



**Menai
Wildflower
Group**



Newsletter of Menai Wildflower Group

June 2017

President's Report

The autumn weather has kept our interest with a wonderful display of flowering plants within our own garden, or on a leisurely stroll amongst our local bushland.

Our group was thoroughly entertained by Eric Whitby with his expertise and passion on his favourite subject of bees.

Our following meetings have some exciting speakers on offer, being our Winter Weekend Warmers with Professor David Eldridge, Senior Principal Research Scientist with the Office of Environment and Heritage, on Saturday 10th June will be sharing the interesting subject of 'Soil Crust Mosses, Lichens and Liverworts'.

In July Lyndal Thorburn will be talking about the Emu Bush, an iconic genera of flowering plants which can tolerate some of the harshest conditions of drought, floods and frost. Come learn a little more about their cultivation and varieties.

After a successful planting day at the Dharawal National Park last month, members have a further opportunity to get involved with the revegetation of the Five Islands Project which will be happening this June during weekdays.

Remember to organise your diaries for the Regional Get-together at Coffs Harbour on the 2-3rd September 2017, with the theme of 'Rainforest Riches'.

See you all soon.

Jason Cockayne

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MWG joined in with the NPWS 50th anniversary celebrations.

Coming Local Events

(See Special Interest for others)

3 June Working Bee at IRFS 9am start for weeding, mowing and socialising.

3 June Propagation at IRFS nursery 1pm.

10 June Menai Wildflower Group meeting.

Professor David Eldridge will be speaking on the fascinating Soil Crust Mosses, Lichens and Liverworts from Australia's drylands from 1pm.

1 July Working Bee at IRFS 9am start

1 July Propagation at IRFS nursery 1pm

8 July Menai Wildflower Group meeting

Lyndal Thornburn will be speaking about The Emu Bush from 1pm.



Visiting Menai Community Gardeners admiring The Mounds.

Bees – 10 May 2017

Do you take bees for granted? Do you dislike bees because they can sting? At our May meeting Eric Whitby shed some light on bees, how they live, what they do for us and the potential threats to them.

But, first he told us how to remove a bee sting. The easiest way is to scratch the sting off with your fingernail; don't grab at it as the poison sac will be squashed and this poison will be

released into the skin. Rub ice on to the skin to reduce the effect of the sting.

Not only do European bees produce honey and beeswax, they also together with native bees, pollinate crops, fruit trees and indigenous plants. Eric mentioned the threats to bees. These include the Asian Bee (which is slightly smaller than the European Bee) which competes for nesting sites & food, and is a varroa mite host. The varroa mite feeds on bee blood causing the potential spread of diseases that weaken the bees and can cause the bee colony to collapse very suddenly – Colony Collapse Disorder.

Other threats include small Hive Beetle and Large African Beetle that can infest hives. Also glyphosate products like Roundup and Zero can cause the Queen to stop laying due to being fed nectar from contaminated plants, and worker bees lose their sense of where the hive is.

The colony is made up of the Queen bee, Drones and Worker Bees. The Queen remains in the hive and is the only bee in the colony to lay eggs - up to 2000 a day during summer. She can live up to 6 years, but for commercial hives she is replaced every 12-18 months. The Drones mate with the Queen and only live 3-4 months. The worker bees do all the work – collect nectar and pollen, feed and groom the Queen and regulate the hive temperature and keep the hive clean.

There are over 1600 species of native bees. You might be familiar with the blue-banded bee buzzing around your tomato plants, or the larger furry Teddy Bear Bee, or wondering why your rose bush has very neat semi-circular pieces cut from the leaves – the work of the Leaf-cutter Bee. The hives in the Illawong RFS garden house the small black stingless bees - *Tetragonula carbonaria*, that help pollinate the native plants.

Other interesting things Eric told us about bees were that they fan as a group to keep the hive cool; bees can use up to 2 litres of water a day; the hive is kept at a constant temperature of 35-36°C; they won't fly if the temperature is below 15°C.

Eric's final comment was "a busy hive with lots of nectar-bearing plants close by is happy hive."

Sharon Pearson

Powerful Owl Talk – 12 April 2017

Our April speaker was Lisa Harvey speaking on her honours project – to trap and fit tracking collars to Powerful Owls to enable research into habitat in urban Sydney. The Powerful Owl is Australia's largest apex nocturnal predator owl, and is present along the Eastern Coast and is listed as vulnerable in NSW.

The owl is a territorial obligate hollow nester, 60cm in height with a wingspan of 140cm. It is estimated Sydney has 50-60 pairs with approximately 10-12 additional single birds.

The Powerful Owl Project was initiated by Birdlife Australia in 2011. This project is a citizen science project investigating breeding success, habitat use and diet of Powerful Owls in Sydney and the Central Coast. Lisa's research extended this project to find more information about habitat use and diet and to compare home range sizes of the Powerful Owl in areas of varying degrees of urbanisation across Sydney.

To enable the project to succeed, GPS transmitters with a weak link harness designed to fall off after a number of weeks were attached to three females and two males. Suitable trees with reasonably clear surrounding foliage had to be located to enable the slinging of a net, raised with the aid of a



John Martin

bow and arrow, to trap an owl responding to the call of a female, male or even a young owl.

The owls were then fitted with transmitters and tracked during the breeding season throughout the Sydney region. The GPS GSM transmitters enabled remote access to data via the mobile phone network. GPS fixes were first recorded half hourly then switched to hourly throughout the tracking period. Lisa showed the results of the main areas tracked, multiple home range trips with the owls in Balgowlah Heights, Bonnet Bay, Menai, Centennial Park and the Botanic Gardens.

The availability of vegetation may affect home range size. The variations found were: Botanic Gardens approx. 650ha, Centennial Park approx. 300ha, Bonnet Bay approx. 220ha, Balgowlah Heights approx. 110ha, Menai approx. 20ha.

Greenspace is an important element to habitat. Different types of greenspaces were used, such as structured gardens in the Royal Botanic Gardens and natural bushland in the Sydney Harbour National Park at Balgowlah. Overall 85% of GPS locations were recorded in greenspace; dwelling density within an owl's home range varied between 0.43 & 6.26 km². Balgowlah had approx. 80% greenspace, Bonnet Bay approx. 60%, Botanic Gardens approx. 90%, Centennial Park approx. 95% and Menai approx. 99%.



Nick Bradsworth

Collection and dissection of owl regurgitate assisted in determining the diet consumed by the tracked owls and also other known pairs throughout Sydney. Of the 74 pellets analysed,

prey items were identified from bone fragments, hair and feathers.

The GPS results in the Sydney region showed the common ringtail possum rating approx. 35% on the scale, the flying fox approx. 15%, rats approx. 15%, birds approx. 14%, common brush tail possum approx. 10%, sugar gliders approx. 3%, rabbits approx. 3% and unknown mammalians approx. 3%.

What is the future for urban Powerful Owls? Prey is unlikely to be a limiting factor due to the abundance of key prey items such as the Common Ringtail Possum and Common Brushtail Possum. Habitat loss, especially the loss of old trees capable of producing large hollows for breeding is likely to be a significant concern. Other issues include human-wildlife conflict, with the Powerful Owl being susceptible to car strike and collisions with buildings. In highly urbanised areas, the owls may have to fly further afield to find greenspace and because of the risks associated with urban areas, greenspace design in cities could help reduce this risk. Future projects will entail research into hollow availability and characteristics of greenspaces.

The dedicated teams tracking, monitoring, researching and sharing their findings on these magnificent owls is greatly appreciated by all – we thank Lisa, Birdlife Australia, the University of Sydney, City of Sydney Council and the Royal Botanic Gardens for their generosity.

Marion Payne

Mulch Ado About Nutting

Dogs like macadamias but macadamias DO NOT like dogs. The nuts, if chewed and ingested, are toxic to dogs. If not chewed and swallowed whole they can cause a blockage.

Every time our macadamia tree has a flush of flowers we constantly monitor the progress of any ensuing nut production. So far we have been lucky that only two flowerings out of ten have actually nutted.

Beneath the tree is a good accumulation of leaves intermingled with more than one application of eucalyptus mulch. Moisture is retained in the ground fairly well and the tree is thriving very nicely, thank you very much.

BUT, trying to round up any nuts which have fallen, whether by maturation or strong wind, is a difficult task (somewhat akin to searching for truffles) for people with good eyesight, let alone yours truly. However, our noses and their accompany senses of smell are no match for the dogs' keen snouts. Keeping doggy treats in a pocket or container is an essential when trying to get one dog or t'other to relinquish their prize finds.

The dilemma therefore is this: to keep the ground bare under the tree and either let it dry out or increase our water bill OR to maintain a good mulch cover and stay super vigilant at nut time.

Alan F

(With apologies to W. Shakespeare Esq.)

Royal National Park Seminar

Because of our efforts in supplying so many plants to the Georges and the Royal NP over the years I was asked to talk at the Royal National Park Biodiversity Protection Seminar. My subject was the role of a volunteer nursery in preserving biodiversity.

On the day I was rather daunted to notice that the other four speakers had PhDs in their topics including a professor or two and I have no qualifications in horticulture whatsoever. Still it seemed to go down OK.

The other speakers were an interesting bunch. Most will remember Bob and Ann Young, authors of *Understanding the Scenery*, about the features of the RNP. I thought Ann's contribution was particularly appropriate.

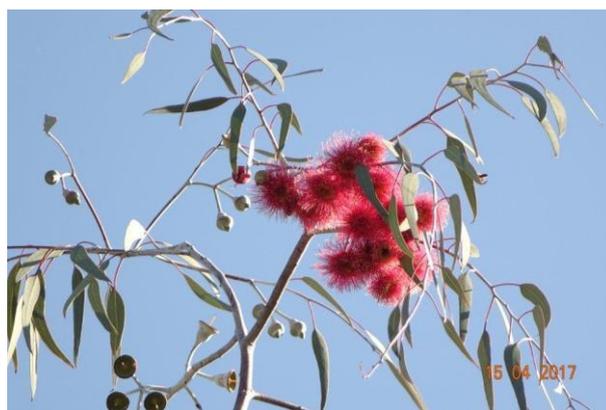
Leroy Gonsalves did his PhD on microbats and spoke at our group a couple of years ago. His topic was the RNP and some of the interesting work being carried out with tracking transmitters.

The work of Mark Ooi from the Centre for Ecosystem Science at UNSW was a revelation. His PhD is in seed science and he is working on the effect fires of different intensity have on the seed bank in the soil. He also revealed that some of the local *Boronia* (and other plants) that are a real problem to propagate will germinate by simulating a quite normal day/night cycle with lows; I think about 9 degrees and highs about 19.

Lloyd Hedges

Facebook Sensations

Sharon placed some photographs of an *Eucalyptus caesia* 'Silver princess' growing in Oatley on our Facebook page. While the photos were fine ones of a very nice plant, she could scarcely have been expecting the response. Within a day it was approaching 100,000 hits. After several days it finished at over 230,000 hits and 2000 shares.



Judging by the names, it first went ballistic in Italy, then throughout Europe before heading off to the Orient.

By the time the rush had died down our Facebook page had gone from about 690 page likes to 940.

Sharon's effort even eclipsed John Prat's photo of the Sea Eagle carrying the penguin he took South of Wattamolla, which received 50,000 hits the first time around. The Sydney Morning Herald recently asked permission to publish his photo and an article about it on the electronic version of the paper and it has probably now been seen more people than Sharon's.

Lloyd Hedges

Community Opportunities

If you are interested in some bush regen, check out the information about Bushcare on Sutherland Council's website. There are many sites and weeding provides good exercise and good conversation. Improve the environment and learn more about our local flora.

Jason can recycle your old plastic pots. Please give them a rough rinse and leave them at the compound.

Special Interest

Deadline for contributions to next newsletter is Sunday 23 July. Any items suitable for inclusion in the newsletter may be sent to the Editor (Post to Secretary or e-mail mwfeditor@gmail.com) before the deadline.

Working Bees are held on the first Saturday of month at IRFB starting at 9am and include weeding, mulching and munching.



Su and Anne tubing up seedlings

Propagation days are now a regular part of running the nursery at **Illawong Rural Fire Station**. They are a great opportunity to be involved in interesting project and learn new skills. Members can assist in MWG ventures or propagate species for themselves. The Saturday meetings are open to the public and next one will be on 3 June. The **Tip nursery group** continues to work on **Mondays**. Please contact Lloyd (95431216) for more details on either of these opportunities.

A group of members is also meeting on **Tuesdays at 9am**. Contact Pam Pitkeathly regarding Tuesdays or if you are enthusiastic about helping on another day - phone 9771-9789 or email pit.keath@bigpond.com.

Keep up to date with our **Facebook page** or use our **website** which can be easily accessed using an internet search for the phrase "Menai Wildflower Group" and selecting what should be the first option offered.

Meetings are held at the Illawong Rural Fire Brigade each month except January. Most meetings are held on the second Wednesday at 7:00pm. The three winter meetings: June, July, August are held on the second Saturday of the month at 1pm. The venue is the Illawong Rural Fire Brigade Headquarters. New members and friends are welcome.

When you joined the Menai Wildflower Group you became a member of the NSW APS and therefore are **welcome at other APS group** meetings, bushwalks, etc. This gives members a lot more activities to participate in. Visit the APS NSW website www.austplant.com.au/ and check out what other districts are doing, particularly our neighbours East Hills and Sutherland: <http://easthills.austplants.com.au/> <http://sutherland.austplants.com.au/> .

Lloyd Hedges

Nursery Report

Thanks to Ron and Marian the Tip nursery has been growing plants for the Dharawal and Five Islands National Parks. We have supplied 500 plants to Dharawal NP, Ron and Shaun gave a hand to put them in - along with a bunch of New York uni students and some locals. We have a lot more growing on for an August planting session.

The Five Islands plan is for a mid-June planting effort. This project is more exciting as the only means available for landing on Big Island is by zodiacs and if there is a sea running it can get too dangerous and be cancelled. We should have 1000+ plants for the initial effort with more to follow.



MWG joined in with the NPWS 50th anniversary celebrations.

The other main propagating effort is Flannel flowers both white (*Actinotus helianthii*) and pink (*Actinotus forsythii*). These are the plants most in demand and the main way the nursery pays for itself.

The plants coming out of the IRFB micro nursery are steadily increasing and we regularly get members of the public turning up at our nursery days as well as our East Hills compatriots. We have also had tours by other gardening groups. The Menai Community gardening group will have visited by the time this gets published and Ron's Probus club is visiting in the spring.

The propagation beds are proving themselves; the one we purchased from Sage Horticulture with its heated base as well as automatic watering especially so. It is providing plenty of cutting-grown plants and has provided several grafted plants as well.



Hopefully this winter, if the committee and the flesh are willing, we might complete the IRFB nursery with a 4 metre polyhouse and a full heating unit for our second propagation bed. This will take up all the space we have, so will have to do us for a while. We can then get back to the gardening.

Lloyd Hedges

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