



## In this issue we feature

- A lot of STEP events and hope to see you all at many of them.
- A wonderful article by Dr Haydn Washington on the commodification of nature
- Cats on the loose and what can be done about them
- Isolde Martyn writing about a sad day at the UTS campus
- We have reviews of 2 very different books and a letter to the editor
- Part 2 of John Martyn's Eucalypts of the Lane Cove
- Catchment will interest the more technical of you
- The main conservation groups are still ignoring the looming overpopulation crisis and we write about that on page 13
- Barry Tomkinson reports on the recent NCC Annual Conference where STEP was present
- We note with sadness the death of STEP stalwart Jan Ruys
- There are other small articles filling out this issue

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## State Election Candidates' Environmental Forum, Tuesday 22 February

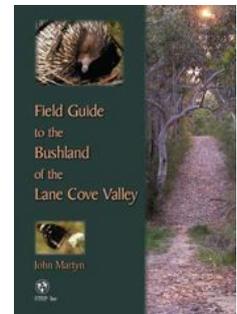
See details next page

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## Launch of the Field Guide to the Bushland of the Lane Cove Valley Saturday 12 March, 2pm, Jenkins Hall, Lane Cove National Park

Jenkins Hall is at the administration building. Access is from Lady Game Drive.  
Gary Dunnett, the DECCW Regional Manager- Metro North East Region, is the keynote speaker.  
If you are interested in national parks then Gary is well worth meeting.

Join us to celebrate the release of this a remarkable book covering the geology, ecology, flora and fauna of the Valley illustrated with hundreds of brilliant colour photos. It has 32 mapped and detailed walks and much more besides. This is an opportunity to learn more about the amazing bushland at our doorsteps and thus to increase our understanding and appreciation of it. It will also be an opportunity to enjoy refreshments and to meet up with other STEP members



RSVP to [secretary@step.org.au](mailto:secretary@step.org.au), to PO Box 5136, Turramurra 2074 or to John Burke on 0418277030

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## Meet the Author Opportunity

If you can't make it to the launch, or if you would like to hear John talk about the book in more detail he will give a short talk and be available for discussion and to sign copies for anyone wishing to buy one.

**When:** Thursday 3 March 2011 at 6.30 pm.  
**Where:** Meeting Room, Hornsby Library, 28-44 George Street, Hornsby.  
**Cost:** \$5 per person with light refreshments included.  
**Bookings:** Email [library@hornsby.nsw.gov.au](mailto:library@hornsby.nsw.gov.au) or call 98476614

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## STEP Walks

Our next walk is the Hornsby Valley Blue Gum Forest walk on Sunday 20 February. See details of this and following walks on the next page and on our web site.

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## Clean Up Australia Day – Sunday 6 March 2010: Thornleigh Oval and Park Precincts

STEP will run its usual community clean up from a base at Thornleigh Oval (end of Handley Avenue). From here we target the western entrances into Lane Cove National Park, and the surrounding bushland and residential precincts. The site will be open from 9.00am to 1.00pm. All volunteers are welcome and should report at the registration table beside the oval. Please bring some good walking shoes, hat, garden gloves, water and sunscreen. Special collecting bags for the rubbish will be provided. **For enquiries contact:** Barry or Penny Tomkinson at 9484 9934

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## Climate Change talk – Tuesday 15 March, 8 pm

**St. Andrews Church Hall, corner Chisholm and Vernon Streets, Turramurra**

Associate Professor and ex STEP president, Michelle Leishman of Macquarie University will talk on climate change and its implications for vegetation management, ecological restoration and biodiversity conservation. Michelle is a leading scientist in this field and will be able to tell us just what climate change means for our ecosystems.

## **The State Election Candidates' Environmental Forum, Tuesday 22 February, 8pm** **St. Andrews Church Hall, corner Chisholm and Vernon Streets, Turramurra**

STEP will partner with the Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales to sponsor a Candidates Environmental Forum on Tuesday 22 February 2011. The Environmental Forum will be open to all local State election candidates in the Hornsby, Ku-ring-gai, Davidson and Epping electorates. The meeting will be open to members of the public as well as members of local environmental groups. Local media will also be invited to attend.

STEP President, Barry Tomkinson will be the moderator at this forum. Come along and see what your candidates have to say and bring your questions- or email them beforehand to: [barryt@bigpond.net.au](mailto:barryt@bigpond.net.au). (Note the 3 'r's)

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### **STEP Walks**

#### **Sunday, 20 February: Hornsby Valley Blue Gum Forest Walk**

This walk goes along the valley floor of Hornsby's majestic Blue Gum Forest growing on rich volcanic soils. It features tall Sydney blue gums along with a number of rainforest species including lillypilli, sassafras, scrub turpentine and vines. We will walk via Fishponds waterhole – a deep pool on a large bend of Berowra Creek flanked by tall sandstone cliffs. Some rock scramble is necessary along the way

**Meet:** End of Rosemead Road, cnr Lochinvar Place, Hornsby. (Gregory's Map 77 A6, Sydway Greater Sydney Map 214 K4). Meet at 9.45am.

**Length:** 4 - 5 km

**Duration:** 3+ hours

**Difficulty:** Medium/difficult, some rock scramble.

**Bring:** Water and sunscreen. STEP will provide tea/coffee, biscuits/cake.

**Book:** By contacting Robert Bracht at [Robert.bracht@hotmail.com](mailto:Robert.bracht@hotmail.com) or 0422 088 305.

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#### **Sunday 20 March: Berowra Creek walk**

This track follows part of the Great North Walk along the shoreline of tidal Berowra Creek and through a variety of landscapes and vegetation communities such as mangroves, salt marsh, lagoons, open forest and woodlands with several eucalypt species not common in the Lane Cove Valley. The salt marsh at Calna Creek is one of the largest intact areas in Sydney's north. There are many shell middens of the original Guringai Aboriginal people. Bird life is prolific, and there are some beautiful scenic views over the serene waters of Berowra Creek in its deep valley. We will turn around at Sams Creek.

**Meet:** At the north end of the car park on the north side of the Crosslands recreation area at 9.45 for a 10 am prompt start. Crosslands is reached by following the gravel road that continues and winds down the hill from the end of Somerville Rd, off Galston Rd, Hornsby Heights.

**Duration:** About 3 hours

**Difficulty:** The walk is relatively easy with no long hill climbs but there are some short, steep rocky sections which make it quite tiring.

**Bring:** Camera, binoculars, water, sunscreen and a snack. We may review nature photography opportunities as they arise.

**Book:** Call, or preferably email, John Martyn at [johnmartyn@opyusnet.com.au](mailto:johnmartyn@opyusnet.com.au) 0449 7962 or 0425 830 260. There is unreliable phone reception at Crosslands.

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#### **Sunday: 17 April: Sphinx Track to Bobbin Head and Bobbin Head Trail**

We shall walk from the Sphinx Memorial near the Bobbin Head Road entrance gates to Ku-Ring-Gai Chase along the Sphinx Track and Warrimoo Track to Bobbin Head. Warrimoo Track walk along Cowan Creek is pleasant as the path hugs the shore for most of the way passing beaches, she-oak stands and mangroves. At Bobbin Head we will have coffee at the Marina before we tackle the steep ascent of the Bobbin Head Trail and return to the Sphinx.

**Meet:** At Sphinx Memorial inside Ku-Ring-Gai Chase. (Gregory's Map 56 K13, Sydway Greater Sydney Map 196 C18). Suggest park cars outside the Chase Gates. Meet @ 9.45.

**Length:** 5km

**Duration:** 3 - 4 hours

**Difficulty:** Moderate/Difficult, steep ascent & descent

**Book:** By contacting Robert Bracht at [Robert.bracht@hotmail.com](mailto:Robert.bracht@hotmail.com) or 0422 088 305

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### **The STEP calendar**

We have never had so many events to tell you about in one newsletter. It's easy to overlook things so here is a summary for your diary. We shall also remind you by email where possible.

**20 February:** Blue Gum Walk  
**22 February:** Election forum  
**3 March:** Meet the author

**6 March:** Clean up Australia  
**12 March:** Field Guide launch  
**15 March:** Climate change talk

**20 March:** Berowra Creek walk  
**17 April:** Sphinx Track walk

Sometimes one comes across an article that you wish you had written yourself. Here's one from the long-time campaigner Dr Haydn Washington that appeared in the National Parks Association of NSW Journal last year. We commend it to you – and to the hierarchy of DECCW and to all our NSW politicians.

## **Society's worldview, sustainable use and the commodification of nature**

**Dr Haydn Washington. Environmental scientist and former acting CEO, and present executive member, of the Nature Conservation Council**

'There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot ... Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them ... For us of the minority, the opportunity to see geese is more important than television, and the chance to find a pasqueflower is a right as inalienable as free speech'

Aldo Leopold

Recently, during the lobbying around the Tourism Bill, environment groups sought to stop 'tourism' being given more prominence in the Act. A senior DECCW officer said to me 'We are all on the same side!' My immediate thought was 'No we aren't'. I later considered why this was so. I did my PhD on wilderness, specifically the confusion people have about what wilderness is. I researched environmental ethics, philosophy and history. It made me realise that conservationists constantly need to remind themselves why society so often 'doesn't get' what conservation is about. The answer is because of society's worldview, something we as conservationists rarely talk about – but we should.

A central point in our worldview is whether nature has a right to exist for itself – or is it just something for humans to use? If you believe the former (an eco-centric belief) you believe in the intrinsic value of nature. If you think nature is just for our 'use', then your worldview is anthropocentric (focused on ourselves), resourcist (nature is just a resource), and utilitarian (it's all about human use). This view collectively has been called modernism or modernity.(1,2) As a wilderness activist since the Colo (Wollemi) campaign in 1974, I am aware that most of the values we attribute to wilderness are utilitarian values. However most conservationists want to protect these places because we think the land has a right to exist for itself. We use the utilitarian arguments because they work on those with a modernist worldview. Thus we speak about the value of ecosystem services to human society – regulating water flow, containing bioresources we can use, holding soil, recycling nutrients, etc. We rarely say 'this place should be protected from exploitation because it has a right to exist for itself, not just for us'.

Sometimes environment groups also forget to ask themselves what their vision, principles and ethics are. For example, NCC's constitution does not state its vision or its values and immediately jumps to 'objects'. It is common for many organisations to do this, but if you don't know where you are coming from with your values then you often don't know where you want to go. Today the consumerist and resourcist view of modernism is largely in control. Indeed the latest State of the World 2010 shows that consumerism is spreading to cultures all around the world.(3) More and more commonly nature is seen just as a commodity, not something sacred and wondrous to keep for future generations. A few years ago this happened to water in Australia. Rather than being something held in public, it became a commodity to own and trade. Few people noticed. The same thing is happening with our atmosphere in terms of carbon trading. CO2 is just another commodity (albeit with dangerous effects) that can be traded. This is the triumph of the market economy. Commodification is now

spreading to nature as a whole, where nature is seen as just a tourist commodity.

However in the late 1800s and early 1900s something wonderful happened in the US – Henry David Thoreau and John Muir.(4,5) Later came Aldo Leopold, the author of the 'land ethic'.(6) These advocates spoke eloquently for the intrinsic value of nature, that national parks should be first and foremost for nature conservation. Forester Gifford Pinchot opposed Muir's view of wilderness, saying that conservation was about using these places for human benefit. However, the idea of national parks for nature conservation won out.(1) As a recent documentary on ABC television rightly claimed 'this was the best idea America ever had'.(7) The exploitation lobby was then held in check and national parks became the wild bulwark against the consumer and resourcist ethic. Until now. Now it seems in Australia that national parks and wilderness are just tourist commodities to be traded. Federally the government has created 'National Landscapes', yet these are not to celebrate the uniqueness and special nature of these places, or to help conserve their biodiversity and geodiversity. Instead at a recent meeting, the talk was about 'market share' and economic value. I asked how this actually helped nature conservation. There was an embarrassed silence, followed by the statement that hopefully tourist industries would become advocates to protect parks. However, 'National Landscapes' really exist to make more money for the government from tourism.

In NSW, the recent Tourism Bill came out of this ongoing trend towards the commodification of nature. It came out of the Tourism Task Force, whose aim was not to improve nature conservation but to make money for government. Its recommendations were accepted unchanged without going out for public comment. The Government then sprang its new Bill on the environment movement. Given the support of the Shooters Party and Fred Nile, the government had the numbers. The environment movement negotiated to improve the Bill, but in the end 'tourist' was enshrined in the management principles and the Minister became the final decision-maker about all leases and licences. Since then, one key DECCW bureaucrat has told the Colong Foundation for Wilderness that new wilderness nominations would have to be scrutinised to see if they conflicted with possible future tourist use. Tourist use is dressed up as a 'partnership', but Prof. Ralph Buckley notes that this is a misleading term, as the partnership is one way, with little contribution to conservation. Tour operators make money, but not for the park agency.(8)

So are we all 'on the same side'? I don't think we are - whether some bureaucrats realise it or not. During the

media debate of the Tourism Bill, another senior NSW bureaucrat stated on radio they were 'the protector of the parks'. But is this true now? If DECCW is acceding to the resourcist ethic and abandoning the ethical position that national parks are first and foremost for nature conservation, then one can validly question this. Seeing our national parks as tourist commodities to be traded is turning back more than 100 years of conservation ethics. It is yet one more small victory for the modernist view of the world, the same view that created the environmental crisis.(9) The lack of discussion of ethics means few people have actually thought through their view on intrinsic value. So embedded is the consumerist mind-set in a market economy that it seems that everything is to be traded. The problem is that this fails to understand the ecological limits to this ideology. Markets do fail, markets in fact need to be regulated, ecosystems do collapse.(9) It also fails to consider any ethical or spiritual values for national parks.(10)

Exploitation has not gone away. It is always there, it just changes its spots to fit whatever is in vogue. In the mid-70s the buzz word was 'multiple use'. This essentially meant exploiting national parks for timber, mining, tourism, etc. Actually it was multiple abuse. We staved off this exploitation grab at that time. Then in the US a group was created called 'Wise Use', pretending to be about conservation.(11) In fact they were about exploiting national parks for mining or timber, etc. This idea is still going on, and groups such as the Shooters Party try and dress up their desire to go shooting as conservation management. Now the latest buzz word in academia is 'sustainable use'. What is the word in common with all these terms? It is the 'use' of nature, the utilitarian exploitation of national parks and wilderness. I would bet that many of those using the term 'sustainable use' don't know the history of similar terms.

Instead 'sustainable use' is dressed up as something new and wonderful. It does not have 'ecologically' in front of sustainable, and without this the term is actually meaningless. Sustainable for tourist operators? Sustainable for the State's budget? It is a common resourcist ploy to remove this, for example ecologically sustainable development becomes 'sustainable development', removing the focus from keeping ecosystems sustainable. Prof. Ralph Buckley notes that

'sustainability' is all too often a 'soft excuse to avoid the hard realities of environmental science'.(8)

'Sustainable use' suggests that existing use of national parks is somehow unsustainable, that there is something wrong with the idea of a national park as it stands. I don't believe this to be the case. Often in the same breath with the term 'sustainable use' the word 'exclusion' is used, that national parks somehow exclude people. National parks don't exclude people, they exclude inappropriate activities that impact on the conservation of nature – and rightly so. Most of the academic discussion of 'sustainable' use seems to arise out of the situation in developing countries where protection of biodiversity in parks has problems because locals are degrading their lands and then exploiting the parks. Apparently we are to apply sustainable use to national parks because land use nearby is not sustainable. This strategy is partly a desperation measure to try and gain support for national parks through providing income to locals. This is not the situation in NSW, where the majority of the population supports the idea of national parks for nature conservation, and almost nobody is degrading them for survival reasons.

How is 'sustainable use' different from 'multiple use' or different from exploitation? History has shown that the postmodernist academic polemics against wilderness by historian Cronon(12) and philosopher Callicott(13) were immediately used to argue for greater exploitation of national parks and wilderness. Do we believe that the exploitation lobby is not (or will not) attempt to do the same with the term 'sustainable use'?

In summary, the environmental movement needs to learn from its history, to remember it is a part of a world movement seeking to change the consumer ethic about nature. That means thinking about and changing society's worldview. We need to recognise each new attempt to try to commodify our national parks. Without changing our consumer worldview, we will never reach a truly ecologically sustainable future.3 Today, we have a wonderful vision of national parks being for nature conservation first and foremost. We now face an ongoing trend to seek to commodify nature and abandon this vision. Environmentalists need to recognise this, and - as always—remain eternally vigilant.

## References

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4. Thoreau, H. D. (1854) *Walden: or Life in the Woods*, Dover Publications, New York (current edition 1995).
5. Gifford T (1996) *John Muir: his life and letters and other writings*. Baton Wicks Publications, London
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11. Luoma, J. R. (1992) *Eco-backlash*, *Wildlife Conservation* 95(6), 27-36.
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13. Callicott, J. B. (1994) *A critique of and an alternative to the wilderness idea*, *Wild Earth* 4, 54-59.

## Wandering cats murdering our wildlife – What you can do

Cats are beautiful animals that can make great pets but that wreak huge destruction on Australian animals when feral or when simply allowed to wander around the backyard. The Australian Wildlife Conservancy, in its Summer 2010/11 magazine, says that 'Feral cats kill at least 2 million native animals every day in northern Australia alone.' The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland estimates that 'Each Australian pet cat, if allowed to wander, has been estimated by some sources to kill an average of 16 mammals, 8 birds and 8 reptiles per year.'

(<http://www.wildlife.org.au/conservation/issues/2007/petmgmt.html>) The Victorian State Government says that 'All cats, even well fed pet cats, can kill wildlife. In Victoria, on average, each pet can kill 25 creatures every year; this adds up to 12.5 million creatures every year. At the same time, feral cats eat the equivalent of seven native rosellas each week, over 70 million creatures each year. (<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/>). The Cat Protection Society recommends that cats be kept indoors at all times.

A few years ago we wrote in this newsletter about this cat problem but were too flippant for one of our members who promptly resigned. We can't afford to lose more members, so must emphasise that we do love cats – but only when they are not allowed to wander. In our article in STEP Matters No 151 we pointed out that one should never allow a cat to bite or scratch. They can carry diseases which affect humans, especially toxoplasmosis which can cause birth defects and miscarriages, and blindness in young children as well as adults,

The following article is on the Ku-ring-gai Bushcare Association website (<http://www.bushcare.org.au/>) and gives information on dealing with any feral or wandering domestic cats that are on your property.

### Cats



For many of us, cats are loved companions, and members of the family. However, there is little doubt that cats do not belong in nature reserves and parks. Cats are highly skilled hunters and it is a little known fact that even a cat bite will kill most prey within 24 hours from blood poisoning caused by the bacteria in a cat's mouth, unless the victim receives a prompt antibiotic shot!

The law is not entirely clear on the course of action to take when we discover cats are visiting or living in reserves or Bushcare sites. While councils will help catch and deal with stray dogs, that isn't the case with cats.

A number of options are available to you, however, after speaking to the Animal Welfare League the following strategy is recommended.

Whether you think the cat is owned by a neighbour, or not, draft a letter for distribution to the neighbouring properties which covers the following points:

- A cat of the following description has been seen in the reserve (if you have a picture, include it)
- If available include any evidence of killed native animals and mention that owners can be fined \$165 if their cats damage anything outside the property where they are kept under the NSW Companion Animal Act 1988.
- State that following consultation with the Animal Welfare League (and council if you have checked with them) a program of trapping will commence shortly.
- If you have a cat, please ensure it remains at your property at all times.

- If you think you know whose cat it is, please pass this message onto them.
- When the cat is caught it will be sent to the Animal Welfare League for processing.
- Any stray cats caught will be humanely euthanised.

On reading this information you would expect responsible cat's owners to take extra care to keep their cat indoors. Up until this point, they may have been totally unaware that their puss has been visiting your reserve or Bushcare site. So if the cat is a neighbour's, the letter alone might solve your problem.

If not, traps are available for hire from Kennards (around \$44 p.w.) or the Animal Welfare League (around \$10 p.w.). The recommended method of trapping strays is to start feeding the animal on newspaper, just after dark, with something aromatic such as tuna. In a few days, once the routine is familiar, set up the trap with newspaper and food inside. (The trap should have a pressure sensor on the floor rather than the bait hook type). Put a towel over the trap to help disguise it. Then sit back and wait.

Stray cats can be very vicious when cornered. So leave the cat in the trap and next morning, deliver it to the Animal Welfare League for assessment. The League is only accepts these cats Monday to Friday so plan to trap Sunday to Thursday night. The League will check whether the cat is micro chipped and if so, will attempt to contact the owners. Strays will most likely be euthanised. Domesticated cats that stand a good chance of finding a new home (young healthy individuals) may be put up for adoption. You may wish to adopt it yourself if you have the inclination to have a house cat.

The benefit of the letter approach is two-fold. Firstly, it might alert the cat owner to what their sweet little kitty has been getting up to. And secondly, it will let all the neighbours know that the reserve is important and that it's being monitored, so we could hope to expect less inappropriate activity, such as cat and dog visits.

For More Information Contact:

Companion Animals Management Officer, Ku-ring-gai Council T: 9424 0705  
Animal Welfare League NSW (Manly, Warringah and Pittwater Branch)  
160 Mona Vale Road, Ingleside NSW 2101 T: 9913 8731  
(Contact Peggy Brown)

## A Day at UTS Lindfield

*Isolde and John Martyn attended a special event at the Lindfield Campus of UTS and Isolde has written about it.*

### A Celebration of Time, Space and Sound

In October 2010, the Music Therapy and Music Education Department of UTS organized a special day at the Lindfield Campus. The concept was to celebrate the beauty and history of the site, and STEP was asked if they could provide a speaker on the local bushland.

For those who have never stepped foot there, the campus is at the end of Grosvenor Road in Lindfield and perches on a promontory like a strategically built castle, presiding over the Lane Cove Valley.

The program began with singer-songwriter Michael Birk acknowledging the Aboriginal inheritance and playing some of his compositions. Then Viki Gordon and her colleague from the Aboriginal Heritage Office gave a presentation. Viki is an archaeologist and a consultant on Aboriginal sites to several north shore councils. STEP's John Martyn was next with 'How well do you know your local bushland?'

John's talk took the form of an illustrated journey down the Lane Cove Valley, from rainforest-filled sandstone gullies and tall eucalypt forest in the upper reaches, via the meandering broadwater of the middle reaches near UTS, to the mangroves and mud flats of the estuary.

In research for the talk, John and I had done a reconnaissance of the sandstone woodland of the campus on a previous cloudy, showery day. There were some beautiful smooth-barked apples and I was admiring one when I noticed a curious creature like a tiny, fluffy white sea anemone nestling in a dint in the bark. This proved to be the larva of a species of ladybird known as the "mealy bug destroyer", and this slow-moving, innocent-looking creature had been found to be such an effective predator on citrus mealy bugs that it was exported to California in 1891. And then another surprise, a beetle-like creature that scuttled from point to point on the bark, but coloured so cryptically that it was

almost invisible at rest. The Australian Museum identified this as the nymph of a tree hopper. Then another delightful discovery on a nearby rough-barked tree, a bug with a shield-like back, marked like an Aboriginal painting from the Central Desert.

So three surprises! Sometimes we walk too fast through the bush, and need to take time to "stop and smell the roses". But back to the celebration...

The last speaker was Roy Lumby from the Twentieth Century Heritage Society talking about how the Lindfield college building had been designed to fit in with the beauty of the site. The audience was then led on a tour of the building. But what a tour! Yes, it successfully showed how the architect had sought to provide a unity with the surrounding bush but not only that -- the day was also a celebration of music. The UTS Music therapy and Music Education Students provided patches and splashes of gorgeous sound. As the people on the tour turned a corner, they might be treated to xylophones or sweet voices. It was always a delightful surprise.

At lunchtime there was a picnic on the southern lawn and the day ended with everyone (audience and musicians) in a circle playing drums and percussion -- with some shining performances on the drums from several little ones in the audience.

So, a beautiful experience but there was a sad edge to the day. It was a valedictory celebration by the Music Department. They are being closed down. What was also regrettable is that a proportion of the campus (including much of the lower carpark) has been sold by UTS and is to be turned into apartment blocks. Is that the beginning of the end for the UTS Lindfield campus?

So thank you and sorrowfully farewell to those staff and students who created such a wonderful program for the day. Not only did the campus bushland provide a healing descant to the rhythms and pressures of Sydney life but in itself it was clearly an inspiration for music.

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## Hats Off!

*John Martyn conducted a STEP bushwalk last year on a hot day and has some thought on cooling off.*

In publicity for bushwalks, STEP (and other groups) urge participants to wear hat and sunscreen, obviously to avoid the effects of our powerful subtropical summer sun. However at the other end of the scale, most people who hike in cold climates, or ski, wear head protection to avoid heat loss and hypothermia. There are wild variations in the estimates of how much body heat is actually lost through the head, some websites claiming it as a total furphy dating from wartime advice from the US military. One reasonably authoritative site states that it varies from about 7% of total body heat loss at rest, to up to more than 50% when exercising due apparently to increased cerebral blood flow as the heart rate rises.

STEP's Lane Cove River Loop bushwalk, on a steamy day last November, was quite heat-stressful for most participants, and any way you could get cool would have been welcome (a swim in the river was not an option!). We were slightly lucky in that the route is quite shady, and there was patchy cloud cover by midday, but the wind went flat on us and it was quite still and sticky and hovering on 30°. And there were just enough uphill segments to significantly raise heart rates. Given that the sun itself was actually not much of a problem, the best advice to overheated walkers might just have been to "take your hats off".

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### The STEP Committee

Barry Tomkinson – President  
Stephen Proctor – Treasurer  
Helen Wortham - Secretary

John Burke – Vice President  
Andrew Little,  
Tim Gastineau Hills  
John Martyn

Robin Buchanan  
Don Davidson  
Jill Green

The newsletter editor for this edition is John Burke who has written everything not otherwise accredited. Send complaints, praise, comments or letters to the editor to [secretary@step.org.au](mailto:secretary@step.org.au)

## Two book reviews

### Do we dare hope that there is room for optimism?

The job of environmentalists is to improve things, to expose the harm done by the unthinking and the greedy, to point out the consequences of their actions and to propose a better approach to the issues facing humanity. That means that we are perpetually in an opposing role and continually criticising. But what if there is no problem, what if we are all wasting our time and efforts?

The well-credentialed scientist and author, Matt Ridley, has written an interesting book titled *The Rational Optimist*. You can read about him at <http://www.rationaloptimist.com/>. His basic tenet is that human intelligence has evolved from when people first started to exchange goods and services and thus to specialise. The result was a huge and continuing improvement in our standard of living, a standard that few of us would agree to forgo to return to an earlier age. Many of the world's citizens have more comforts, health and services than the elites had in centuries past and those that still have but little are rapidly catching up.

Ridley tells the fascinating story of the history of trade, industrialisation, the rise of cities, the substitution of fossil fuels for slave labour, the advantages of genetically modified food, the options for feeding the billions and much more. He even has some optimistic things to say about Africa and climate change. He admits to problems but has faith in our ability to deal with them before disaster strikes. It's a book worth reading but not convincing enough to lead STEP to pack up and shut down – as tempting as that may be. We need people questioning and opposing where necessary. Without such opposing we would have dammed the Franklin, put a freeway through the Lane Cove Valley bushland and generally been left with whatever the profit takers left us. On a national and worldwide basis animal and plant extinctions and loss of forests would have been more horrific than has happened.

So there is room for optimism but surely only if the human capacity for innovation and improvement is appropriately directed. That means that we must keep questioning, evaluating and opposing. Shame about that!

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### Mystery in North Turramurra, Intrigue in East Wahroonga?

We thank STEP member Gerry Cohen for this review of *The Unlikely Bushman* by Ron Hicks.

A hermit, a house a swimming pool, nude bathing, all in the depths of Lover's Jump Creek Valley? How? Why? And most of all, who? Who could have lived alone in the bush down in the Valley, unknown and unremembered, only a couple of hundred metres below our feet, where we sit sipping our lattes on Bobbin Head Road?

The journalist and local resident Ron Hicks, after a chance discovery, set about trying to find the answers and finally did uncover the intriguing story of this mysterious soul, who lived among us in his bushland hideaway in North Turramurra and died as he had lived, alone and unknown.

Bushbashing with his dog in the Valley one late afternoon in winter, Hicks stumbled across broken shards of crockery, then discovered that the flat rock on which he was briefly resting was man-made, supported by stones joined with cement pointing. Part of a wood-burning stove was his next find, and on subsequent visits to the site he found more pieces of the stove, an elaborate candle-holder, even the remains of what appeared to be a generator. Later he found three concrete blocks or columns, about a metre tall, clearly indicating some more substantial structure than the temporary shacks commonly found around Sydney during the Depression years. His journalistic curiosity aroused, and not even having a name for the mystery soul, Hicks began a daunting journey of investigation, interviewing older local residents and trawling through a near impenetrable maze of Government departments and their records, some as far back as the late nineteenth century, to try to unravel the mystery.

Trying to find local residents who might remember a hermit in the Valley proved frustrating, as those who may have known of him (her?) had mostly died or moved away. Finally, as Hicks was standing on the doorstep of an older resident who was actually in the process of moving out, a name was casually dropped. At last Hicks had a clue, even though the first name of the mystery bushman was no more than a nickname, and Hicks could not even be sure of the spelling of the surname.

Thence began the often frustrating Odyssey through one Government department after another, digging through long-buried records until at last Hicks was able to trace the life of his hermit-bushman from birth to death and give us a real life mystery story set in our own suburb.

Along the way, Hicks recounts fascinating snippets of past characters and events in North Turramurra and East Wahroonga which we would otherwise never heard of. *The Unlikely Bushman* is a fascinating detective story, a must-read for all the people of North Turramurra and neighbouring suburbs.

Published by Ron Hicks [rjhicks@live.com.au](mailto:rjhicks@live.com.au)



## Good to know someone is reading STEP Matters

We get very few letters to the editor but one arrived from Julian Ledger following our last newsletter of 2010 where we commented on commercialism of national parks. We print his letter below and the response from STEP President, Barry Tomkinson. One can reflect upon this discussion in the context of Haydn Washington's article earlier in this newsletter.

### Dear STEP

I share in the frustration expressed in STEP Matters # 157 regarding the underfunding of National Parks (NPs) which causes NPWS difficulties in carrying out its charter. It seems to me we allow NPs to be underfunded because as a community we do not care enough and don't bring pressure to bear through the political process. Also in NSW we now have 820 NPs and I understand only 46 charge entry fees – that's less than 6%. The fees are an average of \$7 per vehicle which is reasonable and should not be a deterrent (with the exception perhaps of the high fees at Kosciuszko National Park). In NSW in 09/10 the Park Use Fee total revenue collected was \$20M which reportedly currently accounts for approximately 30% of annual expenditure on visitor facilities and infrastructure. Presumably it is not practical or economic to collect fees at most NPs which limits the application of a user pays model.

The STEP Matters update goes on to suggest "that recent relaxation of NSW legislation to allow commercial tourism developments inside national parks could become a convenient funding mechanism to cover such budgetary shortfalls" and "we are however fearful that the need for additional revenue will see commercial and recreational considerations gradually replace conservation as the primary responsibility of our national parks. This would indeed be an ecological disaster".

The above makes a lively editorial and was certainly the line of the National Parks Association during the passage of the recent legislation but, given the checks and balances, what in fact is the risk? As an observer over the years it seems to me that the NPWS in NSW for the most part has not been sympathetic to tourism franchises or licenses within NPs whilst at the same time, information, outreach and marketing could be better. The consequence is that if you are a bushwalker and able to read topographical maps the NPs are excellent (and I've gained enormous satisfaction by frequently walking a very long way off the beaten track). If however you are not confident, are less motivated, do not own a car, do not read or do research or are less

### Dear Julian

Thank you for your recent thoughtful note on tourism in our national parks (NPs).

STEP is quite supportive of many of the points that you make in your note. You paint an attractive vision of a modern NP system that caters to the needs of a wide range of groups, with strict conservation values being the first and foremost criterion.

Therein lies the rub! STEP is of the view that the recent legislative changes to the laws governing tourism in NSW National Parks actually serve to undermine the primacy of the conservation requirement in three key

physically able then the opportunities in NPs are more limited. A further significant proportion of the population does not visit NPs at all.

In simple terms if more people were introduced to NPs and used them within existing strict conservation constraints and, in particular, if there were better interpretation and more education centres then the funding base through taxation and user pays could be expanded for the benefit of NPs and their conservation.

How's this for a vision – a NPs organisation which has a network of modern, attractive visitor/interpretation/education centres and with the technology to match the attention span of gen Y and gen Z. A NPs organisation which has three funding sources – taxation, user pays (possibly via a sat nav process rather than toll gates) and franchise/license fees from facilities attached to visitor centres and licensed operators bringing groups into parks. A NPs organisation with strict conservation values first and foremost and actively supported by not only individual members of the public and environmental organisations but also private operators whose livelihoods are tied to the continuing quality of the NPs.

I think there is plenty of evidence of this working well around the world. I think there are park systems resourced and managed better than ours. I think therefore that rather than editorialising about hypothetical ecological disaster let's consider the present threat of deterioration by neglect and underfunding and look more creatively at what can be achieved in the future. The controls necessary to make this work are to be achieved through the approval process, the term of licenses or franchises and their conditions along with appropriate monitoring.

I should mention an interest – I work in tourism (for a not for profit organisation).

Julian Ledger

areas:

- By removing the prohibition on the exclusive private use of NPs. (STEP believes that all our NPs should be open to the public at large, not reserved for special groups for whatever reason)
- By allowing leases to be granted for purposes that are not tied to the nature conservation purpose of NPs (we agree with you that conservation should be their primary requirement)
- By giving more power to the Minister as the issuer of leases and licences, which may not be reviewed by the Courts (STEP is always suspicious of politicians who seek to remove their decisions from the scrutiny

of the Courts!). For example, courts will no longer be able to throw out bad decisions, such as proposals to establish private universities and wedding reception centres in these parks.

STEP sees the new rules as being the thin edge of a very thick wedge, designed to weaken the levels of protection applying to native fauna and flora that NPs were established to provide. The rationale for the new changes is that they will help to meet park visitor target numbers and increase park income. The evidence for such claims is however quite thin. Professor Ralph Buckley, Director of the International Centre for Ecotourism Research at Queensland's Griffith University, has stated that on current trends visitor target numbers will in any case be easily met, while warning that private development in NPs "just does not work" and that the evidence suggests that NPs run the danger of giving away the most profitable part of their business to private interests. For example, in South Africa, where national park tourism is a large industry, Professor Buckley says that 66% of park revenue comes from fees charged directly to visitors, with commercial operators contributing only 5%.

The new changes open up NPs to more development by introducing the concept of "sustainable tourism", a wording designed to perhaps alleviate concerns until it is realised that the concept is not actually defined in the legislation at all. Barrister Tim Robertson suggests that a court will therefore likely conclude that the concept

means tourism managed in a way that "will not threaten or jeopardise future tourism!"

The changes have been delivered after a sustained programme of pressure from many groups in the commercial tourism market, especially following on from the 2008 recommendations of the Tourism Inquiry headed up by John O'Neil. STEP is fearful that, stripping away the pretence, the real purpose of the new changes appears to be to grant developers greater opportunity and scope. They will ensure that more hotels, lodges, cabins, fast food outlets etc get built. Leases granting exclusive use to public building and tracts of parkland will be allowed; even gazetted "wilderness" areas will not be exempted. Tourism, rather than conservation, will become the primary aim of our NPs.

Proof will be found in the way in which NPWS budget allocations alter over the coming period. STEP is anticipating that conservation related projects will be squeezed to fund additional tourist related work. Now that would certainly be a tragedy, especially given the increasing pressure on National Parks to open up their land to the use of so-called sporting groups (Shooters Party, mountain bikers etc). With less than 7% of NSW carrying national park protection as it is, STEP is of the view that their future as conservation refuges is under increasing threat from a wide range of pressure groups, the tourism industry being only the latest.

Barry Tomkinson

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## Meena wins NSW Young Scientist Environmental Award

Meena Sritharan of Strathfield Girls High School was last week awarded the STEP Inc Young Scientist Environmental Award at a ceremony at the University of Western Sydney, organised by the Science Teachers Association of New South Wales Inc.

Meena's paper, *How to clean up an oil spill*, looked at how the water temperature of the ocean affects the time taken to clean up an oil spill. Judge Syd Smith mentioned that the general standard of entries this year was very high, reflecting a high level of maturity and skill by the students. Syd said of the winning entry "Meena's research is topical, very relevant for those who have to face future accidental oil spills and the quality of her presentation was the equal of many professional publications".

STEP President Barry Tomkinson commented that the award is part of STEP's continuing commitment to the field of environmental education. "We are passionate about addressing the causes and consequences of environmental change. As a result, we are also passionate about environmental education. We are therefore delighted to continue our long involvement with the Young Scientist programme," he said.



Meena Sritharan receives her award from Syd Smith

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## The really good news!

For the past few years visitors to Lane Cove National Park have been frustrated by the closure of the kiosk that sold coffee, cold drinks, ice creams and the like. Now a coffee trolley has appeared that operates on weekends and public holidays. You will find it in front of the administration building near the children's play area.

## Eucalypts of the Lane Cove Catchment – Part 2

From STEP Committee member Dr John Martyn. This is part two of this article, part one appearing in the August 2010 issue of STEP Matters. John states: "I would greatly appreciate comments and feedback. There is much still to learn".

### 3. The stringybarks

Stringybark's are not well represented in the Lane Cove catchment, compared say with Ku-ring-gai Chase and Garigal National Parks. Scattered specimens of **white stringybark** (*E.globoidea*) can be found in shale/sandstone transition soils in places like Field of Mars Reserve and Dawson Ave, Thornleigh, and there is even a specimen in Sheldon Forest. The **common sandstone stringybark** (*E. oblonga*) that is so much a feature of Ku-ring-gai Chase, does not occur, its place being taken by isolated pockets of the very similar **narrow-leaved stringybark** (*E. sparsifolia*); localities being North Epping and Auluba Ovals and near the Kate St Scout Hall bordering Rofe Park, Turramurra. These sites are either close to or within the shale/sandstone transition; whereas *E. oblonga* is normally a sandstone species. The key Duffys Forest species, **Brown Stringybark** (*E. capetillata*) does not occur in the catchment despite being named on the council's "Duffys Forest community" information plaque at Auluba Reserve. Its distribution is more towards the coast.

The south-western part of the catchment starts to show Cumberland Plain shale and lower rainfall influences. There is a small stand of **thin-leaved stringybark** (*E. eugenioides*) on the south-west side of Field of Mars Cemetery. This species hybridises readily with *E. globoidea*, and stringybarks in general are notorious hybridisers; and it is perhaps somewhat of a relief that they are not well represented locally so one is not constantly bogged down with identification headaches.

### 4. Ashes and mallee-ashes

Van Klaphake points out that **silvertop ash** (*E. sieberi*) and **whipstick mallee-ash** (*E. multicaulis*) tend to occur together. This is definitely true in the Lane Cove catchment, on both the Twin Creeks and Fox Valley ridgetops. Both sites have high fire frequency, and many eucalypt species adopt mallee habit there including **red bloodwood** and **scribbly gum**. **Silvertop ash** is very prone to mallee habit when young and its seed capsules are virtually identical to those of **whipstick mallee-ash**, so how do you tell them apart? Well the stems of the latter are bare and whiteish throughout whereas those of young *E. sieberi* have a grey, knobby stocking. On the Twin Creeks ridgetop it is difficult to believe sometimes that most of the beanpole mallee trunks are of the same species as that massive, thick old *E. sieberi* with its black, furrowed trunk, that grows next to the track on the way to Howson Oval, and looks exactly the same as it did when we moved into the area thirty years ago.

### 5. Mahoganies, red and white

It was a surprise to learn on the eucalypt course that red and white mahoganies are from different eucalypt sub-genera; red belonging to **Symphiomirtus** sub-genus and white to **Eucalyptus**. Examples of both occur in the Lane Cove catchment.

**Red mahogany** (*E. resinifera* subsp. *Resinifera*) is quite common, especially on the Ryde-Macquarie side, but also right along the north-east flanks of the catchment down to Lane Cove. It inhabits the shale/sandstone transition, but it remains locally common on the

sandstone side of it, extending down along sandstone slopes in the Sugarloaf-Boronia Park area. Occasional specimens are also found on shale, such as in Sheldon Forest, and were possibly once more widespread on this substrate before urbanisation. But its greatest presence now is as a park, street and old-garden species where it is able to expand to take on a spreading habit, and is distinctive with its dark red-brown fibrous to stringy bark and lush crown of dark-green leaves.

**White mahogany** (*E. acmenoides*) is near the southern limit of its range in the west of the catchment, where it is a large species growing on shale in bushland reserves like Stewart Park on Epping Rd, and Edna Hunt Sanctuary. Strangely the smaller, but near-identical **shade mahogany** (*E. umbra*) is a tree of totally different habitat, growing on rugged sandstone outcrops in Ku-ring-gai Chase, though it is also found in sandstone woodland in Garigal National Park where it is a medium-sized, straight-trunked tree.

### 6. Blackbutts and peppermints

Both species are so common that it is easy to take them for granted and overlook them. They even hybridise locally and an *E. pilularis-piperita* cross was the first eucalypt hybrid to be recognised historically.

**Blackbutt** occurs in almost all habitats, from shale through sandstone valleys to sandstone ridgetops. If you walk along a ridgetop like Twin Creeks or Thornleigh, you only have to descend into the gentlest hollow and you will find blackbutts, though they will be short and low-branching compared with forest specimens. As you move down the valley to the estuary you will notice that the species becomes progressively shorter and lower-branched in the more open landscapes.

**Sydney peppermint** too has a wide distribution, but usually shuns shale. Nonetheless it can be a substantial tree along creek lines, with some whoppers along Devlins and Byles Creeks where in places it takes over from blackbutt and smooth-barked apple as the dominant large eucalypt.

### 7. Ironbarks

It's a shame that ironbarks are rare in the catchment because no large eucalypt is more awe-inspiring than a big ironbark with its massive, tall, straight, black, furrowed trunk. A largish **grey ironbark** (*E. paniculata*) in William Lewis Park on the corner of Lucinda Ave and Fox Valley Rd, gives you some idea, and there is also a beauty near the corner of Malton and Boundary Rds, North Epping.

In the catchment, *E. paniculata* is a shale or transition species, with a liking for drier, poorer shale soils, as in William Lewis Park, though it is also found around the alluvium/sandstone interface in Berowra Valley around Crosslands. It is almost the sole representative of its clan in the catchment, though there are a handful of *E. siderophloia* (also called grey ironbark) in Lane Cove that seem likely to be remnants of original forest stands (Van Klaphake pers com). Now is also the time to look out for planted pink and red-flowered forms of **mugga**, or **red ironbark** (*E. sideroxylon*), with their beautiful and

almost unique combination of silvery-grey foliage, red or pink flowers and rough black trunks. There used to be a particularly nice one at Milson's Point Station - hopefully it is still there!

### 8. Blue gums and bangalays

Despite the rather specific and shale-based nature of Blue Gum High Forest, **Sydney blue gums** (*E. saligna*) will grow anywhere. There is a big one around the corner from our street growing on a sandstone outcrop; and look at the way they have taken off at Lamberts Clearing in the Wildflower Garden. Blue gums can be found right down the valley, and really take off on alluvial soils, but in these one needs to be careful with i.d. Along the Buffalo Creek Boardwalk in Field of Mars Reserve, the first two white-trunked gums you arrive at when walking upstream are in fact **flooded gums** (*E. grandis*) and not native locally, though the remainder further along the boardwalk are in fact **Sydney blue gums** (plus **blackbutts**). Then one must be on the lookout for *E. saligna*'s first cousin **mountain blue gum** (*E. deanei*), the giant white beanpole of Blue Mountains valleys. This species is certainly capable of naturalising locally.

One big puzzle is how much genetic presence of **bangalay** (*E. botryoides*) there is in the local *E. saligna* stock. The tendency of local blue gums to have short to long stockings of rough, tessellated bark, and a more cylindrical shape to their fruit, is often attributed to hybridisation with bangalay. You notice the stockings increasingly as you progress down the valley, where blue gums also tend to be shorter and lower branching. But Van Klaphake cautions that this may just be a natural variation, a sort of southern race of blue gum, and nothing to do with hybridisation. After all, **bangalay** is a rough-barked, salt-tolerant species quite different in appearance to blue gum, and the opportunities to get together to cross-breed are limited. In the Lane Cove catchment bangalays occur very rarely in the lower estuary.



9. Grey gum

**Grey gums** (*Eucalyptus punctata*) are largely absent from the Lane Cove catchment except in a few shale-based reserves like Stewart Park and Wallumatta Nature Reserve. There is however a small stand growing on sandstone in Tunks Park (possibly planted) and elsewhere in Sydney's north the species grows happily on sandstone with no hint of a shale band in sight, so why this contrast. Maybe it is possible that in higher rainfall sites the tree can thrive on lower nutrients, which might explain its wide distribution on sandstone in Garigal and Ku-ring-gai Chase National Parks (not to mention Berowra Valley), but surely there is enough rain in the Lane Cove catchment for it to flourish on sandstone there if that is the explanation?

### 10. The strange scaly barks

Scaly bark (*E. squamosa*) is an unusual tree. It is small (5-10m) but quite robust looking, and I have walked past the same ones now for more than 20 years and they never seem to grow much or change shape. You usually see them in ones and twos, maybe up to five or six in a group, then no more for hundreds of metres, even kilometres. Although at one stage scaly bark was thought to be a variety of **forest red gum** (*E. tereticornis*) it is now believed to be more closely related to mallee eucalypts like *E. transcontinentalis* of the West Australian inland.



Above: Sydney Blue Gum (*Eucalyptus saligna*)

Left: Red Mahogany (*Eucalyptus resinifera*) West Chatswood

## Lane Cove River after the Storms

More News, good and bad, from John Martyn

Last February the upper Lane Cove River and tributaries were literally scoured out by a massive flash flood from a severe thunderstorm that broke over an already saturated landscape. There is no doubt that this flood was amplified by runoff from hard surfaces. Some of you will have seen evidence of the power of the water since it tore up huge slabs of concrete from the ford crossing of Devlins Creek and cast them almost effortlessly downstream.

One effect that was immediately obvious was that aquatic plants were virtually eliminated by scouring, and to date there is very little regrowth. Oddly, the creek waters were crystal clear for months after the event, since all residual clays and organic matter were swept downstream and through to the estuary. The damage to the creekside vegetation was profound and ongoing. Coachwoods, black wattles and water gums were bent over to ground level. These are not recovering as one would like, but the privets are re-sprouting as dense thickets, accompanied by mulberry, box elder, Chinese elm and numerous weedy herbs like fleabane. From casual observation it appears there has been a loss of native riparian vegetation.

But I was staring into a pool in the Lorna Pass section the other day and saw a native Cox's gudgeon. In the Field Guide I had made a point that they had more or less vanished from the upper catchment – I hadn't spotted one for at least three years. Aristotle said "*One swallow doth not a summer make...*" and this is true of this fish sighting, but it is certainly a glimmer of hope.

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## Works in the Lane Cove Valley

Refurbishment work to the aqueducts over the river at De Burghs Bridge and at Kissing Point Road are underway with the former due for completion in January. The path was closed for a day and will be closed for a short period in June while they demobilise the site. In the case of the latter, the path between Kissing Point Road and Vimiera Road will be closed from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> February between 9 am and 2pm Monday to Friday.

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## In Case You Missed It

### 450 Mirror Solar Facility Under Construction in Newcastle – From the Warren Centre newsletter

Australia's largest solar-thermal tower system designed to demonstrate that, after the cost of carbon is taken into account, electricity can be generated by sun-power at the same or less cost than fossil fuel-generated electricity started construction at the CSIRO National Solar Energy Centre in Newcastle in NSW on 26 October 2010. CSIRO started installing 450 large mirrors (heliostats) manufactured by Central Coast company, Performance Engineering Group, that will create temperatures of up to 1,000 degrees C. Creating these 2.4 x 1.8m panels of glass mirrors for a solar field is not easy... the shape has to be very accurate and the construction has to be strong enough to withstand extreme weather.

The heliostats have a lightweight steel frame with a unique, simple design, ideal for mass production. Smaller than many heliostats currently being used around the world, they are never-the-less just as efficient, more cost effective and much easier to install.

Dr Alex Wonhas, said the economical design of the heliostats will also make solar fields more cost effective to build and operate. "It's a local idea generated by CSIRO and manufactured by a local company, which will have global impact," said CSIRO's Energy Transformed Flagship Director, Dr. Alex Wonhas.

The heliostat field is part of CSIRO's new solar Brayton Cycle project – a solar tower and field that generates electricity from just the air and sun.

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### Jan-Oct 2010 the warmest period on record

November 30, 2010 – 11:38 am, by [Crikey](#)

**Earth and paleo-climate scientist at ANU, Dr Andrew Glikson writes:** The combined global land and ocean surface temperature for January–October 2010 was +0.63°C above the 20th century average of 14.1°C and tied with 1998 as the warmest January–October period on record, according to new report *State of the Climate – Global Analysis*, October 2010. See the full article at <http://blogs.crikey.com.au/rooted/2010/11/30/jan-oct-2010-warmest-period-on-record/?source=cmailler>.

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### No money for geothermal

The Climate Spectator (<http://www.climatespectator.com.au>) tells us that the heat from just 1% of Australia's geothermal resources would be enough to power the country some 26,000 times over. Geothermal, heat produced by radioactive decay kilometres underground, would seem to have all the advantages of nuclear energy without any of the waste and safety problems. It's disheartening therefore that little is happening here to develop that resource while countries such as Indonesia, Germany and the US are investing public and private money. It seems that we are happy to keep burning coal. Wonderful!

## Ignoring the Elephant in the Family Room – or is it the Mammoth in the Kitchen?

Several conservation groups have published a document they called *Natural Advantage, A 2011 NSW State Election Agenda for Safeguarding the Benefits of Nature*. See ([www.nccnsw.org.au/campaigns/state-election](http://www.nccnsw.org.au/campaigns/state-election)). A very praiseworthy and worthwhile venture it is too and STEP supports all the initiatives therein. There is plenty about cutting greenhouse pollution, forests, marine sanctuaries, weed control, sustainable urban areas and so on. The groups involved are the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, the National Parks Association of NSW, the Total Environment Centre Inc., The Wilderness Society, the Blue Mountains Conservation Society and the Colong Foundation for Wilderness.

A popular definition of lunacy is doing the same thing over and over while expecting a result that never comes and that's akin to trying to fix a problem while ignoring the obvious cause. An example of that was the ACF's campaign against the Traveston Crossing Dam on the Mary River. They campaigned without mentioning that the cause of the perceived need was the exploding population in southeast Queensland. The dam has been delayed but as, and if, the pressure of population mounts it will be a stay of sentence rather than a reprieve.

We read *Natural Advantage* with a growing sense of disbelief. Alas, the only mention of population was to do with fish numbers and the like. It is unbelievable that they have written this without mentioning population. At Australia's recent rate of growth of over 2% pa our population will double every 35 years which means that we would have 180 million in a bit more than 100 years. At lower rates of growth the time will be extended but the result will be the same.

Just how we are going to slash total greenhouse emissions, restore health to rivers, make urban areas sustainable and achieve the other objectives of *Natural*

*Advantage* in the face of relentless population growth is far from clear. With our present population we have managed to devastate the ecology of vast areas of Australia and it's hard to see that things will improve if we keep doubling. Let's say that we would like to halve our total greenhouse emissions in 50 years and that our population doubles in that time. To achieve our goal we will need to have one quarter of the per capita emissions that we now have. And in a further 50 years our per capita emissions will need to be one eighth of our current level. If they think that is easily achievable then how about deciding where our food will be grown? We can probably cope for a while if we farm vast areas of Northern Australia, the farms will sit nicely with all the mines and gas extraction facilities that will be up there. Is that what our environment groups are advocating?

By ignoring the issue of population they are pandering to the growth-without-limit merchants within our business, political and religious ranks and are helping to sabotage real (and truly sustainable) environmental progress. To ignore one of the greatest ongoing contributors to environmental degradation makes their efforts scientifically invalid. They are wasting their time.

Of course the issue of population can be sensitive and difficult. But that should be reason for crusading environmentalists to confront rather than to hide from it. It needs to be said that the issue is not about race, not about religion, not about culture, not about refugees or boat people or how many children a family should have. It's a bigger issue – about the future of the world and, in this case, about NSW and Australia.

If they think that population growth is not an environmental problem then they should say so and give us the science behind their reasoning. To ignore it is cowardice. The environment deserves better.

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### What is La Niña? John Martyn

It does not mean a tempestuous Spanish lady, as a *Herald* journalist recently wrote. It actually means "little girl", the opposite gender to El Niño – "boy child". Weatherwise it is the countercyclical mode of the dry El Niño pattern, and as the press keep telling us, we are in one right now! Warmer water in the western Pacific causes air to rise, with a relative drop in pressure, which induces air to flow more strongly westwards from the colder eastern Pacific to compensate. This boosts the trade wind flow and it blows massive amounts of moisture onto our east coast and across the north of the continent. But that is only half the story of the drought-breaking rainfalls across the inland and south-east.

Innovative research at UNSW has highlighted the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) based on sea temperature ratios across the central and northern Indian Ocean. As well as a La Niña (strongly positive SOI) we are also experiencing a negative IOD which tends to induce Indian Ocean atmospheric moisture to flow north and meet up with the strong La Niña flow from the east, curving back across northern Australia, flowing south-eastwards down through the centre, and meeting cold air from the Southern Ocean to trigger heavy rainfall from trough lines and low pressure cells. Unfortunately most of this moisture misses poor old WA, and their south-west has experienced almost its driest winter on record.

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### Vale Jan Ruys 12.08.1932 – 21.10.2010

STEP was formed out of the chaos and devastation that was the construction of the Canoon Road netball courts. Jan and his wife Robin have had a long association with STEP. At our first AGM in June 1979 the minutes record that 'Mrs R Ruys was appointed Treasurer'. Those minutes then reported that "It was at 5.15 am that a telephone call from Jan Ruys ..... alerted us to a very large bulldozer at the end of Canoon Road." That would have been in April 1978 and the bulldozer was about to destroy the bushland where the netball courts now are and to signal the beginning of STEP. At the second AGM Jan was appointed Vice Chairman, and again in August 1981. He was still there in 1983 and then in 1985 for the last time. So he was closely involved from mid 1978 to October 86 - an 8 year commitment. After that he was a regular attender at our meetings and always supportive.

Our sympathy goes to Robin and family.

## NCC Annual Conference October 2010

STEP attended the conference and Barry Tomkinson reports as follows:

The Nature Conservation Council (NCC) of New South Wales has been the peak environmental organisation within the State for over fifty years. NCC works to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature. Representing more than 100 member societies, including STEP, each year it holds an Annual Conference of members at which a range of business options are debated and voted upon.

At the most recent NCC Conference, STEP proposed two motions for adoption. The first was based on the STEP *Position Paper on Bushland Tracks and Trails*, a copy of which was sent to all STEP members last year. After some debate, the Conference endorsed the STEP Position Paper but only in its "application to existing mountain biking sanctioned management trails in National Park estate". STEP was able to accept this minor restriction and as a result the Conference authorised the NCC Executive to write to the NSW Minister for Climate Change and the Environment, to endorse the STEP Paper and to urge the adoption of the approach and standards laid out in that Paper.

The second STEP motion urged the NCC to recognise that "exponential population growth is one of the key

threats to the environment, that there cannot be infinite growth in a finite world, and to develop and prosecute policy accordingly". This motion too was carried at the Conference, however the NCC Executive has subsequently declined to assign any level of priority to population growth in their current operational plan, preferring to maintain their long standing position of taking only "limited action" (aka no action at all). NCC have in fact had a "policy on population" since 1986 and subsequent Annual Conference's have passed numerous motions on the subject since that time, yet the Executive continue to sit on their hands and ignore this major issue.

Their evident preference is to focus instead on a broad programme of often times self evident short term goals, such as urging a "reduction in unnecessary water consumption", while apparently ignoring that fact that increasing population is a fundamental cause of the water shortage problem (and most other environmental ones). STEP will continue to push the NCC to become a serious advocate on this matter and to stop observing events from the sidelines. See our article on page 13.

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## Doctors for the Environment press release

It's great to know that we aren't alone in our concern about overpopulation and its effect on the environment. Doctors for the Environment (<http://dea.org.au>) have pointed out some health consequences as well, as you can see from their press release reproduced below.

National medical group, Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA), will this week wade into the population debate with the release of a poster to convey the health risks associated with unfettered population growth.

Twenty-four thousand GPs will receive copies of the poster entitled 'Advancing Australia Fairly' this week to display in waiting rooms around the country.

DEA asserts Australia's population size should be based on a scientific understanding of the carrying capacity of our "fragile continent" and not on the views of those with vested interests.

DEA Spokesperson and GP, Dr George Crisp, said Australia's population growth rate was higher than India, the Philippines and Cambodia, and described this as "ill-considered" and "harming our quest for liveable communities".

"Doctors have a commitment to protect human health," Dr Crisp said, "which is why we feel compelled to take a position on this issue. Any further pressure on our continent's ecology, in addition to that of climate change, will take a heavy toll on human health and wellbeing. We have an important obligation to the world to reduce our greenhouse emissions – a task that is difficult enough, but near impossible with an expanding population."

Population advocate and Australian businessman, Dick Smith, has commended the DEA initiative, saying: "I agree Australia's population size must be based upon scientific, demographic and health concerns - and not on

the opinions of community sectors with deep conflicts of interest."

"It is overwhelmingly clear that we're currently living beyond our means in terms of our natural assets," Mr Smith said. "It is urgent that we question this approach. We need to adjust our growth and consumption driven economic model which stand at odds with our fragile environment and finite resources."

DEA's Position Paper on Population calls for an assessment of the wide-ranging impacts and consequences of population growth on our environment, human health and wellbeing, the economy, energy security and infrastructure. All major projects should have a population impact statement in order to move away from the 'given' that a new resource project must be developed immediately if economically advantageous.

Dr Crisp said Australia's rapid population growth had placed considerable strain on existing health infrastructure, services, waiting lists and personnel, as well as negative impacts on the community - with citizens of bigger cities suffering from more pollution, longer commuting times, and more obesity from lack of exercise.

"Future population planning must take into account the capacity and maintenance of health services, and the implications of population growth on human health and wellbeing," Dr Crisp said.

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<b>Field Guide to the Bushland of the Lane Cove Valley (NEW PUBLICATION, NOW AVAILABLE)</b>			
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Non-member	postage is \$8 per order – see below \$45		
<b>Postage for Sydney's Natural World and Field Guide</b>		\$8	
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## Walkers wanted

We have produced small brochure advertising the new Field Guide to the Lane Cove Valley bushland and intend to letterbox it to houses adjacent to the Valley. We have drawn up street maps each covering about 300 houses and are looking for volunteers to do the work. Here is a chance to combine exercise with good works!

If you can help please email [secretary@step.org.au](mailto:secretary@step.org.au) with your contact details or ring Barry Tomkinson at 0412 250 595 and we will arrange for you to get the brochures and map.



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