



STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No.111 December 2001

CHRISTMAS BBQ

Christmas being imminent we will close the year off with our usual barbecue. It has always been a popular event and we are sticking to the same formula.

The venue will again be at the back of **Leuna Ave., Wahroonga**, accessible from the end of the Broadway.

Neroli and Harry Lock will provide a gas barbecue and hot water from late afternoon, say 4.30pm onwards on **Sunday 16th December**. Bring your own food and drinks and yourselves in the most cheerful mood possible, to compare notes with your friends in STEP about the past year and the one to come.

To those members who cannot be there, the Committee thanks you for your continuing membership and wishes you a **MERRY CHRISTMAS** and a **HAPPY NEW YEAR**.

SPRING BUSHWALK

Margaret Burgmann was inspired to write about the STEP Spring Bushwalk since she and husband Jon enjoyed it so much. (Unfortunately the letter reached us too late for the last Newsletter, so we print it here. Ed.)

The STEP Spring Bushwalk was a real treat, as we explored part of the Berowra Valley under the expert guidance of Bill Jones. He took us on the Blue Gum Walk, a circular trail which starts from Rosemead Rd., Hornsby. It took us about three hours to complete, including many stops to see, smell, feel and learn about the plants and animals that call the valley home. We began by following a fire trail, which led to a well-made track, taking us up through the forest and on to the sandstone ridge.

We wondered at the huge Blue Gums, doing so well on the rich volcanic soil, sniffed the spikey yellow blooms on the Lomandra (careful!), admired the Eriostemon in flower on the ridge top, listened to the mournful call of the Fantail Cuckoos, and touched a Sassafras tree -- remnant of an ancient rainforest which once covered this part of the world.

High on a huge sandstone rock face were Rock Lilies in full bloom. They used to be common on our Sydney sandstone until keen gardeners stole them all. No-one could have reached these ones! From the ridge top the track led us down into the valley again, where we scrambled over potholed rocks at Waitara Creek, and sat for a welcome break at the Fish Ponds. Then as we headed for home, to our delight, Bill Jones spotted not one, not two, but four Powerful Owls, perched high in a Turpentine Tree. Two large babies with fluffy white breasts stared down at us with dark eyes, and two stripey adults tried to look inconspicuous in the foliage as we practically lay on our backs to admire them. Those of us with binoculars shared them around, so everyone could have a good look. Many people would have passed that way without an upward glance, but it is always worth looking up if you see bird droppings on the ground! Nearing the end of our walk we heard a wailing cry, and watched as some Yellow Tailed Black Cockatoos flapped slowly above the trees, stirring up their white cousins whose patch was being invaded. What a grand finale to a really good bushwalk. The walk is well signposted, and you can get maps of the area from Hornsby Council. Best of all though is to be guided by an expert --- thanks, Bill!

Young Scientist 2001 - STEP Award for Best Environmental Project

To encourage and reward research and education on environmental issues, this year, for the first time, STEP aligned with Intel Young Scientist 2001 and donated a prize of \$150 for best environmental project.

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

Neroli Lock and Margaret Booth chose STEP's winner, Lui Weber, a year 12 student from Wollumbin High School and Michelle Leishman awarded Lui his prize at a ceremony at the Powerhouse Museum on Friday 19/10/2001.

Reproduced below is an extract from Lui's project, a survey on the endangered red-fruited ebony, *Diospyros mabacea*: **Summary**

Diospyros mabacea is recognised as one of the most threatened plants from the Tweed Valley in far northern NSW. It is a small to medium subtropical rainforest tree restricted to the erosion caldera of the Mount Warning shield volcano. Its current conservation status on the Rare or Threatened Australian Plant list (ROTAP) is 2ECi It is also listed under schedule one of the Threatened Species Act as endangered and at serious risk of disappearing from the wild in one or two decades. It has an extremely limited geographic range of less than 100 km and its representation in reserves is not considered adequate for conservation.

Prior to this study only 204 specimens were recorded, predominantly from the Oxley River. This survey records a further 18 specimens in the Rous River catchment with positive indications for maintaining genetic diversity in

the gene pool. It covers site assessment, threatening processes and recommends directions for further research.

Introduction

*Having grown up in the forests on the NSW/QLD border I have spent countless hours exploring the intricate mosaic of microclimates with their characteristic vegetation. It was John Sinclair, renowned for saving Fraser Island who gave us the UNE rainforest books which introduced me to identifying rainforest trees and their families. In the process of collating a list of local species for our Landcare group I recorded twelve ROTAP listed species on our property and researched threatened species likely to occur in this area. However the critical factors which led me to search for the red-fruited ebony were Bruce Chick OAM, Man of the Trees and patron of my school, planting a *D. mabacea* and later seeing a stand of these trees along with several other threatened species when I accompanied a National Parks and Wildlife expedition to collect genetic material from *Fontania australis* on the Oxley headwaters. I remembered seeing a tree with dark fissured bark, covered in epiphytes not far from my home. I also noticed this association during work experience with Alex Floyd at Coffs Harbour Botanic Gardens and Herbarium. NPWS confirmed my identification of this and another younger tree as *D. mabacea*. I then started a systematic search for this species. I identified another specimen on our property and three isolated trees in pastures downstream on the Rous River. Since water and gravity are the main known vectors for seed distribution I was convinced that somewhere upstream in more favourable rainforest habitat was the mother tree. Eventually after finding another lone individual I discovered a stand of eleven *D. mabacea* and a mother tree on a tributary at the headwaters of the Rous River. NPWS has*

confirmed my find and recommended conservation measures for this site.

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The Annual General Meeting

The AGM held on October 18 was well attended (including our local MP Barry O'Farrell) and very successful. The formalities of the evening were quickly dealt with (see President's Report below) and I am happy to welcome new committee member Neryle Sheldon. Neryle has agreed to take on the job of Secretary and Minutes Secretary, a job previously done most efficiently by Helen Wortham. Helen has taken on new responsibilities in the past year looking after the web page and deserves a rest from the Secretarial duties! I am also very happy to welcome back Jennifer Schwarz to the committee after a year's absence.

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Guest Speaker

Rymill Abel gave a most interesting and enjoyable talk on bush regeneration activities on World Heritage-listed Lord Howe Island, primarily aimed at removal of climbing asparagus. Many STEP members have taken part in weed removal and bush regeneration on Lord Howe. It is obviously a worthwhile and enjoyable experience, because several have been more than once. It is remarkable that so many are willing to travel at their own expense and give their time doing often back-breaking work.

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President's Report Oct.2001

It is with pleasure that I present the President's report for the year to October 2001. It has been a very busy year for the committee with many achievements. The year began with the launch of STEP's new map 'Walking Tracks of the Lane Cove Valley' which was put together by committee member John Martyn and his band of volunteers. We had an extremely successful map launch on the 9th November at Jenkins

Hall in Lane Cove National Park, with Peter Duncan, Director of the Centennial and Moore Park Trust as guest speaker. Much of the committee's time this past year has been spent on sales and marketing of the map – I am pleased to say that we have sold well over 1000 of the 5000 printed and thus re-couped our costs. The map has also re-ignited interest in our 'Field Guide to the Bushland of the Upper Lane Cove Valley' and we will be doing a new print run next year to meet demand. The map is something that STEP should be very proud of – it is beautifully produced, provides a valuable resource for bush enthusiasts, raises STEP's profile and generates both new members and income that can be spent on bushland conservation. In addition, the enthusiasm generated has resulted in the desire to produce another walking tracks map – this time of the Middle Harbour bushland from Sydney Harbour as far north as Garigal National Park. This project should keep the mapping volunteers busy for another 18 months or so! We have also spent considerable time on our EPA Stormwater Trust grant for Morona Ave, Fox Valley. This has involved working on the design of the stormwater detention basins, keeping a watchful eye on the contractors during the construction phase, many meetings with Peter Draper of Lane Cove National Park, leafletter drops to neighbours, designing brochures and signs, organizing information days, collecting water samples for chemical analysis and setting up a bushcare group for the site. This has been a very worthwhile project, with much community participation, as well as importantly reducing the impact of stormwater release on Lane Cove National Park. Monitoring and bush care will continue for some time. I would particularly like to thank Neroli Lock for her time and effort on this project – it wouldn't have happened without her.

Another important achievement has been the launch of the new STEP web site. We now have a very impressive and informative web site that I hope all members with internet access log on to regularly to keep up to date with news and activities. STEP also continues to move into the electronic age with regular email contact with members as well as Newsletters now available via email. Special thanks are due to Helen Wortham for taking on the additional roles of maintaining our web site and email contacts. STEP has continued to support environmental education through the Pam Morse Bequest Fund. This year we awarded grants to Warrawee and Turrumurra Public Schools to support their environmental initiatives – planting a native garden and hosting Ku-ring-gai Council's Puppet Play 'Privet the Weed'. For the first time we are also supporting the Intel Young Scientist Awards, organised by the Science Teachers' Association of New South Wales, through the provision of prize money for the best environmental project.

Activities

This year's activities program has been particularly successful. We held three talks which were all very well-attended: Jocelyn Howell from Royal Botanic Gardens on 'Ways of Wildflowers', Angus Finney on the first longitudinal traverse of the sub-Antarctic Island of South Georgia, and Valerie Close from Ku-ring-gai Council led an environmental education 'Journey to the Heart of Nature' experience. We also ran three bushwalks (Tambourine Bay, Great North Walk from Killara to Fiddens Wharf, and Blue Gum Walking Track Berowra Valley Regional Park) which were also very popular.

Newsletters

We published six newsletters (no.s 105-110) as well as a monthly contribution in the Ku-ring-gai Observer, thanks to Bruno Krockenberger who has been our newsletter editor and KO writer for several years now.

Committee

The committee met monthly to deal with the business at hand. The current committee comprises eight members, which is fewer than the constitution allows for. This has meant that the committee has had to work hard this year to achieve its goals and we certainly look forward to welcoming some new members. Bill Jones will not be standing for the committee again due to other commitments, and we thank Bill for his contribution over the last few years. We are very pleased that Jennifer Schwartz is rejoining the committee and we also welcome Neryle Sheldon as a new member. I would like to thank all committee members of 2000/2001 for their hard work and enthusiasm, particularly Helen Wortham as Minutes Secretary, Publicity Officer and web maintainer, and Hugh Roberts as Treasurer, Secretary and Membership Secretary.

Representation

STEP has been represented on both Ku-ring-gai Council's Bushland Conservation Advisory Committee and Environmentally Sensitive Working Party. We have also remained as a member of the Union of Lane Cove Valley Conservationists, although we have not been able to attend every meeting.

Finances

STEP's financial position is healthy, with details in the Treasurer's Report. Sales of the map and field guide contribute substantially to STEP's finances.

The Coming Year

There are several looming issues for the following year. The major issue is likely to be the rezoning of the B2/B3 corridor, now made more complicated by the Federal Government's announcement of a study into a possible link between the F3 and the M2 as part of the Western Sydney Orbital Project. STEP plans to employ a Project Officer through the Nature Conservation Council on a part-time basis to assist in the

development of strategy and to campaign on transport and environmental issues related to the possibility of the F3-M2 link. There will also be continuing issues with Council's Residential Strategy and SEPP5 developments, as well as with the construction of the Parramatta Rail Link. We will continue to be involved with Council's management of urban bushland through the Advisory Committee. STEP will also continue to support environmental education and community awareness of bushland issues through its Environmental Education grants. We look forward to continuing our role as an effective advocate on environmental issues in Ku-ring-gai in 2001/2002.

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New STEP Committee

The new Committee is:

President -- Michelle Leishman,
Treasurer -- Hugh Roberts,
Secretary -- Neryle Sheldon,
Website -- Helen Wortham,
Members -- John Martyn, Jennifer Schwarz, Neroli Lock, Chris Maxworthy, Bruno Krockenberger. The position of Vice-President has not yet been filled, and there is room for more committee members.

The STEP address is:

STEP Inc.,
PO Box 697, Turrumurra, 2074.

The Web-site address is:

www.step.org.au

The e-mail address is:

secretary@step.org.au

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Lord Howe Island

Following the STEP AGM Barry O'Farrell, MP for Ku-ring-gai and Deputy Leader of the Opposition, made a statement to Parliament, an abbreviated version of which is reprinted here (the full text is available from Hansard or from Mr. O'Farrell's office).

"Last month I attended the AGM of STEP, a community based

environmental conservation group(which).....grew out of environmental issues.....(and)..... now acts across the whole of Ku-ring-gai..... It is an example of a local..... environmental group that does terrific work. I acknowledge the value of the Lane Cove Valley walking trails maps prepared by John Martyn(and)..... I note that his current project is preparing a map of Garigal National Park-- Middle Harbour walking trails.I particularly want to address a presentation given by Rymill Abell,, on his bush regeneration experiences on Lord Howe IslandInitiated by Ian Hutton, the renowned Lord Howe Island naturalist in 1995, groups of people from the mainland are visiting Lord Howe ... to assist in bush regeneration.This year 149 people participated in the program over six weeks. These people make the effort give up their time and pay real money -- of the order of \$1400 -- to spend a week on Lord Howe to devote themselves to work on introduced weeds,

Lord Howe Island, of course, boasts the world's southernmost coral reef. It supports teeming seabird colonies, rare land birds, diverse forest landscapes and a fascinating coastal terrain.

It was clear from Mr. Abell's address that the work of the group is an example of enjoyable environmentalism, something that everybody everywhere should be encouraged to undertake. I am also told that the work of the people from the mainland has had enormous impact over the past six years in promoting better environmental practices among the islanders.....

Bush regenerators do an enormous amount of good work most weekends across the Ku-ring-gai electorate and throughout most parts of Sydney They deserve the strong support of the community and government. I am especially impressed by the

work that is being done on Lord Howe Island. To my mind the work goes that extra mile and demonstrates real commitment by people such as the Abells, the Locks and the other 147 people who participated in the program this year.I propose to join the regenerators for a week in July next year to lend my support to the great efforts being contributed by these people, but more to learn about the program and find out what government can do to assist.....

...Hopefully in the near future there will be increased emphasis not just on bush regeneration work but also on attempts to retain existing bushland in suburban backyards and throughout local Council areas. I am pleased to place on record my appreciation of the work of STEP, my fascination by the address given by Rymill Abell and my admiration for the people who participate in the program....."

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Sustainable Sydney Conference 2001

John Martyn represented STEP at this conference and reported as follows:

Useful and enlightening, or all style and little substance?

It was possibly a bit of both, but too much of the latter.

The DUAP organised conference at the Australian Technology Park, Redfern, (16-17/11/01) was promoted as providing a "forum for the diverse voices of our city -- government, industry and community groups -- to debate, share ideas and build consensus for tomorrow's Sydney." It attracted around 450 delegates from all levels of government, from the housing industry, from academia and from numerous community groups. It opened with Aboriginal, ministerial and keynote addresses, plus a stand-up comedy act. As expected, keynote speaker Ian Lowe (Emeritus Professor of Science, Technology and Society, Griffith University) presented an

enlightening and memorable talk, comparing our city reasonably favourably with other Australian cities, but poorly with with European norms; nothing new here but constant reminders are essential. Our water use per capita continues to rise despite pricing and conservation education. Energy use per capita is also increasing, public transport use is slowly declining and car use is rising. Sydney's population density, at 18 per hectare, is low by European city norms of around 50 per hectare. Participation in social and community activities is declining. Our city is becoming less liveable. But you all knew that anyway. So what did the rest of the conference achieve?

It was enjoyable at times. It provided opportunity for meeting like-minded people. It was strong on style and presentation, however it largely failed to provide anything of real substance, or give one optimism that real progress will be made on environmental and development issues.

For example on the final afternoon I attended a workshop on the topic of Sydney Harbour. There were many informal contributions from the floor and from the hastily assembled panel, but almost half the session was spent defining what Sydney Harbour actually was from various viewpoints. The workshop would have benefited from a series of short formal presentations by experts, followed by discussion. To be really effective the entire event should have been structured along more conventional conference lines, with single sessions of expert presentations on topics such as public transport, pollution, management of open space, building, planning etc., with generous time provisions for questions from the floor. Inspirational speakers like Ian Lowe and Paul Keating should be there as well, but only as icing on the cake. Workshops are a fine idea, but not at the expense of formal presentations.