



GECKO Spring 2010

The Newsletter of the Blue Mountains City Council Bushcare Program



Welcome to the Spring edition of Gecko.

This newsletter contains extracts of two journal articles which you may wish to read more about, or discuss with your group. Please do not hesitate to ask a Bushcare officer for more information. We would also welcome contributions from you to prompt debate about issues on your site.

If you are interested to read about the range of activities you have been part of in 2009-10, you may like to get a copy of our Annual Report, either from the Bushcare office or the website.

We wish Chris Dewhurst well in his new job at Hawkesbury County Council and thank him for his 14 years of dedicated service advocating for Bushcare in the mountains.

Happy weeding and reading.



Lyndal Sullivan
Bushcare Team Leader

DATES TO NOTE

Sunday 7th November Katoomba Creek Walk and Weed 8.30am – 4.30 pm
Off-track walking, searching for remaining weeds. Some walking through the creek may be required. Contact Lyndal Sullivan 4780 5528 lsullivan@bmcc.nsw.gov.au

Saturday 13th November Weeding on the Edge Banksia Park (details inside)

Saturday 13th November 10.00am – 3.00 pm Living with Fire in the Lower Blue Mountains - Forum, Winmalee (details inside)

Saturday 13th November Annual Lower Mountains Christmas Dinner, Lapstone Hotel from 6.30 pm. An opportunity to relax and meet other local Bushcarers. All Welcome! Please contact 4780 5623 or let your bushcare officer know to RSVP.

Sunday 14th November Fishing Competition at Yellomundee Regional Park with Yellomundee Aboriginal Bushcare and Bass Fishoes. Contact Xuela Sledge on 47847319 or npwsvols.bluemountains@environment.nsw.gov.au

Friday 19th November Hester Creek Swampcare, Leura 9-1pm Join the Hester Creek Landcare group, in looking after Blue Mountains Skink habitat and a free BBQ lunch. Book with Michael Hensen on mhensen@bmcc.nsw.gov.au or 4780 5471.

Saturday 20th/Sunday 21st November Love Lawson Festival. Visit Bushcare stall.

Saturday 20th/Sunday 21st November Jamison Valley Weekend (details inside)

Monday 22nd November Garden Weeds workshop

Tuesday 23rd November Workshop to Learn to use an electronic Plant Key
Dept Industry & Investment Workshop (see August Gecko).

Friday 26th November Maple Grove Swamp, Katoomba 9am-2pm

Join in to help the Dwarf Mountain Pine population in Katoomba Falls. Maple Grove Swamp is located immediately upstream and is being invaded by a variety of weeds, such as pines, holly and japanese honeysuckle. Book with Michael Hensen on mhensen@bmcc.nsw.gov.au (preferred) or 4780 5471.

Saturday 27th November Willow Patch Restoration at Popes Glen (details inside)

Wednesday 1st December Bushcare Network Meeting 6pm Lawson Library All welcome. Light dinner provided. RSVP by Fri 26th Nov and for details of discussion topics, please contact Lyndal Sullivan 4780 5528 or lsullivan@bmcc.nsw.gov.au

Continued overleaf

Deadline for contributions for next Gecko 4th January 2011



Sunday 5th December Wentworth Falls Lookout (details below)

Saturday 11th December Wilsons Glen Downstream weeding A short remote bushcare trip postponed from October due to rain. Full day treating montbretia in the creek. Contact Lyndal or Erin 4780 5623 or bushcare@bmcc.nsw.gov.au

Saturday 29th January Leura Cascades Combined Leura Catchment Bushcare groups day of paddling in the creek and weeding. All bushcarers welcome. A joint BMCC/NPWS event, contact 4780 5623.

Stormwater Solutions Workshop

The Transformation of a Willow Patch

Where: Popes Glen Reserve, Blackheath.

When: Saturday 27th November 2010
9:00 am - 1 pm

Popes Glen Bushcare Group invites bushcare and land-care volunteers to a Stormwater Solutions workshop.

The workshop will demonstrate some of the practical techniques used to reduce the impacts of urban stormwater runoff in the local bushland. This is an opportunity to gain practical experience with the materials and techniques used in 'soft engineering' projects right across the Blue Mountains.

- see a range of soft engineering structures
- learn how these structures manage the flow of stormwater through the area
- participate in constructing a 'wetland cell' structure

For more information on meeting place and to register to participate in this event, please contact Bushcare at Blue Mountains City Council on 4780 5623 or pchrismas@bmcc.nsw.gov.au.

Please register by Wednesday 24th November.



Wildlife love Bushcare ! Else Mitchell Reserve

Photo by Mike Purtell

Weeding on the edgeCalling all bushcarers working on the ridgetops above the Jamison Valley

Blue Mountains Regional National Parks and Wildlife Service in partnership with Blue Mountains City Council. Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Management Authority and the Environmental Trust invites interested bushcarers to take part in Bushcare activities Weeding on the edge ... from Katoomba through to Wentworth Falls. This comes in an attempt to get more activities tackling weed problems leading down into the Jamieson Valley

Saturday 13th November catchment protection is occurring at Banksia Park, Katoomba with Banksia Park Bushcare Group. Come and have a closer look and join in for the afternoon 2-5pm.

Saturday/Sunday 20th/21st November A remote weeding weekend that may include camping overnight. A trip down Jamison Creek into the valley. An opportunity for experienced walkers. Limited places.

Sunday 5th December is **International Volunteers Day**. Join NPWS for a planting day at Wentworth Falls lookout. Or drop by for a quick sausage sanga.

RSVP to all of these events to NPWS Volunteer Coordinator Xuela Sledge on 4784 7319 or

npwsvols.bluemountains@environment.nsw.gov.au or Web: www.environment.nsw.gov.au/volunteers/index.htm



The *Pittosporum undulatum* debate

A comprehensive article by Jocelyn Howell was printed in *Cunninghamia* 8(1): 2003 as a FORUM paper. Jocelyn Howell wrote this article in her capacity as a plant scientist with the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust, entitled "*Pittosporum undulatum* as a case study for native species that change range – how to avoid inappropriate responses?"

The following is an extract of some of the key points, however it is recommended you read the full article which can be obtained from the Bushcare Office or the Botanical Gardens website. It draws on the work of many experts which you can pursue through the extensive references.

During the past two centuries massive land use changes may have induced changes in the range of indigenous plant species. Such changes include changed hydrology, altered fire regimes, increased nutrient levels, and altered abundance and distributions of animals (particularly birds) with which native plants interact. We need to consider very carefully how to treat native species that naturalise outside their previous ranges. The spread of *Pittosporum undulatum* in the Sydney region provides a case study for considering approaches to this question.

Pittosporum undulatum, known as Sweet Pittosporum or simply Pittosporum, is a small tree native to certain moist forests and woodlands on the coast and nearby ranges in southeastern Australia.

Natural range of *Pittosporum undulatum* in the Sydney area

In the greater Sydney Basin Bioregion, *Pittosporum undulatum* occurs naturally in widespread sandstone gully habitats, other fire protected sites and also in the understorey of two very rare vegetation types. The Blue Gum High Forest, and Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest have both been reduced to approximately 1% of their former range and have been listed Endangered Ecological Communities under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995. Much of the area remaining of each endangered forest, especially of Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest, persists as small patches on edges of privately-owned farmland.

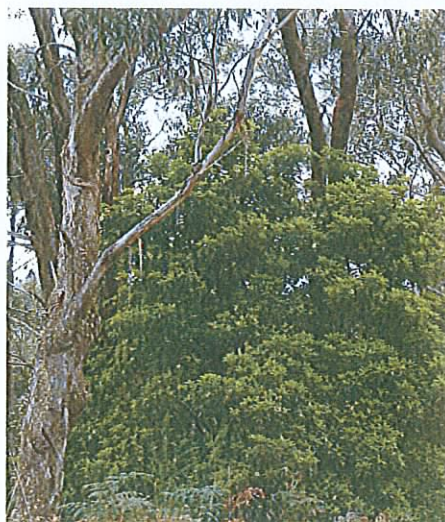


Photo
Barbara Harley

Discussion

Howell discusses some of the damaging responses to *Pittosporum undulatum* having been branded an "environmental weed"

Bulldozing of the understorey of the Endangered Sydney Turpentine Ironbark Forest containing *Pittosporum undulatum* has been observed. This has resulted in the loss of all understorey plant species, associated fauna, lichens, fungi, rootstocks, soil-stored seeds, associated mycorrhizas, other soil microorganisms and microfauna. Some landowners may think they are doing the right thing, but less well-intentioned people may use Pittosporum's presence as an excuse to get rid of bushland.

In addition to this threat to biodiversity, the idea that Pittosporum is a weed has become so entrenched that some bush regeneration contracts have specified its removal without follow-up treatment of affected areas. Results have included invasion of bared areas by exotic weeds such as *Lantana camara*, *Ehrharta erecta* and *Tradescantia fluminensis*, which cannot be considered an improvement to the habitat.

Continued overleaf



Conclusion

The paper concludes that labelling *Pittosporum undulatum* as a weed in order to prevent perceived loss of biodiversity has created a threat to other biodiversity.

In order to counteract the effects of these past communications and prevent loss of rare forest types in Sydney, there is a need to -

- Devise a strategy that conveys the message that *Pittosporum undulatum* is an appropriate native species within its original natural geographic range (though it may be a habitat intruder in some places within this range), but that beyond this original geographic range it may behave as a weed in natural environments.
- Stop attaching a single label such as an "environmental weed in southeastern Australia" to the species as a whole. Specify precisely the location and conditions when discussing situations where it may be perceived as a problem invader.
- Use only ecologically qualified people to reduce its abundance where necessary as part of integrated management of native vegetation.
- Use rather than abuse *Pittosporum* in its natural range - to suppress weeds and hazardous fuel growth on bushland edges!

The Importance of Buffers

Local ecologists, Drs Peter and Judy Smith have recently had a Blue Mountains study published in the prestigious *Pacific Conservation Biology* (volume 16, number 2, pages 92-100, 2010)

The abstract of the paper is printed below, it is entitled "Urban edge effects in the Blue Mountains, New South Wales. Their work has established some baseline standards for the size of buffers needed to protect significant habitats in the Blue Mountains and similar Sandstone based vegetation communities. Their work has been used in planning instruments, such as the Blue Mountains LEP 2005.

Urban edge effects can have an adverse impact on native flora and fauna in the adjoining bushland. We surveyed edge effects at sites in the Blue Mountains where the urban area is separated from bushland by a perimeter road. Common edge effects included weed invasion, physical disturbance of the vegetation and soil, incidental rubbish, dumped rubbish, dumped plant material, tree felling/lopping/ringbarking and visits from domestic dogs. Uncommon edge effects included recent hazard reduction burns, bushrock collection, and poor tree health (dieback not associated with fires). The maximum extent of obvious edge effects (all types combined) varied between sites, from 9 m to 60 m from the edge of the road. At most sites (77%), edge effects were restricted to distances of 40 m or less into the bushland, but a significant number of sites (23%) had more extensive edge effects. Sites with extensive weed invasion were associated with older housing, suggesting that weed invasion will increase over time at sites adjacent to younger housing. Weed invasion frequently extended further than 60 m into the bushland along drainage lines and tracks, especially the former, but these were not included in the measurements. Edge effects were more extensive on flatter topography than downslope of housing, apparently because the former is subject to more intensive use by local residents. The actions of local residents have a major influence on edge effects, and are responsible for much of the variability observed between sites. The findings of this study are consistent with previous studies of edge effects around Sydney and elsewhere. Based on the results of the study, we recommend that a buffer of native vegetation at least 60 m wide should be retained around significant flora and fauna habitats to protect them from edge effects. Additional management actions are required to control vegetation degradation along drainage lines.

Contact the Bushcare office or Drs Peter and Judy Smith, for a copy of the full version of the article
P & J Smith Ecological Consultants, 44 Hawkins Parade, Blaxland, NSW 2774,
email: smitheco@ozemail.com.au



BMCC Weed Management Strategy 2010

In 2001 Blue Mountains City Council formally adopted its first weed strategy. The 2001 Weed Strategy has been the basis for Council weed management programs in the past 9 years.

Over this time the national approach to weed management has evolved to embrace more strategic use of resources to protect environmental and community assets. Council and other local land management agencies have followed this trend by implementing co-operative weed management programs.

In recent years Council has given priority to a limited number selected 'subcatchments' in order to make a substantial difference rather than spread resources too thinly. This document explains why and how Council deals with weed management issues in the local government area and provides a framework for accountability for the next five years.

The three key aims of the strategy are to:

1. Reduce impacts of existing weeds within the Blue Mountains;
2. Prevent establishment of new weed species within the Blue Mountains, and
3. Enhance Council and community capacity to solve weed problems.

The document has been in production since March this year and has been through an extensive community consultation process. A revised draft is expected to go to the Council Meeting of 23 November 2010 for discussion and adoption.

For further information please contact Linda Thomas on 4780 5612.

SNAKES

by Marg Turton, Blue Mountains Rare and Endangered Species Group

It is summer, and snakes are on the move again. If you see a snake the most important thing you can do is move away slowly! Do not try to kill it!

Most snake bites occur as a direct result of a person trying to kill them. Apart from being dangerous it is illegal, as all snakes are protected in NSW. If you have a snake in the yard, the safest thing to do is to give it a blast of cold water from the hose (from a long distance), this will encourage it to find a more hospitable place to visit.

Not all snakes are venomous. We are fortunate to be living in a World Heritage Area where we may be lucky enough to see a beautiful python or tree snake. Probably the most commonly seen snakes in the Blue Mountains are Red-bellied Black Snakes, Brown or Tiger Snakes—all of which are venomous. I had an interesting experience last November where a tiger snake disappeared under my home office desk in amongst a pile of boxes! Tiger snakes are not usually an aggressive species, so it was just a matter of watching and waiting until a WIRES snake handler quickly arrived and calmly and coolly removed and relocated it.

Fruit tree netting is a hazard for snakes as they easily become entangled—so always make sure that the netting is wrapped around the tree trunk and does not hang on the ground.

The contact for WIRES is 4754 2946



Red Bellied Black Snake Marg Turton





Do you want to save money? Do you want to create a healthier home and garden for your family? Do you want to learn skills in organic recycling? If so, you may be interested in our free Eco Choices workshops!

Eco choices is a free course open to all Blue Mountains residents which starts with the workshop 'All about Stuff' – exploring the impacts our everyday choices have on the environment. Other workshops include Detox Your Home, Worm Farming, Composting, Eco Gardening and a tour of the new Transfer Station at Katoomba Waste Management Facility. When 5 parts of the course are completed participants receive a free compost bin! The last workshop series for the year is on Saturdays in **Katoomba** on the 6th, 13th and 20th **November**.

A schedule and registration form are available from the Waste & Resources project officer on x 5621 or kknight@bmcc.nsw.gov.au or you can download a registration form from the Council website www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au



LIVING WITH FIRE IN THE LOWER BLUE MOUNTAINS

Forum organised by Nature
Conservation Council of NSW.

Saturday 13th November
10:00am - 3:00 pm
Winmalee Presbyterian Hall (Cnr
Hawkesbury Rd & High School Dr)

Speakers from the CSIRO, the
NSW Rural Fire Service, NPWS,
Blue Mountains City Council and
the Nature Conservation Council.

Everything you need to know about
living with fire in the Lower Blue
Mountains. Topics will range from
understanding fire behaviour and
local ecology, to how your home
can be better protected.

Lunch and Morning tea provided.

Inquiries and bookings
Anne Miehs 9516 1488 or
amiehs@nccnsw.org.au by
5th November

A BOUQUET FOR POPE'S GLEN

Quote from The Upper Grose Valley: Bushwalkers Business, by Michael Keats and Brian Fox, Keats Holdings Pty Ltd, 2008.

"We drove a car to the Dell Street entrance and quickly moved from suburbia to bush. The Pope's Glen area has been well served by the local regenerators and is looking almost as good as nature planned it. Exotic *Pinus radiata* have been felled and are decaying rapidly. Endemic native species are thriving. Waterways are clean and the grunge that marks so many regenerated areas is absent. It was a delightful entry".



BEFORE August 2004
Photo: Paul Vale



AFTER February 2010
Photo: Alan Lane

Photos show a section of the willow plume on Pope's Glen Creek ("The Cubs Patch"), now dominated by riparian species local to the catchment, planted by the Pope's Glen Bushcare Group with assistance from Cubs from the Blackheath Pack.





Dieback at Glenbrook showing the dominance of ferns and grasses, and how individual plants will die out while other vegetation is perfectly healthy.
©Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney

***Phytophthora* Dieback in the Greater Blue Mountains**

In March, a project commenced to identify where 'Dieback' caused by *Phytophthora cinnamomi* is located in the Greater Blue Mountains. In 2008 a report by the Hawkesbury-Nepean CMA, identified that *Phytophthora* was present and causing dieback in the Blue Mountains.

This project aims to gain a more complete picture of how widespread *Phytophthora* is. **Community help is needed** to identify locations where dieback is occurring and take soil samples. Satellite imagery and remote sensing techniques will also be used. If you have seen areas that you suspect of dieback, you can help by collecting a soil sample and the Royal Botanic Gardens will test it.

This is a joint project of Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECC), Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute, University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales. It is being led by Springwood resident and PhD student Zoe-Joy Newby, based at the Royal Botanic Gardens.

What to look for?

Large trees may be completely dead or just have dead branches and a thin canopy. Understorey plants are usually effected first. Young plants will often be yellow and have dying leaf tips. It is common to see patches of bare ground with more grasses and ferns.

Where to sample?

Any bushland areas adjacent to the National Park, or in an area of continuous bushland or along a watercourse leading into the Park. It could be in the Park itself, on public or private land. Testing will not be done on private gardens unless they are bushland and adjacent to a continuous line of bushland to the National Park.

How to take soil samples?

Contact Zoe (see details below) or the bushcare office to collect your:

- Guidelines of how to take samples
- A free sampling kit, and information on how to get samples collected for testing.



How else to help

The project also aims to assist the community take precautions to help prevent the spread of the disease. You can adopt these simple procedures before entering bushland areas:

- ensure your shoes and equipment are free of dirt,
- spray them with 70% methylated spirits (max 30% water)
- wash down vehicles before and after entering national parks, park in designated areas, remain on designated roads and tracks

For more information or how you can get involved, please contact diebackproject@bmwhi.org.au; or contact the Plant Disease Diagnostic Unit at the Royal Botanic Gardens on (02) 9231 8138



Broom in the Kitchen

In spite of the terrible reputation that Scotch Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) has as an environmental weed there is another side to the story. It was formerly known as *Sarothamnus scoparius*

Scotch Broom is also well-known in the culinary arts. Its flower buds have been used in salads, made into wine, and pickled in vinegar to make them like capers. Roasted seeds have even been used as a substitute for coffee, although there is no record of how it tastes! The tender green tops have also been used to impart a bitter flavour to beer, much in the traditional way that hops are used. *But don't let this persuade you to cultivate Scotch Broom in your garden!*

You can find this information in *Cornucopia 2, A Source Book of Edible Plants*, by Stephen Facciola, published by Kampong Publications, Vista 1998. It's in my library.

More recent research indicates that some chemicals in Scotch Broom might increase one's water loss through urine, and also affect heart rhythm. Not only are these side effects unsafe, but others which may emerge are nausea and diarrhoea.

And as a tailpiece, William T Parsons and Eric G Cuthbertson in their book *Noxious Weeds of Australia* (Inkata, 1992), record how, in the middle of the 19th century, broom was responsible for the fine quality of North British mutton. The author of that statement went on to say that he had acquired 10 pounds of broom seed which he shared with landholders for sowing on the Darling Downs, while he himself scattered his portion of the seeds on the elevated tableland of New England and on the dividing ranges of the Clarence district!

Rae Druit, Wentworth Falls Bushcare Group

Scotch Broom

Martin Louis



Photo: Barbara Harley

Your Newsletter: This newsletter was compiled by Lyndal Sullivan (assisted by Robyn Crane) from Blue Mountains City Council with contributions from volunteers (with special thanks to Barbara Harley & Shirley Brown) and Council's Environmental Management Staff. It is sent to Bushcare & Landcare volunteers and other interested people. Contributions and suggestions are always welcome, as are requests for alterations to the mailing list. Contact: Bushcare, Blue Mountains City Council, Locked Bag 1005, Katoomba NSW 2780; phone 4780 5528 or email bushcare@bmcc.nsw.gov.au.



If undelivered please return to
Locked Bag 1005 Katoomba NSW 2780



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