



STEP Matters

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In this Issue

Diary Dates.....	1
Christmas Barbecue	1
Successful Grant Application ...	1
Young Scientist.....	1
Birds in Backyards	2
Credit Card Payments.....	2
President's Report 2001-02	2
Wanted — Committee Members!.....	3
Wild Rivers Walk.....	4
Australian Bush Heritage Fund	4

STEP Committee

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Michelle Leishman

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Secretary

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Newsletter Editor

Bruno Krockenberger

Publicity

Jenny Schwarz

Web, Membership, Publications

Helen Wortham

Committee Members

Neroli Lock

John Martyn

Tony Morrison

Project Officer

Kate Read

Diary Dates

15 Dec Christmas barbecue

Christmas Barbecue

We will celebrate the end of a successful year with a barbecue on the grass behind Leuna Avenue, Wahroonga. Access is from the end of The Broadway.

Neroli and Harry Lock will provide a gas barbecue and hot water from 4.30 pm on Sunday 15 December. Bring your own food and drinks.

To those members who cannot be there, the committee would like to thank you for your continuing membership and wishes you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

Successful Grant Application

Helen Wortham

STEP recently applied to Ku-ring-gai Council for funding under their *2002 Financial Assistance Program*. This is the first time that we've applied for a grant under this scheme and we were delighted to be successful.

Helen Wortham was presented with a cheque for \$1000 from the Mayor, Councillor Ian Cross at the Council meeting on Tuesday 5 November.

We would like to thank Ku-ring-gai Council for their financial support. The money will go towards maintaining our web site and producing the enclosed flyer to raise awareness of the issues involved in building a link road between the F3 and the M2.

Young Scientist

Helen Wortham

To encourage and reward research and education on environmental issues, STEP has aligned with Intel Young Scientist and each year we donate a prize of \$200 for the best environmental project.

On Friday 18 October, Michelle Leishman presented Gregory Howe from Fort Street High School with STEP's prize for Best Environmental Project at a ceremony at the Powerhouse Museum. Gregory conducted a survey entitled *Feral Fish: Is the Plague Minnow in the Myall River System?*

The competition is organised by the Science Teachers' Association of New South Wales Incorporated and is open to students from kindergarten to year 12.



Gregory Howe

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Birds in Backyards

Jenny Schwarz

On Monday 7 October, more than 60 people came to STEP's annual general meeting and to hear Dr Richard Major talk about birds in our backyards. Dr Major is chair of the steering committee for Birds Australia's Birds in Backyards project. He presented some of the findings of community bird surveys carried out in 2000 and 2001.

Species diversity, with more small birds, was found to be greatest in the outer districts of Sydney. For example, only 5% of northern Sydney gardens had Willie Wagtails compared to 47% of gardens in Western Sydney.

Gardens with more trees and with mostly native plants had a greater diversity of bird species with more small birds than sparsely planted gardens. Surprisingly, the density of the mid-storey shrub layer did not seem to make a difference. Dr Major was at a loss to explain this and thought it may have been due to inaccurate descriptions of vegetation cover by inexperienced participants in the study. It may also have been that the birds were there but were well hidden.

Earlier work by Dr Major suggested that Pied Currawongs were responsible for much of the decline in small bird numbers.

In a study in which plasticine eggs were placed in artificial nests, the majority of eggs that were disturbed had beak marks matching that of currawongs. Until the 1950s currawongs were migratory, only spending the winter in Sydney. Each spring they would return to the Blue Mountains and further west to breed. But now they are permanent residents here, enjoying the berries and pet food that Sydney gardens so generously provide.

Surprisingly, the Community Survey shows that the native Noisy Miner is most negatively associated with the absence of small birds. These noisy and

aggressive birds may not prey on them, but they chase and harass any small bird that ventures into their territory and never give them the chance to stay and nest. Suggestions as to how to Miner-proof your garden have not yet been decided although lower, spiky, thicker plantings may help.

During a lively question session, the dislike of currawongs by many people became apparent. However Dr Major stood up for them, saying they were intelligent birds who could hardly be blamed for seizing the opportunity to have an easier life. Ultimately it is humans that are responsible for the loss of small native birds.

Credit Card Payments

Bruno Krockenberger

Although credit card payments are a convenient method of paying for membership and publications they demand constant and continuous attention in order to satisfy the bank's requirements. This has turned the treasurer's job into a five-day a week task.

Hugh Roberts, our outgoing treasurer, selflessly devoted the necessary time to this task, and we appreciate his dedication. However, having reviewed the situation, the committee concluded that it is unsustainable and so we have decided to abandon the credit card payment facility, effective from 31 December 2002.

After this date only cash or cheques will be accepted. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause.

This decision will be reviewed when we publish the Middle Harbour map. To contemplate a reintroduction of credit card payment facilities the committee would need to be satisfied that a suitable person was available and committed to bring the necessary attention to the task.

President's Report 2001–02

Michelle Leishman

It is with pleasure that I present the President's Report for the year to October 2002. It has again been a busy and successful year for the committee and members.

Project Officer

A major event for STEP has been the employment of a project officer through the Nature Conservation Council.

Since February, Kate Read has been employed to work on STEP's campaign on the proposed F3–M2 link road. She has been very active in researching and producing STEP's Position Paper (which was distributed in July), developing a web page, attending meetings, lobbying, writing press releases and designing and printing a brochure that will be distributed next month.

STEP could not have been nearly as effective on this issue without Kate, although we still have a long way to go, with road options due to be released in the next month or so before the final consultant's report by the end of the year.

Kate has also been lobbying on behalf of STEP for the rezoning of the B2/B3 corridor – the development of a rezoning application of the abandoned freeway corridor by Planning NSW has been moving slower than snail's pace for the past three years. STEP regards the rezoning as a matter of urgency.

Stormwater Mitigation Project

STEP's major stormwater mitigation project at Fox Valley, funded by EPA's Stormwater Trust, has been largely completed. A very successful Open Day was held on 26 May and only some minor water quality testing remains to be done, along with continuing bush regeneration by the Fox Valley Bushcare group. This has been a very successful partnership with Lane Cove National Park.

Publications

We have reprinted John Martyn's *Field Guide to the Bushland of the Upper Lane Cove Valley* and continue to sell steady numbers of both the Field Guide and map of the *Walking Tracks of the Lane Cove Valley*.

Work is continuing apace by a small band of volunteers under the guidance of John Martyn to map the walking tracks of Middle Harbour. This is an ambitious project which will result in the production of two maps, stretching from Garigal National Park in the north to the bushland reserves on the northern side of Sydney Harbour. At the moment we expect the maps to be ready for sale by Christmas 2003.

Submission

We made a submission to the NSW Joint Select Committee on Bushfires.

Environmental Education

STEP has also continued to support environmental education through the Pam Morse Bequest Fund. This year we awarded grants to Turramurra North and Pymble Public Schools to support their environmental initiatives – planting native trees and establishing a worm farm.

We are also again supporting the Intel Young Scientist Awards, organised by the Science Teachers' Association of New South Wales, through the provision of prize money for the best environmental project.

Activities

This year's activities program has been very successful. As usual, STEP ran a Clean-Up Australia site in March.

We have hosted well-attended talks by:

- Dr Damian Gore (Department of Physical Geography, Macquarie University) on the health and sustainability of the Lane Cove River;
- Nicola Mason (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service) on the fox control program in Sydney's urban bushland; and

- Dr Richard Major (Australian Museum) on birds in our backyards.

We also ran three bushwalks (STEP Track in April, Cowan track in August and Wild Rivers walk in September) which were very popular.

Finally, we had displays at the Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Festival, Turramurra Food and Wine Fair and Turramurra Library.

Newsletters

We published five newsletters (numbers 111 to 115) as well as a monthly contribution in the *Ku-ring-gai Observer*, thanks to Bruno Krockenberger who continues to do a fantastic job as our newsletter editor and KO writer.

Committee

The committee met monthly to deal with the business at hand.

We are very sorry that Hugh Roberts has decided to stand down as treasurer and membership secretary. Hugh has done a marvellous job for six years. We have been very confident that our accounts and records have been exceptionally well looked after during this time.

However we are pleased to welcome Thérèse Carew to the committee – she has very kindly offered to take over the treasurer's position.

I would like to thank all committee members of 2001–02 for their hard work and enthusiasm, particularly Jenny Schwarz for publicity, Neryle Sheldon for secretarial work and Helen Wortham for web page maintenance. Thanks also to John Burke and Bruno Krockenberger who have been very active on our transport sub-committee.

We are always looking for new committee members so please think whether you have some spare time that you would like to offer to help STEP.

Representation

STEP has been represented on Ku-ring-gai Council's Bushland Conservation Advisory Committee (now called the Natural Areas Advisory Committee). We have also remained as a member of the Union of Lane Cove Valley Conservationists, although we have not been able to attend every meeting.

Finances

STEP's financial position is detailed in the Treasurer's Report.

Sales of the map and Field Guide have declined but still contribute substantially to STEP's finances. Costs of providing services to members (such as the newsletter and web page) as well as insurance costs have risen so that membership fees no longer cover these costs. Consequently we will be putting forward a resolution to the members at this annual general meeting for a fee rise. We believe that membership fees still remain modest and offer good value for money.

The Coming Year

The major issues for STEP in the coming year are likely to be the F3–M2 link road proposal and the rezoning of the B2/B3 corridor. These have important implications for traffic and quality of life for Ku-ring-gai residents.

We will continue to be active in bushland management issues and environmental education and will strive to be effective advocates for Ku-ring-gai's environment.

Wanted — Committee Members!

Would you like to help protect your local environment at a grass roots level? We're currently looking for some new committee members.

If you're interested in joining the committee please write, e-mail or contact Michelle Leishman on 9489 8972.

Wild Rivers Walk

John Martyn

Sunday 29 Sept 2002

The weather forecast was not good. 'Showers with a possibility of thunder and small hail'. Cloud was increasing as about 30 of us set out from Acron Oval, St Ives and descended the long hill to The Cascades. Here we first encountered the 'wild river', actually Middle Harbour Creek.

Middle Harbour Creek is one of the more pristine of the larger streams draining our North Shore area. However nobody swims any more at The Cascades, a once-popular swimming hole, due to pollution. It is still a beautiful spot but increasing residential and light industrial development on the Belrose side of the catchment has contaminated the water, and swimming is not recommended.

The walk followed the narrow, uneven Middle Harbour Track for 3 km down the left bank of the creek, in it's deep, narrow valley, past rapids, deep, shady pools, cliffs and through coachwood groves to the brand new stepping stones crossing at Bungaroo. The rain, hail and thunder stayed out over the ocean and we picnicked at the crossing, in patchy sunshine, at high tide, watching fish lazily breasting the tidal currents in the clear water.

South-westerly winds kept the temperature down for the long

climb out up the Bungaroo Track, a well-constructed trail with sweeping views across the valley bushland. A prearranged car pool allowed us to return to Acron Oval reasonably quickly. The 6 km walk took exactly 4 hours including stops and car ferrying.

For more photos see <http://www.step.org.au/MAP.htm>.

Australian Bush Heritage Fund

John Martyn

The Australian Bush Heritage Fund was started by Dr Bob Brown and friends to purchase two blocks of land of high conservation value threatened by woodchipping in the Liffey Valley in northern Tasmania.

Australian Bush Heritage Fund now owns and manages 13 properties Australia wide. It is funded by tax-deductible donations which are used to both purchase then manage the lands. Recently it bought Carnarvon Station, a large pastoral lease in Queensland, and it actively manages this land with the aim of restoring it to its natural state by removing feral animals (pigs, cattle, horses) and encouraging indigenous fauna and flora.

Australian Bush Heritage Fund is planning to purchase another large pastoral lease ('bigger than Singapore'), this time in WA.

WA residents among you may be familiar with White Wells, near Mount Gibson, in the south Murchison, on the Great Northern Highway past Wubin. White Wells is just beyond the edge of the WA wheat belt with its massive salinity problems. It contains most of the typical vegetation types of its zone, such as gimlet and salmon gum woodlands, granite breakaways, sand plains, and being WA, features spectacular seasonal wildflowers. It is a haven for threatened species such as the ground-nesting mallee fowl. It has a station homestead and other accommodation.

White Wells is to be named Charles Darwin Reserve through the involvement of Chris Darwin, Charles Darwin's great-great grandson, who plans to match every donation one for one. It will take \$20 a hectare to buy and manage White Wells. \$2000 will safeguard 100 hectares. Make a donation of \$300 or more and your name will be placed on a commemorative plaque. There will be a volunteer ranger scheme through which you can help in conservation management of the property.

For further information on the Australian Bush Heritage Fund, or to make a donation, their website is www.bushheritage.org or phone freecall 1800 677 101.



Stepping stones constructed in September 2002 near the Bungaroo historic site, Middle Harbour Creek



Pools and rapids on Middle Harbour Creek, The Cascades, St Ives