



STEP Matters

Number 124, June 2004

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Australian Native Orchids

Date: Tuesday 27 July

Time: 8 pm

Place: St Andrews Church
Hall (Vernon Street,
South Turrumurra)

Contact: Bruno Krockenberger
(9449 1985)

You have to know where to look for them and you have to know what you are looking for.

Australia has a fascinating variety of native orchids, a lot of them being tiny ground orchids. So tiny and with no actual plant in evidence, no leaves to give their location away they are exquisite flowers when looked at with a magnifying glass or when captured by macro-photography.

This is where our next speaker comes into it. Ron Howlett holds a master of science degree in applied physics and has over thirty years experience at teaching physics and maths at secondary schools. In his spare time he indulges in outdoor activities such as bushwalking, fishing and photography in his own words 'with a passion for orchids'.

His main orchid interest lies with Australian terrestrial orchids, which he regularly encounters when bushwalking in remote areas. To a large extent the words 'remote areas' are operative, since the ground orchids are very sensitive to human activity and their presence depends on undisturbed ground, although some can still be found on sparsely covered rock shelves in the upper Lane Cove Valley.

In the pursuit of his hobby Ron has become expert in ground orchids and has also developed his photographic skills.

We will have the pleasure of benefiting from Ron's passion for orchids on Tuesday 27 July. After his presentation he will answer questions, which can be further pursued during tea and biscuits after the talk.

Diary Dates

Talk

25 July National Tree Day
(call 1300 88 5000 or go to
www.planetark.com)

27 July Talk on Australian Native
Orchids by Ron Howlett

Blue Gum High Forest Walks (Rosedale Road, St Ives)

(also see page 4)

Wednesday 30 June, 10 to noon
Led by Jane Gye (9489 3171)
donation appreciated

Sunday 4 July, 1:30 to 3:30 pm
Led by Neroli Lock (9489 5794)
donation appreciated

Sunday 4 July, 2 to 4 pm
Ku-ring-gai Council walk led by
Nancy Pallin and Valerie Close
(call 9440 8552 to book,
no charge)

Other Walk

Sunday 11 July, 10 to noon
Ludovic Blackwood Memorial
Sanctuary (Blue Gum High Forest)
Meet at Sanctuary gate on
Beecroft Road 'triangle' near the
corner of Pennant Hills Road,
opposite Observatory Park

STEP Inc

Community-based Environmental Conservation since 1978

PO Box 697, Turrumurra, NSW 2074

F3–Orbital Link

Since our last newsletter the outcome of the F3–M2 link study has finally been released.

You might recall that STEP made a submission strongly urging that the whole study be widened to look at the real transport needs rather than just a road based solution to a perceived need.

Predictably the overall transport needs question was brushed over with a few throw-away lines and the not-so-hidden agenda for a road solution was promoted.

For those who were reading between the lines during the process of the public participation and preliminary stages, the three main options could be defined as:

- The RED option encapsulated the dreams of the Central Coast commuters, because it was a direct route to the CBD.
- The YELLOW option represented 'manna from heaven' for the Hills Motorway interests because it delivered vehicles to the toll gates in both directions.
- The PURPLE option met the hopes of the Pennant Hills Road corridor residents, and was the only one that made any transport sense (if you absolutely had to have a road).

There were also subtle signals that the preferred option was always going to be the purple route.

So the purple option has now been enshrined as the solution and will now be progressed through the EIS stage, with some further public participation along the way.

During this next stage the emphasis will be on the detail. The big issues are likely to be:

- The entry and exit portals at Wahroonga. The location and the integration with the F3 at that point are bound to cause some local problems.

- The location and height of ventilation stacks along the route will be critical and no doubt controversial.
- Filtration of the exhaust is probably the most critical aspect overall and the public should be gearing up to ensure that it is not fobbed off with a second best solution because of financial reasons. Filtration is critical since it would reduce the impact of pollution on the neighbourhood immediately adjacent to the stacks and it actually has the capacity to reduce pollution overall at least for the length of the tunnel stretch of road.

STEP will continue to take part in the EIS process.

Although STEP is disappointed that the overall transport needs were again subjugated to a road solution, it is heartening to see that Sydney's newly appointed Sustainability Commissioner, Professor Peter Newman, has recently voiced his opposition to the latest motorway proposal, the M4 East extension, because it was contrary to the principles underpinning the State Government's policy to have a fully integrated plan for Sydney's future needs. STEP's submission to the F3–M2 inquiry contained almost identical words, but we must admit that Peter Newman's work in the past has largely informed STEP's position and views.

We hope that Peter Newman's involvement in planning will have a greater impact than in the past, when he was a voice in the wilderness (WA).

We should warn that better transport planning will not be a smooth path in the future because the road lobby remains powerful and heavy road transport still commands a predominant share of the total that it will exert future pressures to maintain. We are not yet convinced that the 'single-agency' era of planning influence, as Peter Newman calls it, is over. (He is being polite. We call it RTA dominance.)

Also the growth area of the Central Coast will continue to cause political pressure as long as the rail service and its local infrastructure needs are not improved.

A pessimist would therefore predict that something like a red option from Wahroonga to North Ryde could rear its ugly head again within five years. Being optimists we would say between seven and ten years.

Threatened Species Act Amendments

Proposed amendments to the *Threatened Species Act 1995* include that local environment plans can be accredited for ten years, and that catchment management authorities will be responsible for assessment.

The new reforms rely on councils and catchment management authorities having appropriate expertise and resources to gather and assimilate a large amount of data. The concern is that catchment management authorities and many councils do not have this capacity and that the new reforms do not address the ongoing issue of cumulative negative impacts on threatened species.

There are also concerns about public participation, transparency of process, independence of the Scientific Committee and the future of the Biodiversity Advisory Council, and adoption of the precautionary principle.

More information at www.nccnsw.org.au.

Report on Fungi Talk

On 4 May, Ray and Elma Kearney presented a slide show of fungi observed, documented and photographed in the Lane Cove Valley. Ray and Elma are members of the Sydney Fungal Studies Group and have been involved in the recording of over 20 species of Hygrophoraceae, many never before classified or recognised as new species.

They have also been instrumental in having half a square kilometre of the Lane Cove Bushland Park inscribed on the National Estate by the Heritage Commission because of the density of occurrence of these species of fungi, some of them threatened species.

Such achievements are remarkable in themselves but the photography displayed in their slide show is nothing short of spectacular. The colours of the specimens were brilliant and recorded in minute detail.

They also gave some startling insights into fungi such as the species which actually invades the cicada nymph and remains in dormant state until the nymph is ready to emerge from the ground at which time it exhibits a growth spurt which overcomes the cicada and allows it to extend its fruiting body above the ground. Truly an 'alien' scenario.

We are indebted to Ray and Elma not only for the extremely interesting presentation, but also for the work they carry out as amateurs on the conservation of species.



Formally classified as endangered, *Hygrocybe lanecovensis* has only been found, to date, in Lane Cove Bushland Park
(Photo: Ray Kearney)

Climate Change

Climate change is defined by the Convention on Biological Diversity as:

Variation in either the mean state of the climate or in its variability, persisting for an extended period, typically decades or longer. It encompasses temperature increases (global warming), sea level rises, changes in precipitation patterns, and increased frequencies of extreme weather events.

Each of these phenomena can impact on biological diversity. In fact climate change is one of the major threats to biodiversity.

A recent paper, prepared by Anna Reynolds on behalf of the Climate Action Network Australia, reviews the scientific literature and catalogues the warning signs from the bush. The Climate Action Network Australia consists of a complete who's who of Australian conservation, alternative technology and sustainability organisations.

The paper states that the findings are conservative and limited:

... because of the low level of Government support for scientific research into the impact of climate change on Australia's nature. There are likely to be many other ecosystems and species which have not yet been studied that will be affected by climate change. We are at risk of not paying enough attention before it is too late.

Among the findings are:

- Three of Australia's World Heritage areas are being, and will be, significantly damaged by low levels of climate change – Kakadu, Wet Tropics, Great Barrier Reef. Another World Heritage area, the Blue Mountains, will be affected by higher levels of climate change.

- Ninety Australian animals have been specifically identified as at risk. However the number of animals identified as at risk could be far higher if broader studies were undertaken.
- Many of Australia's remaining native forests will change or be damaged by the effects of climate change. For example Australia's wet tropical mountain rainforests will decrease by 50% with only 1 degree Celsius rise in global temperature.
- The tinderbox conditions in eastern Australia in early 2002 match with the scientific projections for NSW as global warming intensifies. Bushfires like those experienced in 2002 will occur more regularly and cause serious and irreversible damage to national parks and forests.
- Many species of gums will have their entire current populations exposed to temperatures and rainfalls under which no individuals currently exist.
- Mt Kosciuszko will lose its alpine environment.
- Current efforts to repair the Murray–Darling river system will be undone by 2050, the river's mean flow being reduced by 30%.
- Many of our national parks currently protecting endangered species may no longer have suitable climate for these species.

The paper points to the economic benefits for regional communities in the industries providing solutions to prevent climate change and concludes that:

these solutions will not be introduced without determination by Governments and the public to make major changes to the way we produce electricity, provide transport and use the land.

More information at
www.climateaustralia.org.

Water-wise Garden Project

A new project about to be launched by Ku-ring-gai Council should be of considerable interest especially to residents with gardens, as water usage and water restrictions are such important topical issues.

STEP Inc has joined with Ku-ring-gai Council in a project to develop a water-wise garden on the corner of Eastern and Gilroy Roads, Turramurra. The project is designed to establish an urban display garden using water-wise practices.

Garden issues will include the reuse of stormwater on site by utilising a stormwater tank with a slow release gravity fed soaker hose. The problem of compacted soils and hard surfaces will be addressed by creating a multilevel diverse native garden using native plant species. Local native plants will be featured in the garden as well.

This project represents a partnership between Council and community groups and will be undertaken in four stages as money permits. Funding for stage one has been assisted by the successful grant application of \$4000 from the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources.

Congratulations to Ku-ring-gai Council on the initiation of such a timely and environmentally sensitive project, which will assist in the more efficient use of water — our most precious commodity.

The formation of a core volunteer group is envisaged which will assist with planting and maintenance of the garden. If you are interested in being part of this group, please contact Neroli Lock (9489 5794).

National Tree Day

Each year on National Tree Day people are encouraged to plant trees and shrubs native to their local area. This year Tree Day takes place on Sunday 25 July, and Schools Tree Day is on Friday 23 July.



Planet Ark set up Tree Day to help tackle some of the country's serious environmental problems like salinity and erosion. Planting native trees provides food and shelter for local animals and bird life.

To organise a tree planting site, call 1300 88 5000 or go to www.planetark.com.

Blue Gum High Forest

Blue Gum High Forest only occurs in the Sydney Basin bio-region, only on soils derived from Wianamatta Shale, and is restricted to high rainfall ridgelines which receive more than 1100 mm rain per year.

Blue Gum High Forest has the structural form predominantly of tall open-forest to open forest. Its canopy trees are Sydney Blue Gum (*Eucalyptus saligna*) and Blackbutt (*E. pilularis*), with Sydney Blue Gum particularly abundant on the lower slopes and depressions, and Blackbutt more prevalent on the ridges.

Other tree species are Smooth-barked Angophora (*A. costata*), Grey Ironbark (*E. paniculata*), White Stringybark (*E. globoidea*), Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) and Forest Oak (*Allocasuarina torulosa*).

It has a complex understorey of shrubs, herbs, vines, grasses and ferns, and provides habitat for native birds, bats, possums, lizards and insects.

The Blue Gum High Forest in St Ives is the largest, most viable remnant of Blue Gum High Forest in existence. However its viability is threatened if development goes ahead on the privately owned property.

Concerned groups have recently formed a coalition, the Blue Gum High Forest Group, to try to preserve this endangered ecological community for perpetuity. Check out <http://www.step.org.au/bgghf.html> to find out more ... and go on one of the walks advertised on page 1.



Blackbutt



Grey Ironbark
