



Wollombi Valley Landcare Group

News for December 2008



For more information phone Jane Mowatt (4998 8158) or Catherine Craig (4998 3236)

Everyone is welcome. Look forward to seeing you there. 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.

Gas exploration in the Wollombi Valley

In our last newsletter Landcare expressed their total opposition to exploration and mining of coal seam bed methane gas in the Wollombi Valley.

We are pleased to advise that Sean Gough, Chairman of WAGE (Wollombi Valley Against Gas Extraction, Inc) has agreed to attend our Christmas meeting and give a brief outline of the potential impact of gas exploration on our valley and bring us up to date on the progress of their campaign.

Sydney Gas had originally identified one site, across the valley from Mulla Villa, between Wollombi and Laguna, where they sought to sink an exploratory well. With issues associated with their first site they are now seeking alternative sites, including Milsons Arm and Narone Creek.

Report on the October Meeting – Burrealung Valley

A small but select group met at The Dairy, Murray's Run, for a very informative and entertaining talk by Bill Hicks on the history of the development of long stem tube planting. Many of us have bought long stems tubestock either from Bill, or Willowdene Nursery, and planted them, religiously following the instructions and swallowing our doubts while breaking the planting instructions in every gardening book I've ever read.

Where DID that belief come from, that all plants must be planted with all of the stem above ground and only the roots below the surface?

That was one of the rare questions Bill couldn't answer about his long stems. He developed them for the riparian zone i.e. along the river and creek banks and they are particularly suitable to our very loose sandy soils. I knew the advantages in planting deeply enough so that the roots were in the cooler and damper soil well below the exposed dry surface and that this also helped in resisting being washed away in the next flush down the creek. I hadn't realised the extra advantage of planting the tree and shrub species so that their roots were below the grass rooting zone, thus reducing the negative effects of competition with an established grass cover.

Lesley Williams, as the representative of the Burrealung Landcarers then took us on a tour of their plantings along the creek. Bill's plants are well established, forming the beginning of a tree canopy, shading the water and stabilising the bank edges. Where these trees are, there has been very little erosion even in the massive June '07 flood. All planted areas were very effectively fenced to exclude the stock grazing the adjacent paddocks.

We were also shown the areas of willow removal. Some established trees had been injected with poison and, so far, there was no reshooting. The most impressive sight was a heap of branches which had been cut off the trees and placed in a heap. They were reshooting all along their length even though not in contact with the ground. That is, after all, how the willows were planted initially - just put a stick in the ground and stand back.

Our thanks to Bill and Lesley for an interesting expansion of our understanding of long stem tube planting under our local conditions.

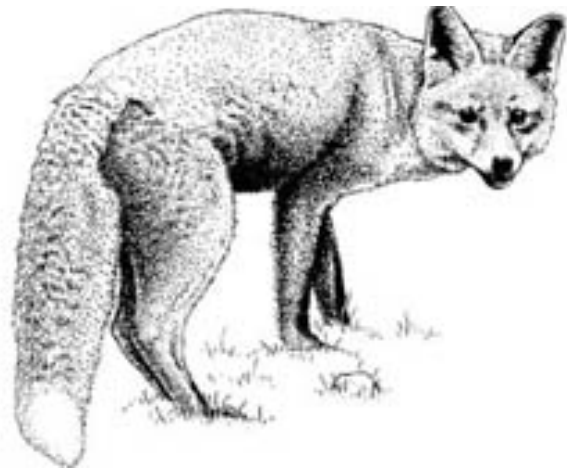
Jane Mowatt

Update on Pilot Fox Control Program

Thirty one properties, in 7 areas of the Wollombi Valley have expressed interest in participating in a pilot program to use 1080 baits to start controlling foxes locally. The regulations to use this pesticide are stringent, understandably, and we want to be assured that we are following procedures correctly, especially to protect non-target species. The new Pesticide Control Order allows baits to be laid on a participating property within 150 metres of any dwelling providing strict conditions are adhered to and appropriate records are kept. Requirements include that a control plan be developed and approved by Rural Lands Protection Board officers and that all participants sign a distance waiver form. Not having previous experience of these procedures we contacted Hunter Land Management (HLM) for advice on how to proceed as they are currently undertaking 1080 baiting programs on behalf of NPWS on public and private land in the Broke region and the Congewai Valley.

HLM is keen to support us in designing an ongoing fox control strategy for the valley. They have prepared a quotation for carrying out one (1) fox baiting program on the 31 pilot properties. We hope that once we are familiar with the correct procedures local landholder groups can take over the operation of each baiting program. A reassuring aspect is that it is recognised good practice to undertake a 'free feed' exercise for any area not yet baited. This involves laying a piece of meat in a mound of sand at each of the locations identified for baiting, to determine what species are taking the food from the foot prints in the sand. This is a 'research only' phase, without the use of baits and requires no permits or special procedures. Baiting can then occur at those stations where no non-target species such as quolls and monitor lizards are recorded. An ideal time to be baiting is autumn-winter, when foxes are dispersing and pairing up to breed.

HLM would like to meet with the pilot group early in 2009 to discuss and schedule the 'research' phase and start developing the control plan for the ultimate baiting phase. They have generously offered to prepare the control plan for the pilot program *pro bono* as a donation to Wollombi Valley Landcare in recognition of the contribution made by Landcare to the management of our natural assets. However, we will incur fees for them to undertake the 'research' phase and baiting phases of a program which will ideally needed to be repeated every 2-3 months between March and October.



The Committee is keen to go ahead with this pilot program as it will benefit the whole valley. We will ask for support from the members and take a vote at our Christmas Meeting in December for an allocation of \$3,500 from our funds to pay for it. If further major allocation of funds is needed for subsequent programs we will again seek your approval.

If you are unable to attend this meeting and wish to express a view on the proposal for Landcare to fund this initial pilot program then you are invited to lodge your comments by email to wollombi.landcare@gmail.com

Robyn Lamond

Notes from the Propagation Workshop

If you were unable to participate in the propagation workshop held recently, Anne Kinnear has kindly made her notes available.

On 6th September, 2008 a few intrepid landcarers met at Evelyn Bloom's house for a cuttings workshop. The very able teachers were Evelyn, Judy Brown and Shelagh Brigg, assisted by Jane Mowatt when some extra botanical expertise was needed. Unfortunately that weekend was noted for the amount of rain that fell and some people could not get over the flooded creeks to attend the workshop. And when the local RFS Captain rang to advise other creeks were flooding, the workshop came to an abrupt halt for more of the participants who bolted for home. Hopefully another workshop will be held soon.



These are my notes of the workshop. I have no skills in this area, so any errors are mine alone. I have relied on "Australian Native Plants" by John Wrigley and Murray Fagg for botanical information to fill in the gaps in my knowledge [and to avoid irritating Jane with too many silly questions].

The most important thing about cuttings or growing native seeds is the medium used to propagate them. Evelyn uses a mix of 2 parts coarse sand to 1 part peat. Judy had an interesting mix of coarse sand and quartz gravel with some humus added. Judy uses coir, compost or peat as humus. The most important thing is that the mixture should not hold too much moisture. The coarse sand has to be washed repeatedly to get rid of all the clay. Put sand in a bucket or container, add fresh water and swirl around until all the clay is washed out of the sand.

First of all Judy showed us how to smoke flannel flower seeds [*Actinotus helianthi*]. This process of smoking can be used for a wide variety of seeds, including *Boronia*, *Grevillea*, *Gymea Lily*, *Hakea* and *Hibbertia*. Judy used an old aluminium jelly pan, with sand in its base and an old tin garbage lid. A handful of seeds were added to the pan, covered with some dried gum leaves, which were set alight. The leaves need to smoulder and produce smoke. Put the lid on and when smoke dies down take lid off and put water on it. Leave for 24 hours and then sprinkle contents of pan on soil. This process can be done straight on the ground, without a pan, and wherever you want the seeds to germinate; however be careful you don't start a bushfire. Flannel flowers like to grow on sunny, sandy ridges, and will grow in an amazingly small amount of soil. Judy very generously gave me some flannel flower seeds to try for myself. [I haven't been brave enough to try smoking them yet!]

The advantage of growing plants from cuttings is that cuttings can be taken at most times of the year, whereas seed collection can only been done at specific times of the year.

Next Shelagh Brigg showed us how to take soft tip cuttings of amongst others:

Billardiera scandens	(apple berry) small shrub or small climber (ground cover). Likes open sunny position. Beloved of bower birds.
Calothamnus sp	see below.
Correa reflexa	(native fuschia) shrub, can be upright or spreading. Likes well drained soil and full to $\frac{3}{4}$ sun.
Crowea	small woody shrub with star shaped flowers. Quite hardy. Likes a well drained, mulched soil in partial shade.
Darwinia citriodora	low spreading shrub, 60cm high X 1 metre. Needs semi shade and good drainage.
Eriostemon	hardy, long flowering shrub. Needs good drainage and some shade. Cuttings take readily.
Grevillea thelemanniana	dense spreading shrub, 50cm high X 1 metre. Needs full sun and well drained soil.
Melaleuca	(Paper Barks and Honey Myrtles). Propagates easily from cuttings.
Prostanthera	(mint bush). 3 species - propagates easily from cuttings. Needs good drainage, full sun to part shade and likes to be mulched.

Shelagh and Evelyn both recommend pots not less than 12 cm deep that allow the roots to grow straight down. 4 or 5 cuttings can be struck in each pot.

Soft tip cuttings are best done in spring when the plants have begun growing. Take more of the plant to be propagated than required. Always use something sharp to take the cutting like secateurs, or a knife, or as Evelyn did, a sharp razor blade.

Keep cuttings out of direct sunlight and as cool as possible until they can be potted up. Early morning is the best time to take cuttings. If you can't pot them up immediately, as soon as the cuttings are taken, place into a plastic bag, put a teaspoon of water into the bag and shake it up, then breathe into the bag. Close the bag and store in the crisper drawer of the fridge for several weeks.



To prepare the cuttings for propagation:

1. Cut the stem just below a node. If stem is long enough, more than one cutting can be taken.
2. Cut off the lower leaves, not too much leaf should be left, only about 4 or 5. For larger leafed cuttings, the leaves can be cut in half. When removing the lower leaves, it is better to cut them off until you learn which leaves can be stripped off with your fingers.
3. Remove any flowers and buds.
4. Scratch the stem and dip cutting into hormone rooting powder. (Alternatives to hormone rooting powder are hormone rooting gel, honey and vegemite.)
5. Make hole in soil with a dibber (or pencil) and insert cutting in pot.
6. Water in.

Place pots in a tray lined with peat, which should be kept moist and then in a mini greenhouse or propagator. Evelyn showed us an interesting one made from an old polystyrene box from the greengrocer.

Pot on the cuttings when good root growth is apparent. If a single long root is formed, it can be safely pruned back by 1/3rd provided you use a sharp knife or scissors before potting on. Harden off the potted plants gradually before potting out. Ensure plants do not dry out before they are planted out.

We then went for a wander around Evelyn's garden and took our own cuttings from the many plants there, including:

Banksia 'giant candles'	must be propagated from cuttings. Renowned for its flower spikes which can be up to 40 cm long.
Correa baeuerlenii	(chef's hat correa). Birds attracted to this. Frost hardy. Needs well drained soil. Propagates easily from cuttings. Likes shade and well composted soil with good drainage.
Callistemon	(bottlebrushes). Cuttings should be taken after it has flowered. Good bird attractor. Needs full sun, but will tolerate badly drained soils. Strikes readily from cuttings.
Calothamnus	(one sided bottlebrushes) WA Genus. Useful bird attractor. Needs good drainage and full sun. Slightly frost tender. Cuttings are best taken late summer.
Darwinia	grows readily from cuttings. Needs excellent drainage and full sun to ½ shade.
Grevillea (Blooms hybrid)	an interesting hybrid with red and yellow flowers
Hypocalymma augustifolium	WA genus, small woody shrub 1metre high X 1.5 metre across. Needs excellent drainage to survive and some overhead shade. Cuttings strike readily.
Sollya heterophylla	(Bluebell creeper). WA genus, very hardy - weedy potential because birds love its blue berries.
Thryptomene calytrix tetragona	came from a cutting of a local plant taken by Evelyn.

Evelyn also drew our attention to plants in her garden that can be grown from seed, including:

Leptospernum
Lomandra

A great day. I highly recommend the next workshop to you all. Chris Jackson (one of the intrepid and wet participants) really enjoyed Evelyn's pancakes, as we all did, and hopes there will be many more workshops (and pancakes!).

Anne Kinnear



Our Landcare partners

You may not realise that Landcare Australia has many partners who support Landcare activities in many different ways, including funding for specific projects. Companies such as Banrock Station Wines, Westpac Bank, Australia Post, Rural Press, OneSteel, Waratah, Leighton Holdings, Computershare, Coles, Dilmah Tea and Visy. If you want to learn more about these and other partners and the programs they support go to the Landcare Australia website at www.landcareonline.com



Future meetings

Planning is underway for future Landcare meetings.

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.

To all our members and friends...

As the end of the year approaches it is time to start unwinding, to relax and catch up with family and friends, to celebrate Christmas and enjoy ourselves. It is also the worst time of the year for bushfires as the temperatures rise and vegetation dries out; so be prepared. And if you are driving over the holiday period, please drive carefully.

Wollombi Valley Landcare Group Contacts

Mail: Wollombi Valley Landcare Group, Inc. c/o Wollombi General Store, Wollombi 2325

Email: wollombi.landcare@gmail.com

Items for newsletter: Graham Taylor - 9981 6317 / 4998 3326 graham.taylor@tech@gmail.com

LANDCARE MEETING - SPECIAL EVENT

Saturday 21st February 2009 3.00 pm at Laguna Hall

The dramatic changes to Wollombi Brook and its tributaries since European settlement and what caused them

By Wayne Erskine

Professor of Natural Resources at the University of Newcastle

(An author in "The Way of the River – Environmental Perspectives on the Wollombi", 1994)

A summary of research over the past 30 years on historical channel changes, floods, sediment movement, rainfall trends & channel recovery together with an outline of current research on Dairy Arm, ongoing analyses of rainfall records & planned research on fish, chain of ponds & recovery of incised channels in the Wollombi catchment.

Here's a taste of the channel changes experienced on the Brook:



Murrays Run before the 1949 flood, showing a vegetated, small capacity channel.



Near the same location immediately after the June 1949 flood