual General Meeting** -- Keep the evening of Thursday 18th October, 2001, free for our AGM at St. Andrews Uniting Church Hall, at the corner of Chisholm St. and Vernon St., South Turrumurra.

The formal part of the meeting will start at 7.45 pm and will be very brief (unless there is strong stakeholder dissatisfaction, as has happened recently at many company AGM's) and will be followed by an address from our guest speaker.

### **Journey to the Heart of Nature**

Can you imagine 13 adults and two children joining together to simulate the various parts and functions of a tree? If you were lucky enough to attend the workshop run by Valerie Close, Bushland Education Officer at Ku-ring-gai Council, you would have seen this and more.

The group, with an age range of over 60 years, played games and activities

that involved imitating frog calls, dramatising natural processes, sketching bush scenes and visualising the wonders of nature from a different perspective. The workshop was used to demonstrate the approach used in environmental education advocated by Joseph Cornell, an eminent American educator. Valerie was fortunate enough to attend some of his lectures and workshops

at a conference in the USA at the end of last year. The hands-on approach, based on direct experiences proved to be a most interesting and enjoyable experience for adults and kids, imparting a deeper understanding and appreciation of our bushland.

**South Georgia Island**  
About 40 STEP members and friends enjoyed a marvellous talk by Angus Finney on June 21st. Angus

was one of three Australians and an Englishman to undertake the first longitudinal overland traverse of South Georgia, the largest and most rugged sub-Antarctic island, in October/November 1999. The expeditioners sailed in the yacht Tooluka from Terra del Fuego to South Georgia to begin their epic trek. They covered 270 km in 29 days and trudged from sea level to mountain passes of over 1000 m elevation. Most impressively, they crossed more than 20 glaciers during the traverse! It was a wonderful tale of adventure, delivered in a very unassuming style and illustrated with fantastic slides. We all went home inspired that such wild and beautiful places still exist on earth, and that anyone with imagination and courage can leave their everyday life (albeit temporarily!) and undertake such awe-inspiring adventures!



**Pam Morse  
Environmental  
Education Grants 2001**  
Michelle Leishman represented STEP at the activities at both Turramurra and Warrawee Primary Schools that were supported by STEP under the Pam Morse Bequest Fund. On Monday August 6th, Turramurra Primary School students enjoyed performances of "Privet the Weed", performed by Peter Clarke and Valerie Close

from Ku-ring-gai Council. The children all seemed to enjoy the puppet play, and hopefully took home the important message to not dump weeds in the bush! On Friday August 10th, Warrawee students and teachers held an Environment and Aboriginal Day. The Kindergarten and Year 6 children had a great time planting a native garden with plants from Ku-ring-gai Community Nursery, provided by STEP. They then had an assembly with environment poems and stories from the Dreamtime, before enjoying more Dreamtime stories as well as learning about bats from Ku-ring-gai Bat Society. STEP congratulates both schools on their environmental initiatives!



#### **Morona Ave Stormwater Project**

Once the work commenced on the stormwater control project things started to move quickly. Within a couple of weeks the tangle of exotics at Aleta Cl. gave way to the formation of a sandstone retention basin. The site was then planted up with indigenous tubestock to stabilise and enhance the site. A safety fence was also erected on the road edges. Two smaller creek crossings down the fire trail were similarly improved. On the eve of the final inspection the works were tested by a downpour, but

all passed without problems.

A bush regeneration team from NPWS, assisted by TAFE students have now made a start on removing privet, cassia and other exotics from the site at Aleta Close.

A water testing program is now under way when rain occurs and we will continue this monitoring to gauge the effectiveness of the work on water quality.

A volunteer bushcare group has also been formed to continue the weed control effort along the creek and the fire trail.

We are convinced that this section of bushland will become a wonderful part of the Lane Cove National Park, with abundance of bird life and diverse vegetation. It is a satisfying reward to those who have worked towards it over three years



#### **NCC/STEP Project Officer**

Three applications were received for this position following the public advertisements. Assessment of the applications has been delayed by the inadvertent absence of two of the selection committee, but will proceed shortly. We hope that an announcement will be able to be made in the next newsletter.

#### **B2/B3 Corridor**

Ku-ring-gai Council has restarted the process of review of the B2/B3 Corridor rezoning with the

Department of Urban Affairs and Planning. The Council Advisory Committee, which includes STEP representation, has been scheduled to meet at the end of August. The hold-up to date has been largely due to DUAP. We trust that some progress can now be made on the rezoning.



**Council DCP and LEP**  
Ku-ring-gai Council has set up a Working Party on Environmentally Sensitive Areas to provide input to the preparation of a Development Control Plan and a Local Environment Plan. STEP will be represented on this Working Party by Bill Jones, whose extensive knowledge of the local flora and soil associations should be of great assistance in the Working Party's deliberations.

Any member who may be interested in assisting the Working Party could do so, either via Bill Jones or by direct submission nominating any areas which they believe would fall into the Blue Gum High Forest or Sydney Turpentine/Iron-bark Forest classifications or be sensitive for other reasons. Any member with botanical and soils knowledge could help to speed up the process and ensure its completeness.

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**The Frog in Hot Water**  
It was interesting to read Valerie Close's satirical lament about people's lack of appreciation of our natural bushland and all that it represents.

She was apparently responding to reports that some people had objected to the calls of lyre birds in the bush behind their residence. It is unfortunate that proximity to the bushland is often seen as a property asset because of images of spaciousness and gracious living, rather than for true appreciation of the values of the local remnant bushland. Valerie's lament refers to the slow process of degradation, not only of the bushland through human influence, but also of our own loss of memory of its original natural state. Within the memory of many of our members the state of our bushland has changed drastically, by perimeter developments, by weed infestation, by sewer overflow, by noise encroachment, by increased surface run off, by excess nutrient and so on. When we look at our remnant bushland now and say 'Isn't it wonderful to have this natural asset!' we have already forgotten that it has been immensely degraded from what was there thirty years ago.

Valerie's lament refers to the frog placed in water and slowly brought to the boil. The frog will not notice in time to escape.

Will we be able to notice the process and take the necessary action?

Our founding members were dismayed at the degradation by a thousand small decisions, mostly by Council at that stage, the 'death by a thousand cuts' syndrome. No matter how much we do to increase peoples' appreciation of our bushland, there are always more out there who need to be informed and brought to

the realisation of its intrinsic natural value. And while that effort can never be complete the risk of further degradation remains.



### **Catchment Management**

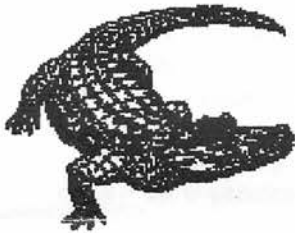
Three steps forward and two and a half backwards is a familiar dance step, not in the ball room, but in the political process of advancing the interests of our environment.

The net half step forward is progress, but the process is frustrating while you are undergoing the two and a half steps backwards. The Land and Water Conservation Minister's reasoning for abolition of the Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Management Trust is spurious and reminiscent of politicians wanting to see concrete on-ground works regardless of whether it is the right on-ground effect in the long run.

Wendy McMurdo, President of Save Hawkesbury's Unique River Environment, has pointed out that '...the Trust's pivotal role has been to advise on the management of the catchment, to promote, support and defend the catchment's best interests, and to persuade government agencies, local councils, industry and local communities they need to work together to redress past

mistakes.....' (Hornsby Advocate Viewpoint). The Catchment Management Act under which the Trust was created does not allow or require the Trust to carry out on-ground work. We must agree with Chris Stanton's viewpoint, expressed in a letter in the same edition of the Hornsby Advocate, that prevention of damage is far more effective in environmental protection than the "on-ground" repair of the damage.

Abolition of the Catchment Management Trusts makes little sense if the alternative is patches of "on-ground" remedial action.



**A Few Steps Forward**  
 Maybe part of the positive side of the 'three steps forward' is the State Government's announcement of the Coastal Protection Package and the Action for the Environment. Up to the present, developments in coastal areas in the most desirable locations has been completely out of control with whole-sale destruction of sensitive coastal environments.

The Coastal Package is well overdue.

The Action for the Environment contains some good initiatives, but it appears that the State has perhaps moved with undue haste to meet a political agenda and has overlooked some of the essential ground work.

It appears that some of the additions to the National Parks are subject to Aboriginal interest which has not been considered. It is unfortunate that the action seems to be marred by disputes due to insufficient preparatory work.



### **Regional Fox Control Program**

The NPWS has over the past four years conducted a Fox Baiting Program in the northern Sydney region, which has now been joined by eleven Councils.

The region contains a green web of interconnecting bushland reserves, which hosts a diverse range of native animals, including threatened species such as the Southern Brown Bandicoot (*Isodooon obesulus*).

Predation by foxes is a key threatening process and studies have shown that foxes are more than twice as common in urban areas than in rural areas.

Where fox control programs have been carried out over many years there are clear indications that native animal populations have recovered or returned to their natural habitat.

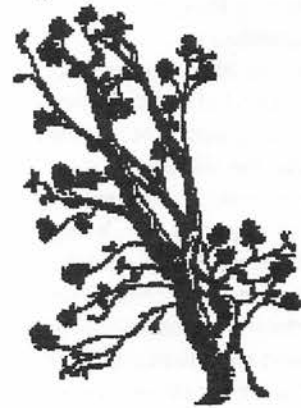
Ku-ring-gai Council now reports that during 2000 a total of 246 baits were taken by foxes and anecdotal information suggests that the number of native animal deaths by fox predation has decreased.

The public is invited to record and report sightings

of the Southern Brown Bandicoot to the SBB Recovery Team at P.O.Box 1967, Hurstville, 2220.

The Southern Brown Bandicoot has a long tapering snout with a naked nose, a compact body and short tail with a pointed end. It has small round ears and eyes. The coarsely furred back surface of the body is usually dark grey with golden brown flecks, while the softer underbelly is creamy white. The forelegs are short with curved claws. The hind legs are much longer resembling those of the macropods. The hind feet are characterised by the syndactylous toes, formed by fusion of the second and third digits. These specialised toes are used for grooming.

The main visible differences between the SBB and the Long-nosed Bandicoot are the latter's longer nose and larger ears.



### **Newsletter Delivery**

The STEP newsletter is now available on the STEP website at [www.step.org.au](http://www.step.org.au) but we will continue to send it out by post as in the past. Those members who wish to receive it by email rather than through the post please indicate this by email to [hkr@bigpond.com](mailto:hkr@bigpond.com) and indicate whether Word or PDF format is preferred.