



# Wollombi Valley Landcare Group News for October 2008



## A Visit to Burrealongs Valley

*The next Landcare meeting will commence at 4:00 pm on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> October at the Dairy in Burrealongs Valley*

The Dairy is just past 845 Murray's Run Road, on the right. Look out for the Landcare signs. Parking is along the road. **Allow 30 minutes travel time from Wollombi.**

The meeting will commence at 4 o'clock - we will be in summertime and in the hotter weather then, hence the later time.

Burrealongs hosted the first planting of Bill Hick's long stem tubestock in the Wollombi Valley. So if you're interested in what your plantings could look like when they are established, here is your chance.

There will be a gentle 2 km loop walk showing riparian (riverside) plantings which came through the testing experiences of the floods very well. It is also an example of successful fencing out of stock from plantings and the Brook.

Further to our woody weeds workshop we will learn about the complicated history of willows as streambank stabilisers. Why they were planted and why they are now being removed. Results of the recent attempts to kill some individual willows will become obvious as the spring reshooting does or does not occur.

Follow the Landcare signs from the Murray's Run / Sydney road intersection or call Lesley on 4998 8205 for directions.



**Looking forward to seeing you there.**

For more information phone Lesley Williams (4998 8205) or Jane Mowatt (4998 8158)

*Everyone is welcome. Tea & coffee provided.*

*The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Wollombi Valley Landcare Group Inc, or any other Landcare agency or government department, but are presented to promote discussion about and the practice of sustainable land use and environmental responsibility.*

## Woody weeds workshop

On Saturday the 16<sup>th</sup> of August, a small but enthusiastic group met at Laguna Hall to discuss the whys and wherefores of woody weeds. Woody weeds are shrub or tree kind of plants with a woody stem).

Jane Mowatt kicked off the afternoon with her surprising pronouncement that every plant is a weed if it is growing in the wrong spot, for example eucalypts and wattles may be weeds to a farmer, whilst *Grevillea robusta* may be a weed to a native bush enthusiast. However, the weeds we were concerned about have been brought here from overseas or interstate. They have been introduced to beautify gardens - but the most resilient among them have leapt the back fence to become rampart along our waterways and in our bush

Particularly of concern around the Wollombi area are privet, lantana, African olive, camphor laurel, tree of heaven and willows, just to name a few.

Robyn Lamond then discussed various ways of controlling weeds from bush regeneration to integrated systems involving manual removal, poisoning, fencing, etc. Bush regeneration involves weeding from the least affected areas where other native seeds and plants can easily fill the gaps.

Barry Shepherd from Cessnock City Council was also present with promotional anti-weed giveaways and suggestions and information about noxious weeds in the area.



Shelagh Briggs astonished the group with heroic tales of her property. She has achieved a remarkable feat, and was a fount of knowledge, having tried and tested every possible way to get rid of lantana. She has finally worked out the best strategies in the war on lantana and estimates that she has only 15% of the weed left. Go Shelagh!! - what a woman!!

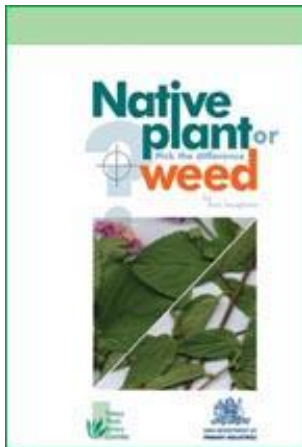
Jane Mowatt then elaborated on her tried and true method of poisoning plants such as privet and Tree of Heaven. Either paint all stems for about a 30 cm band with glyphosate, or if the tree is bigger, then cut indents all the way around with a hammer and chisel and immediately inject each cut with 1 ml of poison (this job is more easily, safely and enjoyably done with 2 people working as a team).

Contact Jane if you need her expert advice or visit her at the monthly Laguna markets. Remember to check that the plant is an actual weed and not a native look-a-like. There is a lot of confusion between the narrow leaved privet and our beautiful native myrtle, *Backhousia myrtifolia*.

Landcare has some fabulous books for sale at a cost price of \$15 each, to help people discriminate between weeds and look-a-like natives of this area. These are available on the Landcare stall at the Laguna monthly market.

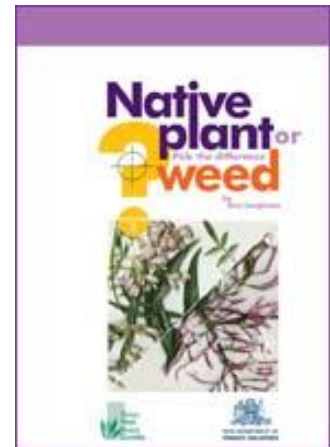
Catherine Craig

## Native Plant or weed?



These full colour illustrated books by Ann Loughran, referred to in the report on the *Woody Weeds Workshop* above, can be purchased at the discounted price of only \$15 each from Wollombi Landcare, either at our regular meetings or from the Landcare stall at the Laguna Markets the third Sunday morning of each month.

These books are spiral bound with 68 and 72 pages, they normally retail for \$24 each.



Volume 1 contains full-colour photographs of weed and 'look-alikes' arranged on facing pages along with explanatory notes. It is an essential field guide for those involved in Landcare, farmers and bush regenerators in coastal and high-rainfall areas. Volume 2 starts where Volume 1 finishes with more side-by-side photos of more weeds and native plants that look similar, plus a guide to botanical terms and features and references to useful books and websites.

Jane Mowatt

## Botanical walk

The weather forecast for Saturday September 20<sup>th</sup> sounded most problematic, high winds and high temperatures! We devised a couple of contingency plans and hoped for the best.

Luckily the day began with fog that lifted leaving a calm pleasant morning. The walkers assembled and after coffee and a chat from Jane Mowatt about wet and dry sclerophyll woodlands we headed up the hill. Our first find was a green hood orchid and not far from that a blueberry ash covered in lovely shiny blue berries.



The good conditions of the past twelve months made it very hard to discern the path but eventually, with one or two detours we made it to the top, where Jane explained the difference between angophoras and eucalypts. The grass trees are growing well. Further on, at the head of the gully, the soft fern has proliferated and looks stunning and so high that it was a case of "Where's Harley?" In this area we found two plants not previously seen on our walks a drosera and Patersonia. There is always something new!

At the top where children in the past had built a fireplace, we admired the distant views, the good examples of *Angophora bakerii*, found the woody pear and then headed down the dry sclerophyll slope.

We were invited to the Storeys where we did further plant ID of specimens collected and thoroughly enjoyed a delicious lunch provided by Cate and David.

Further Botanical Walks are planned, so if you are interested please call Lesley Williams on 4998 8205.

# Massive reduction in Council rates on my property!

I own 50 acres in Knight's Arm of which approximately 80% is under a Voluntary Conservation Agreement (VCA).

The NSW Government has just changed the law on how land covered by a VCA is to be rated. Instead of rating the property on the value of the land NOT covered by the VCA, in my case about 10 acres, they are now requiring the Council to reduce the rates on a percentage basis. In practice, this means that this year, instead of being rated as if I owned 10 acres which has much the same value as 50 acres according to the Valuer Generals Department, I received a discount of \$882 on the original evaluation of over \$1000. Because 80% of my land is under the VCA I only have to pay 20% of the normal rates. This year it was \$135!

A very positive benefit for protecting a bush block.

Further information on setting up a VCA on some of your property can be obtained from the National Parks & Wildlife Service who administer the program by calling the NSW Department of Environment & Conservation on 1300 361 967 or going to their website at <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/cpp/ConservationAgreements.htm>

The following information is taken from the Voluntary Conservation Agreement brochure available from their website:

## **What is Voluntary Conservation Agreement**

A Voluntary Conservation Agreement is a joint agreement between landowners and the Minister for the Environment. The Agreement provides permanent protection for the special features of your land and is voluntary. The area under the Agreement is registered on the title of the land ensuring that if the land is sold, the Agreement and management requirements remain in place.

## **What areas can a Voluntary Conservation Agreement Protect**

A conservation agreement may be entered into:

- for areas containing scenery, natural environments or natural phenomena worthy of preservation
- for areas of special scientific interest
- for areas that are the sites of buildings, objects, monuments or events of national significance
- in relation to areas in which Aboriginal objects, or Aboriginal places, of special significance are situated
- for the study, preservation, protection, care or propagation of fauna or native plants or other flora
- for the study, preservation, protection, care of karst environments
- for the conservation of critical habitat or the conservation of threatened species, populations or ecological communities, or their habitats.

## **What are the benefits**

A Voluntary Conservation Agreement provides the opportunity for land to be permanently conserved - not just under current ownership, but for all future owners. When entering into a Voluntary Conservation Agreement, the landowner continues to undertake responsibility for the management of the land, including control of weeds and feral animals.

NPWS may provide assistance to the landholder in the form of:

- property management planning advice
- biodiversity surveying and assessment assistance
- information and practical advice about conservation management strategies
- links and contacts with like minded people
- notes and news on particular management issues and ecology
- signs
- access to education programs and activities
- assistance programs to support implementation of management plans.

Landholders who enter into a Voluntary Conservation Agreement may be eligible for rate relief and tax deductions, although this is not controlled by the NPWS.



## Gas exploration in the Wollombi Valley

The Wollombi Valley Landcare Group states its total opposition to exploration and mining of coal seam bed methane gas in the Wollombi Valley.

We are pleased to have been reassured by the proponents stating publicly that actual mining will not occur and they are merely exploring the deposits in a spirit of scientific enquiry. *But can we be sure?*

Our valley is subject to both extreme floods and large bushfires. Neither of these events would mix well with a network of pipes in the main floodplain carrying explosive gas.

There are many possible damaging effects on the ecology and hydrology of the area. Heavy traffic, damage to aquifers, pollution of the river and creeks, noise, soil erosion, disturbance of riparian vegetation - much of it planted with the assistance of Government Grants and with voluntary labour.

*Any other points you'd like to add?*

It would be counter to all the environmental protection that Landcare has been encouraging landholders to carry out on their properties.

## Laguna Market Day

The markets at Laguna are held in front of the Old Northern Trading Post on the third Sunday of each month from 9:30 AM to 1:00 PM and are proving popular as more locals and tourists call in to see what is on offer.

Most of the stalls are run by locals who have offer fresh home grown vegetable, olive oil, lavender and various plants for sale.

One stall that is present every month is the Wollombi Valley Landcare stand where Jane Mowatt (our resident botanist) and other committee members are ready answer your questions. Armed with our library of reference books and other material they are ready and willing to answer your queries and ID your plant samples. So if you have a question and are looking for an answer then come along and ask.



Robyn Lamond, Lesley Williams and Jane Mowatt at the Laguna Markets in September.

## Wollombi Valley Landcare Group Contacts

**Mail:** Wollombi Valley Landcare Group, Inc. c/o Wollombi General Store, Wollombi 2325  
**Items for newsletter:** Graham Taylor - 9981 6317 / 4998 3326 [graham.taylor@tech@gmail.com](mailto:graham.taylor@tech@gmail.com)

## Future meetings

Planning is underway for future Landcare meetings.

- Dec 2008** A visit to Stockyard Creek where Brian Woodward will show us how the large log structures introduced into the creek in 2002 to retain sediment upstream and create waterholes have worked following the floods in 2007 and 2008. This meeting is also our Christmas get together!
- Feb 2009** Professor Wayne Erskine *"Channel Changes since European Settlement in the Wollombi Brook Catchment"* Professor Erskine is resident at the Ourimbah Campus of the University of Newcastle and is widely recognised for his research into rivers, environmental flows and streambank changes, and has been studying the Wollombi Brook for many years.
- Apr 2009** A visit to Bill & Betty Hicks' property on Watagan Creek. Bill is best known as the person who developed the long stem tubestock as a method to replace willows as a means to control stream erosion. Bill & Betty for many years operated a nursery to service the demand for these tubestock.

## Where have all the Mynas gone?

Wollombi Landcare recently purchased a trap to catch the Indian Mynas that were infesting our valley. It comes with instructions and gassing bag.

Suddenly, we aren't seeing the Mynas in their normal haunts! Where have they gone? Did someone tell them we had bought the trap?

If you have seen them about lately, especially if they are at your place, then please let Catherine Craig know on 4998 3236.



## Catchment Detox

If you are into computer games, here is a new online game that has been developed in collaboration with key agencies including the CSIRO, the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, and the eWater CRC, as the national project for 2008 National Science Week, to help Australians better understand and manage the environment we live in.



Catchment Detox allows you to manage a virtual catchment, trying to balance the health of the environment, with the economy and population growth.

The aim of the game is to provide food and wealth for the population, while managing issues such as salinity, water quality, agriculture, tourism and urban development. You get to decide what activities you undertake - whether to plant crops, log forests, build factories or set up national parks. If you think you're up for the challenge, go to the Catchment Detox website at <http://www.catchmentdetox.net.au/> and give it a go.



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## \$5,000 grants available for innovative sustainable farming ideas

September 30, 2008

Landcare Australia wants to hear from farmers or land managers who have innovative ideas to encourage and develop sustainable farming practices. Grants of \$5,000 are available from the Woolworths Sustainable Farming Program for developing and trialling best ideas.

The grants seek to encourage Australian farmers to implement innovative techniques which contribute to more sustainable production and competitiveness of our primary industries.

Landcare Farming Program Manager Shane Norrish said: "These grants are aimed at supporting farmers trial or implement good ideas to improve the sustainability of farming practices.

"New ideas and ways of farming are needed to adapt to our increasingly variable seasons and the best ideas come from the farmers who have to tackle tough conditions on a daily basis. The grants will give farmers the backing they need to help put new ideas into action."

The grants are funded by part of the money donated through the Woolworths Drought Action Day in 2008 which raised over \$5 million for Australian farmers. Most of the funding was distributed by the CWA to severely stressed families coping with drought. The remainder is funding sustainable agriculture projects through Landcare Australia.

The grants are available for farmers in areas that were still declared eligible for "Exceptional Circumstances" assistance in January, 2008. [Click here](#) for more information and to see a map of eligible areas (the majority of Australia).

The Innovation Grants are aimed at helping farmers develop good ideas, focusing on issues such as climate change adaptation, crop or animal production, water or nutrient use efficiency and management of waste or salinity. Innovative ideas for sharing information about successful strategies for managing drought are especially welcome. Applications for the Innovation Grants close on Wednesday, October 22, 2008.

For further information, to see examples of projects already underway and to download application forms for the Woolworths Sustainable Farming Program, please visit [www.landcareonline.com](http://www.landcareonline.com) or contact the Project Officer – [Shivani Jayasinghe](mailto:Shivani.Jayasinghe@landcareaustralia.com.au) on 02 9412 1040 or email [shivani.jayasinghe@landcareaustralia.com.au](mailto:shivani.jayasinghe@landcareaustralia.com.au).



Australian of the Year and country music star Lee Kernaghan, has supported 'Backing our Farmers' through a series of

## managing native vegetation



The Native Vegetation Act 2003 (enacted in December 2005) introduced a new approach to the management of native vegetation across NSW. The CMA has been given the role of applying the regulations of the new act and supporting landowners in managing native vegetation on their properties through the development of Property Vegetation Plans (PVPs).

A PVP is a long-term plan which identifies actions for the protection and enhancement of native vegetation on a particular property, including offset actions for any proposed clearing.

Some major benefits of PVPs for landholders are that they are developed free of charge and once completed, can be used to apply for incentive funding. They can also provide landholders with greater security to plan and invest.

### Developing a PVP

Landholders interested in having a PVP developed for their property should contact the CMA. A CMA officer will visit the property to gather information on the vegetation, water, soil, salinity and biodiversity of the relevant sites on the property and discuss some options with the landholder for protecting existing vegetation and improving areas of degraded vegetation on the property.

All property information (including satellite images, property boundaries, drainage lines, and areas of native vegetation) is entered into the PVP Developer, which incorporates scientific data and natural resource information from around the state, with aerial photographs for mapping.



The PVP Developer will be used by all CMAs for the development of PVPs and for assessing proposals for incentive funding for the management and improvement of native vegetation. The PVP Developer will also provide an objective assessment tool for determining the environmental impacts of proposed clearing.

Once developed, the PVP allows the landholder the opportunity to apply for incentive funding to help implement actions identified in the plan.

For more information contact the CMA on 4930 1030 or go to the Native Vegetation website [www.nativevegetation.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nativevegetation.nsw.gov.au)

(Reprinted from the Hunter-Central Rivers CMA website [www.hcr.cma.nsw.gov.au](http://www.hcr.cma.nsw.gov.au))