



GECKO Summer 2012

The Newsletter of the Blue Mountains City Council Bushcare Program



Celebrate 20 years of BMCC Bushcare this year, starting with the Annual Picnic in March! Come and join both new and long term volunteers.

The bushcare office is hoping to increase our availability and effectiveness by trialling a job share arrangement. We welcome feedback from you to ensure we are meeting your expectations. As usual your first point of contact will be your group's bushcare officer, however if you wish to discuss issues affecting the broader program such as changes to groups contact Erin Hall on 4780 5320, also with back up arrangements when your bushcare officer is away. I will continue to be the contact for Gecko, organising special events, the Network and information to new volunteers, on 4780 5528. We are both happy to assist with any inquiry you may have.



Lyndal Sullivan
On behalf of the Bushcare Team

DATES TO NOTE

Wednesday 25th January TAFE information & enrolment day (*see p 8 for details*)

Saturday 28th January Leura Cascades 9 am – 1pm. Four Leura Cascades Catchment groups invite other bushcarers to join them for a morning of weeding and morning tea. A joint BMCC/NPWS event. Contact Lyndal Sullivan 4780 5528, lsullivan@bmcc.nsw.gov.au

Thursday 2nd February *The Blue Mountains: Changing Landscapes Evolving Plants.* Talk by Margaret Baker (*see p 7 inside for details*)

Wednesday 8th February Bushcare Network Meeting 6pm Lawson library meeting room. All welcome. Light dinner provided RSVP Lyndal 4780 5528 lsullivan@bmcc.nsw.gov.au

Saturday 11th February Conservation Kayaking Paddle targetting Black Willows along Nepean River. Kayaks provided. No previous experience required, just fit and agile. New volunteers welcome. Contact Jeff Cottrell 0418 210347 willowwarriors@optusnet.com.au

Sunday 12th February Conservation Kayaking Paddle (details as above)

Saturday 25th – Monday 27th February Blue Gum Forest Great Grose Weed Walk Two day trip along the Grose River. Numbers limited. Contact Vanessa Richardson 47873112 or vanessa.richardson@environment.nsw.gov.au

Wednesday 29th February Glenbrook Creek 9 am – 3 pm A short bushwalk to weed along Zora's and Glenbrook Creeks. A joint BMCC Bushcare/NPWS activity. For details contact Lyndal Sullivan 4780 5528 lsullivan@bmcc.nsw.gov.au

Saturday 3rd March Pippa's Pass, Blaxland 9.30 am – 4 pm Join in a short bush walk and day of weeding. Targeting privet, and crofton weed in the creekline. Easy access, on established track. Contact Lyndal Sullivan 4780 5528 lsullivan@bmcc.nsw.gov.au

Sunday 4th March Clean-Up Australia Day at Marmion Swamp, Leura. 9-12 noon Meet at gate. Lunch provided. Contact Brad McKenna 0407 174199

Saturday 10th Monday 12th March Blue Gum Forest Great Grose Weed Walk An alternative date for the remote trip outlined for Feb 25-27 above in case of wet weather.

Saturday 10 March Planting at Wentworth Falls Picnic Area 9 am – 2 pm. Morning tea & BBQ lunch. RSVP Arthur Henry, NPWS 4787 3104 arthur.henry@environment.nsw.gov.au

Wednesday 14th March Weeding with a View Govetts Leap Blackheath. 9am to 3.30pm Planting, weeding and a special morning tea and lunch. Contact Vanessa Richardson *as above*

Wednesday 21st March Hat Hill Creek Remote 9am to 4pm Downstream from the decommissioned STP. Off track and walking through creeks. Morning tea and lunch. Contact Vanessa Richardson 4787 3112 or vanessa.richardson@environment.nsw.gov.au

Saturday 24th March Katoomba Creek Remote 8.30 – 5pm Off-track walking and weeding, Morning tea supplied. Contact Lyndal on 47805528 lsullivan@bmcc.nsw.gov.au

DATES TO NOTE continued.....

Sunday 25th March Braeside Plant a Tree Day, Blackheath 9 to 4pm Assist in the Braeside Swamp Restoration project. Tools, equipment, lunch and morning tea supplied. Contact Vanessa Richardson 4787 3112 or vanessa.richardson@environment.nsw.gov.au

Saturday 31st March Bushcare Picnic Sun Valley (*your invitation below*)

Wednesday 4th April Water Nymphs Dell, Wentworth Falls (remote) 9am to 4pm Walking a section of Blue Mountain Creek, searching out weeds. Off-track walking and wet feet included! Contact Lyndal Sullivan 4780 5528 or lsullivan@bmcc.nsw.gov.au.

Wednesday 11th April Sassafras Creek, Springwood. Joint activity with NPWS. A full day event with a short bushwalk on tracks to weed a dense patch of privet and ginger lily. Contact Lyndal Sullivan 4780 5528 or lsullivan@bmcc.nsw.gov.au.

Sunday 29th April 2012 Soft-Coir Engineering Workshop, Marmion Swamp, Leura. Contact Karen Hising 4780 5623 or khising@bmcc.nsw.gov.au



18th Annual Bushcare 'Thank You' BBQ

Celebrate 20 years of Bushcare

Sun Valley Reserve
Saturday 31st March 2012
12 noon
Rain, Hail or Shine

Awards and Prizes
Music, Children's Activities,
Bushcare Games

What to bring– family and friends,
plate, mug, cutlery, musical
instrument (if you have one)
Vegetarian food available

Community bus available - numbers limited.
Bookings essential for Picnic and bus
Contact 47805623 bushcare@bmcc.nsw.gov.au
RSVP Tues 27th March 2012



MYSTERY PHOTO



Can you guess what this is?
If you give up turn to the back page for the answer



The Mystery of the Acetone Smell

In early spring, when working at Glenbrook Lagoon, I caught a brief smell similar to acetone. Looking around the neighbouring urban area, I couldn't see anything suspicious. However, later that day, a volunteer from the Glenbrook Lagoon Bushcare Group sent me an email to say that she had smelt acetone near the Lagoon and did I know of anything unusual. Christina Day, Aquatic Systems Officer at Council, confirmed that she wasn't aware of any problems.

Then some weeks later, walking along the footpath at home in Wentworth Falls, the acetone smell was really obvious. Noticing the local native flowering plants in my footpath garden, I began smelling all the flowers and there it was – *Lomandra longifolia* inflorescence! To make sure, my partner and I checked some *Lomandra longifolia* in a bushland reserve nearby and there was no doubt. My partner happened to mention this interesting finding to a local National Parks Ranger and he confirmed that he had been smelling acetone too and thought someone had been dumping something in bushland.

The scent of Japanese Honeysuckle and Jasmine flowers seems to have been quite strong this year too – maybe all that rain in recent years?

Karen Hising
Bushcare Officer



2011 Connected Waters Symposium – Water Conservation in Action

The 'Connected Waters Symposium' was held in Katoomba on Saturday, 12 November. Over 40 people attended from Streamwatch, Swampcare and Bushcare groups, as well as a number of industry partners who have been involved in conservation activities within the Blue Mountains.

The Symposium aimed to provide a forum to share research and achievements in the field of water conservation with a particular focus on the importance of natural water systems.

Blue Mountains Mayor, Cr Daniel Myles, attended the Symposium along with Cr Chris Van der Kley, stating they were very impressed with the achievements of local conservation volunteers.

Inspired by the presentation of Streamwatch research results and Soft Engineering Swamp restoration works at Popes Glen, Blackheath, Mayor Myles said "I was extremely interested in the on-the-ground research that was presented at the Symposium."

"The health of waterways is extremely important and the work done by the participants in the symposium will greatly assist us in providing information to the State Government and Sydney Water."

Cr Myles also said that the information he was able to pass on from the Symposium was well received by both Roza Sage MP, Member for Blue Mountains and Louise Markus MP, Member for Macquarie.

In addition to the informative presentations on Popes Glen, the presentation on Water Sensitive Urban Design ideas by Alexa

McAuley from Equatica, inspired many participants to create some beautiful water sensitive garden features at home. Ms McAuley was joined by Damien Taylor, Council's Team Leader, Building Services in leading a tour of the Echo Point Stormwater re-use raingarden designed by Equatica and built by BMCC. Also on the tour agenda was a visit to a hanging swamp, a fabulous reminder of the natural way of filtering stormwater!

A most enjoyable lunch was followed by a beautiful Giant Dragon Fly slide show from local volunteer and doctoral candidate Ian Baird and a review of emerging trends in Blue Mountains Stream Ecology by Dr Ian Wright. Questions and discussion were abundant throughout the day and were only cut short by time.

We look forward to another successful event in 2012

Christina Day, Aquatic Systems Officer BMCC



Swamp restoration works at Popes Glen



BUSHTRACKS



Do you enjoy a slow bushwalk and pruning? Maintaining bushtracks may just be for you, particularly if you'd like a change from kneeling at Bushcare.

Bushcare is planning to trial a new activity to undertake bushtrack maintenance. Some of our Bushcare reserves have walking tracks that need periodic maintenance; however groups are often too busy with other jobs to attend to these.

It would involve only the careful pruning of shrubs overhanging tracks and cleaning sediment out of drains. Any track construction needed would continue to be undertaken by Council's Walking Track team.

We are asking for people interested in doing this work to come along to the first morning on Monday 30th April in the mid mountains. If you are interested but are only available on weekends or other days, please contact us before this date to let us know.

No experience is needed, just an interest in learning new skills. Training would be offered in the correct way to prune plants to encourage them to grow away from the track, rather than back over it. Cut materials will be used to brush mat disturbed areas, and seeds collected for future propagation. Where drains have been constructed to direct water off tracks, these could also be cleaned.

For more information or to register your interest in attending the first BushTracks morning contact Lyndal Sullivan by Monday 23rd April on lsullivan@bmcc.nsw.gov.au or 4780 5528.

Victory Track, Faulconbridge



NATIVE VEGETATION SURVEY

The state government is asking people to tell them about experiences with the way government regulates native vegetation by completing the Native Vegetation Survey. The information collected will be used to inform the review of the Native Vegetation Regulation. Survey closes 30th March. For information:

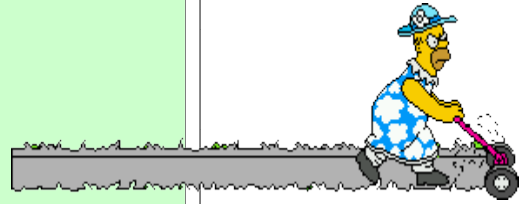
http://engage.environment.nsw.gov.au/portal/natureconservation/nvreg/native_veg_survey



How to Escape the Tyranny of your Lawn!

Blue Mountains City Council is running a FREE
Eco Gardening workshop on
Saturday 25th February 10am – 12noon, in Katoomba
 Places are limited, so register now!

To register or find out about our other Eco Choices Workshops:
 Call Council on 4780 5000, or
 Go to our website: www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au



Imagine the conversation the Creator might have with St Francis about lawns:

'Frank, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there? What happened to the tussocks and wildflowers and stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect, no maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long-lasting blossoms attracted butterflies, honey bees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of colours by now. But all I see are these green rectangles.'

'It's the tribes that settled there Lord. The Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers 'weeds' and went to great extent to kill them and replace them with grass.'

'Grass? but it's so boring, it's not colourful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds and bees, only grubs and sod worms. It's temperamental with temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want all that grass growing there?'

'Apparently so Lord, they go to real pains to grow it and keep it green.

The Suburbanites and Their Lawns

They begin each spring by fertilizing grass and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn.'

'The spring rains and cool weather probably make grass grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites happy.'

'Apparently not Lord, as soon as it grows a little, they cut it – sometimes twice a week.'

'They cut it? So they then bale it like hay?'

'Not exactly Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.'

'They bag it, why? Is it a cash crop, do they sell it?'

'No sir, just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.'

'Now let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow and when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?'

'Yes sir.'

'These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rains and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.'

'You aren't going to believe this Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.'

'What nonsense! At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself.

The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. After a while they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus as they rot, the leaves form compost to enhance the soil. It's a natural circle of life.'

'You better sit down Lord, the Suburbanites have drawn a new circle, as soon as the leaves fall they rake them into great piles and have them hauled away.'

'No! what do they do to protect the shrubs and tree roots from the winter and keep the soil moist and loose?'

'After throwing away your leaves, they go out and buy something they call mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.'

'And where do they get this mulch?'

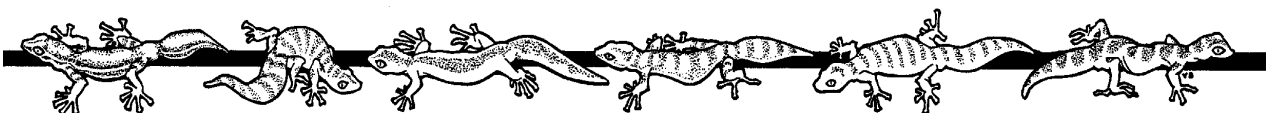
'They cut down trees and grind them up.'

'Enough! I don't want to think about this anymore. Saint Catherine, you're in charge of arts, what movie have you scheduled for us tonight?'

'Dumb and Dumber Lord, it's a real stupid movie about.....'

'Never mind, I think I just heard the whole story.'

(This has been circulating for a while, but seems to have first appeared as a posting to the Deep Ecology mailing list in Sept 1999) .



TREE OF HEAVEN

Tree of Heaven, *Ailanthus altissima*, (TOH) is considered by most bush regenerators to be a difficult weed to get rid of. It is also a very serious weed, transforming whole ecosystems. It occurs along the Hawkesbury River and in the lower mountains up to Linden. There are infestations at Katoomba, Megalong Valley, Mt Victoria and Mt Wilson; and it is also widespread in the surrounding areas such as the Capertee Valley, the Cox's River and the Colo.

The reason for it being considered 'difficult' is that it suckers very easily, and therefore the effectiveness of any treatment method is not obvious immediately. Unfortunately there is no consensus about the 'best' method, only that 2 or 3 years of follow up is necessary.

There seems to be a number of critical considerations that affect what works best. Time of year, density of weed patch and accessibility of the area, all influence the most appropriate and effective treatment. This report attempts to provide readers with information on the experience of different people/groups. Bushcare is not endorsing any of the methods or products used, and some have significant risks.

Friends of Colo (FOC)

Carol Isaacs reports on the FOC's work along the Colo River, where infestations are usually quite small, and as volunteers they have been limited to the use of glyphosate.

"In my experience, hand pulling of seedlings and small plants is NOT an effective way of controlling this plant. What appears to be a small plant or seedling is nearly always connected to some plant part and will respond to pulling by more suckering.

"While Friends of the Colo have used the cut and paint method on tree of heaven in the past, we have not found it to be satisfactory and do not routinely do this. Instead, we have found the best method of treatment in the mostly remote infestations we treat, is the scrape and paint method. This is because it is an interconnected plant system and this is more likely to overcome the plant's resources hidden below ground. It is essential to find and treat every stem by this method, no matter how small. Large stems (basically tree trunks) where scrape and paint is impractical are treated by the frill and fill (injection) method. The trick is to be thorough."

Alan Oliver, contractor

Alan says "Large plants are best injected with Roundup Biactive and also give a couple of good scrapes down the stem and apply the herbicide. Smaller plants scrape and paint two sides (a long scrape) using Roundup Biactive. We have used this technique with great success along the Jenolan and Cox's Rivers and at Newnes. Very few suckers have occurred and are easily treated the next year with the same technique."

Hugh Paterson, contractor

Hugh reported that he has used a wide range of techniques and herbicides, and has found only one method that does not lead to suckering one or 2 years after treatment.

"We have found the best herbicide is metsulfuron methyl. Inject every stem you can in November or December with a mix of metsulfuron methyl 600, glyphosate and non-ionic surfactant.

"We do scrape and paint stems which are too small to inject and not leafy enough to spray or where we need to avoid off target damage." Small leafier suckers are sprayed at the same

time or later in the season

Alan Lane and Virginia King, Bushcare members

As well as working hard at Popes Glen on willows and gorse, Alan and Virginia have been working with large old infestations of Tree of Heaven on difficult terrain on their property near Mudgee. They have tried many techniques over 5 years when plants are in full leaf - i.e. from late spring to late summer. Below is a very brief summary of their findings, from their report

"The best treatment for established infestations in difficult terrain is diesel stem application of "Access" known as basal bark treatment (i.e. for all plants with stems greater than a pencil in thickness). The following day spray the leaves of all small plants with Grazon. This is physically the easiest, allows for accurate application to target plant; highly effective, with very little regrowth or suckering. One difficulty is that the diesel is colourless and soaks quickly into the stem, making it impossible to tell which stems have been treated."

Other techniques tried included:

*Foliar spraying of all plants with Grazon, Pulse & wetting agent was found to be effective for treating extensive infestations of small plants, though some regrowth and significantly troublesome suckering inevitably results in following seasons. Foliar spraying is environmentally problematic because it is not possible to avoid some of the spray going onto the ground or surrounding vegetation.

*Frill large trees only and inject with glyphosate—not found to be effective.

*A range of other methods selectively treating stems by Cut & paint or injection with Grazon or glyphosate and spraying small plants (suckers) had a range of outcomes, none of which were both effective as well as not too labour intensive.

Alan and Virginia say it has been a "huge job, but we can now see that our property is virtually clear of ToH, though we will need to exercise on-going vigilance for the next 2-3 years. We are now looking forward to watching the natural revegetation of these creek banks over the next few years."



Conclusion

It is a very contentious issue about which methods are the most effective. Unfortunately there have been no well designed scientific trials to our knowledge using all the proposed techniques. Alan and Virginia have kept very thorough records of the techniques they have used and kindly made the report available to us. The other groups/contractors have made their own observations over the years, as to what works.

Some of the herbicides and additives have a range of risk considerations, which should all be carefully assessed. We understand that there may be safer alternatives to diesel for use in basal bark application, which we are checking out. Hopefully further experience and trials may give us some answers in the near future. Thankyou to all those who have contributed their experience to this report.



BEFORE : Four Mile Creek 2006

Alan Lane



AFTER: Four Mile Creek 2011

Alan Lane



Changing Landscapes and Evolving Plants of the Blue Mountains

Margaret Baker will share her vast knowledge of geology and plants in a talk for bushcare volunteers on Thursday evening 2nd February. Margaret is well known as one of the authors of a number of guides on plants and birds of the Blue Mountains and of the Sydney Region. She has been teaching in environmental courses at the Blue Mountains TAFE since 1984 and has specialised in native plant identification subjects in recent years. Margaret has also had extensive involvement in many local issues through the former Lower Blue Mountains Conservation Society as well as contributing much expertise to the current BMCS. Margaret has a particular interest in landscape change from the earliest of geological times through to the present impacts of people.

In this talk Margaret will trace the long and continuous thread of plant diversification over some 400 million years of changing scenery in the Greater Blue Mountains, highlighting those characteristics that made the region worthy of World Heritage listing. She will consider the long and continuous evolution of living plant groups, the presence of primitive species alongside modern families, and the role of the region as a centre for the diversification of eucalypts. As the plants and their communities were evolving, the landscape itself was undergoing constant change. Margaret's talk will consider some of the geological events that moved our continent around the globe, and localised forces that sculpted the Blue Mountains landscape while major botanical developments were occurring globally.

When: Thursday 2nd February, 7-9 pm, including supper.

Where: Santa Maria Centre, Lawson. If driving turn south off highway at Orient Street then left into Mary St; park at end of Mary Street. If coming by train there is a walkway from the highway to Mary Street.

RSVP: to Lyndal Sullivan on 4780 5528 or lsullivan@bmcc.nsw.gov.au to assist with catering.



Photo: Jill Dark



BUSH REGENERATION COURSES

Blue Mountains TAFE, Wentworth Falls campus will be offering courses in Bush Regeneration commencing 6th February 2012.

Certificate 2 Conservation and Land Management is the entry level course giving underpinning knowledge and practical field techniques to control weeds and promote bush regeneration. The full-time course is 3 days a week - Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, for six months. Part time is also available.

Certificate 3 Conservation and Land Management (Natural Area Restoration) builds on knowledge gained in Certificate 2 encouraging students to apply their knowledge and skills in a variety of bushland contexts. The full-time course is on Tuesdays and Wednesdays for six months. Part time is also available.

Certificate 4 Conservation and Land Management (Natural Area Restoration) will be offered from March 2012 – March 2013 part-time conducted evenings and various weekends.

If you are interested in any course you can enrol on-line or attend an information/enrolment day on Wednesday 25th January 2012 from 1—3 pm at the TAFE in Mitchell St ,Wentworth Falls, in room C116. For more details contact 4753 2100.



The mystery photo on page 3 is a close up of the inflorescence of this *Xanthorrhoea media* pictured above, photographed by David Coleby

Your Newsletter: This newsletter is compiled by Lyndal Sullivan (assisted by Sharon Huxley) from Blue Mountains City Council with contributions from volunteers (with special thanks to 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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