



Wollombi Valley Landcare Group News for August 2011



Bushfire Safety Community Meeting Saturday 20 August 2011 at 2:00 pm at Wollombi Hall

On Saturday 20th August, you are invited to attend a presentation by Glenn O'Rourke, Deputy Captain of the Wollombi Volunteer Rural Fire Brigade who will be joined by Bert Pipan, the Community Safety Officer from Lower Hunter Fire Control.



As a resident and landholder in the Wollombi Valley you need to be aware of the risks posed by bushfires and how to prepare for the forthcoming bushfire season

Do you have a Bushfire Survival Plan?

Come to the meeting and learn how to prepare your property, learn how to make the LEAVE EARLY or STAY & DEFEND decision - to Prepare. Act. Survive.



Photo: Peter Firminger



It is your responsibility to prepare yourself, your family, your home and property for the threat of bushfire. By attending this meeting you will be provided with important information about:

How fires behave

How to prepare for Bushfire

How to decide to Leave Early or to Stay & Defend

What to do in the event of fire

Fire Danger Ratings and Emergency Warnings

How to stay informed during a bushfire.

Everyone is welcome. We look forward to seeing you there. Tea and coffee will be provided.

For more information contact Jane Mowatt on 4998 8158 or Graham Taylor on 4998 3326.

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.

Bushfire Safety Community Meeting

Private Bush Fire Shelters

Since the devastating Black Saturday fires in Victoria in February 2009, some landholders with properties located remote from the villages and fire brigades in Wollombi and Laguna have wondered about building a bushfire shelter or bunker. The *Australian Building Codes Board* has published a *Performance Standard for Private Bush Fire Shelters*. The Rural Fire Service has issued *Fact Sheet* detailing their position regarding Private Bush Fire Shelters, and the NSW *Department of Planning* has issued a *Planning Circular*. Take the opportunity at this meeting to learn more.

Fire Resistant Plants

What plants are fire resistant is a question often raised by landholders with properties in the Wollombi Valley. Included as part of this newsletter is a fact sheet on Plant Selection in Bush Fire Prone Areas. A widely read book by Joan Webster entitled *The Complete Bushfire Safety Book* also contains a list of bushfire resistant plants, albeit of species more suited to Victoria. Local botanist, and Landcare President, Jane Mowatt will discuss these two references and what plants are best suited to our area.

Wildlife Rescue

Since buying Wombat Valley (our weekender at Laguna), we have become very active in treating wombats suffering from mange. We believe we have had success that mirrors the successes of more scientific programs. The wombat protection society www.wombatprotection.org.au has been of enormous assistance and through them we attended the *National Wombat Conference* held in Albury over the weekend of 18-21 March this year. Over 100 delegates from all over Australia attended bringing together a wealth of knowledge on wombats. The list of speakers was long and distinguished. We met Barbara Trigg, the author of *Scats 'n' Tracks* (there is a copy of this book in the Wollombi Valley Landcare library).

We heard many wonderful stories including that of Benny – see extract below of an article from the Winter edition of *Australia Wildlife* published by the *Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia Ltd*.

The conference resolved to change the name of the common wombat (the wombat which lives in the Wollombi area) to the bare-nosed wombat. The threats to the species are so great that the word “common” was considered a misnomer.

At the conference, we met the chairman of *The Native Animal Trust Fund Inc* (NATF). NATF is a non-profit association licensed by the relevant NSW government department to rescue, rehabilitate and release natives back into the bush. All native fauna in NSW are protected by legislation and individuals and entities must be licensed to hold animals. The Fund was the first licensed wildlife rescue group in NSW and received its licence in 1978.

We attended a 2-day training course with NATF over a weekend in June in Newcastle at the *Hunter Wetlands Centre* at Shortland and are now authorised to carry out rescues. We also attended a wombat care course the following weekend although caring will have to wait until we are retired. The phones for NATF are manned 24/7 and the contact number is 0418 628 483 (0418 NATIVE).



Chris feeding milk to orphaned wombat at Cedar Creek

Louise Hicks & Chris Jackson

Wollombi Landcare Meeting cancelled

In June we were all looking forward to hearing presentation by Anna Durkin on fungi found in the Wollombi area and a nature walk conducted by Catherine Craig around the Common. But unfortunately this and other activities had to be cancelled due to the flooding following the heavy rains that fell just prior to the meeting.

I know several members had been out looking for fungi and taking photos to show at the meeting so it was a great disappointment when we had to cancel. We are hopeful that we will be able to get Anna and Catherine to give their presentation and walk at a later date.

The Dam

We love our dam. That said it's not good for much – too far from the house for fire protection or for house water. But the wombats we love, as well as numerous birds, marsupials, macropods, reptiles, crustaceans, etc enjoy it and it's a delight to look at.

However, there is a hole in it. Or several holes; who can say. It was full after the 2007 floods but to our dismay swiftly lost its water and the level dropped to post drought levels. When the floods of 2011 arrived we were ready.

We had sourced two buckets of a polymer designed to plug the leak. Chris had used sticks to mark the level to which the water in the dam had dropped pre-flood so we were able to limit the polymer application to the edges of the dam above this level rather than the whole dam surface. It looks to be working!



The application was not simple. A boat would be preferable. The implement designed by Chris was creative but required him to wade into freezing water and was very hard on his back. The spread was less even than desired as well.

Would we do it again? No! An unintended outcome was the loss due to drowning of some microbats. We were not aware we had a population of microbats. We hope we still do. According to the spiel about the polymer it had been used successfully on yabbie farms and was environmentally friendly. We had taken particular note of this because of concern for our turtles and frogs. It may have been the clumsiness of our application of the product.

If this application doesn't work we will tolerate a mostly empty dam.....or maybe build a new one!

Louise Hicks

National Day of Action on Coal Seam Gas

Sunday October 16th 2011 has been chosen as the National Day of Action on coal seam gas.

This marks the beginning of National Water Week so it's a very appropriate time for actions that highlight the importance of respect for, and careful management of our irreplaceable water resources.



I urged you to get involved and help to stop the destruction of our land and water – go to <http://lockthegate.org.au/> to learn how you can assist.

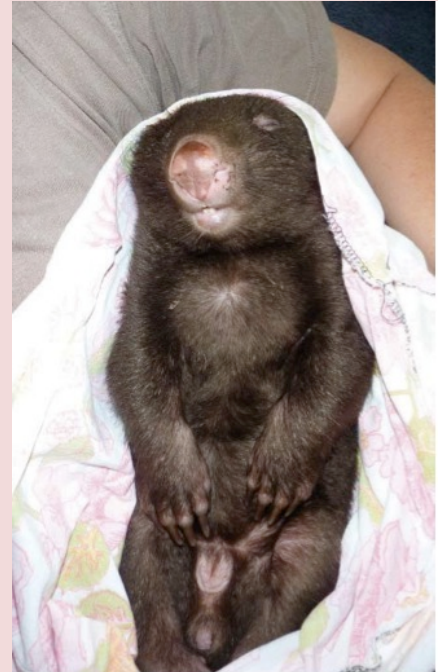
Graham Taylor



LOCK THE GATE
Alliance

Benny

A report came in on 10 Jan 2011 from a member of the public. A young wombat joey was sitting on top of his dead mother who had been hit by a vehicle along a remote cul-de-sac dirt road. A Native Animal Rescue Association (NANA) rescue team travelled out to the location to find the little joey had disappeared, there was no sign of him anywhere and the rescue team eventually had to give up the search. Little Benny endured over a week on his own, fighting to survive, mourning his dead mother and starving as his diet was still 95 per cent mother's milk. During this time on his own, he was also attacked and the skin on his back was torn, he had deep wounds around his neck and along his back. NANA received a second phone call regarding the wombat joey, he had been found again. Unfortunately he had also now been run over by 4WD ag bikes. The person who found him picked him up and handed him in to NANA.



We received him the following day; he was in and out of consciousness for the first five days. He had three fractures in his pelvis and the wing bone was pushed downwards. He had infection in his wounds on his back, head injuries and pneumonia. Antibiotics and painkillers were used. X-rays sent to Dr Howard Ralph, a well-known and fantastic wildlife vet who is always willing to help wildlife. Many hours of intensive care followed, carefully making sure he received enough marsupial milk, rest and medication. After five days we had the first "contact" with him looking in to our eyes, he was dragging his back legs behind when he tried to walk. At no time did he ever give up wanting to live. We were amazed at his incredible inner strength, so how could we as carers ever possibly give up! Slowly his journey to recover started. His wounds healed, his fur started to grow back, his fractures mending. Now, five months later, he is a happy healthy six kilogram boy. He has full movement in his back legs. He has thick black fur all over his back and he loves his milk. His best friend is Ruby, another orphaned wombat joey with another sad story, to be told at another time. Benny and Ruby will be in our care for at least another twelve months before they are ready to face the world as free living wombats."

Marie and Ray Wynan, Jarake Flora and Fauna Conservation

Vale Anne Adams

We regret to advise that Anne Adams passed away on the 5 July.

Anne had been a Landcare member and keen supporter for many years although in recent times she has been too frail to attend any of our meetings or activities, although she appreciated receiving our newsletter and would send me an email apologising that she was unable to attend the meeting but hoped it went well.

St John's Church, Wollombi was filled to overflowing with relatives, friends and acquaintances who attended a memorial service held at 2 pm on Sunday 31 July.

How good is your First Aid knowledge?

Many of us have attended first aid courses, but as time has past what you were told has started to fade and become fuzzy. And while some of what you learnt will hopefully come back to you if you are suddenly placed in a situation where you need to assist someone, it is no substitute for taking a refresher course every couple of years. As someone with a property in the valley you maybe not be able to get assistance or an ambulance quickly, so First Aid knowledge can be very important.



Perhaps you feel uncomfortable that you cannot remember much and dread ever being in the situation when your help is needed? Courses are run regularly by St John's Ambulance for \$180 for a 2 day course, or \$150 for a refresher course.

Also, those who have an iPhone, iPad or other smartphones can download a First Aid App prepared by St Johns for \$3.99 - simple and covering most aspects of basic First Aid, such as resuscitation, burns, choking, etc it is an easy way to quickly refresh your knowledge while you are on the go - now that's clever!

Salvinia Workshop cancelled

In the last newsletter, we advised members of a Salvinia Workshop that had been organised by the Catchment management Authority and Cessnock Council to be held in the Laguna Hall on Saturday 2 July to discuss the current Salvinia situation in Wollombi and to plan strategic control and containment work for the area over the next six months.

However, due to the flooding experienced just prior to the meeting the Salvinia Workshop was cancelled.

With some of the containment booms temporarily submerged at bridge points at least some of the Salvinia probably ended up the Newcastle harbour! Further surveys and a re-assessment of the Wollombi Brook for signs of Salvinia will now be conducted over the next 6 months to reassess the situation.

We will keep members advised when a new workshop is planned.

In the meantime if you detect Salvinia in any waterways in our area then please contact Lorna Adlem at the CMA on 4938 4925 or email lorna.adlem@cma.nsw.gov.au. *There is now a Wollombi Salvinia Monitoring Network* for landholders with Brook frontage to assist with detecting Salvinia by reporting the results of regular fortnightly checks for Salvinia on their section of the Brook.

The number of people using the email network is increasing and their brief email reports have been invaluable in providing a picture of what is happening locally with Salvinia distribution and control.

Let's keep Salvinia on the radar and out of the Brook!

Bushfires and Climate Change

The effects of fire are complex and governed by components such as frequency, intensity and season. While short-term effects of individual fires are important, it is necessary to evaluate the long-term impacts of fire on social, economic, ecological and natural resource values. Research conducted into the Impacts of Climate Change on Natural Hazard Profiles demonstrates that increases in the number and intensity of days of high temperature, low humidity and higher evaporation levels are projected to influence both fire frequency and fire intensity, with the frequency of occurrence of days of very high to extreme fire-risk possibly increasing by 10-50 per cent in all regions of NSW.

The fire season is likely to be extended in most regions, but research towards a much better understanding of future changes to the frequency and intensity of El Niño, ignition rates and fuel accumulation is needed to project the extent of the increase.

Research was undertaken by the NSW Office of Environment & Heritage (OEH) and the University of Wollongong that focused on the greater Sydney Basin (which extends from south of Wollongong to Newcastle and west to the Blue Mountains)- a key region where climate change effects regarding bushfires may most acutely affect a wide range of values. Changes to fire in the future are an issue of very high significance in this region because extensive areas of highly fire-prone bushland:

1. contain high biodiversity values (e.g. Blue Mountains World Heritage status)
2. abut extensive urban areas
3. directly affect ecosystem services, such as the quantity and quality of water and clean air.

The challenge of resolving and balancing risks posed by bushfires and climate change to these values in the Sydney Basin was the subject of the research project, which aimed to:

- quantify changes in fire regimes resulting from predicted changes in climate
- quantify resultant changes in risks posed to biodiversity, ecosystem functions, and people and their property
- predict ways in which a range of mitigation strategies will deal with risks from bushfires, and the performance of these alternatives under climate change
- investigate trade-offs among risks to key management values that will be needed to adapt to climate change in the Sydney Basin - where high value human assets, ecosystem services, and vulnerable and diverse ecosystems co-exist in fire prone bushland
- report findings through scientific publications, project reports and workshops involving key stakeholder groups in the government and the community.

This findings of the report (completed just prior to the devastating Black Saturday fires in Victoria) projects that:

- by 2050, Sydney and the Blue Mountains are likely to experience up to 24 per cent more bushfires and that they could cover as much as a 35 per cent greater area
- risk to urban catchment areas, and fire sensitive biodiversity could increase by 5-20 per cent under the 'high climate change scenario' and < 10 per cent under the 'low climate change scenario'
- current levels of prescribed burning (about 1 per cent of the landscape treated per annum) resulted in a 5 per cent reduction to risk indicators for urban, catchment and biodiversity values
- a five-fold increase in prescribed burning is required to counteract the adverse effects of the 'high climate change scenario', a smaller increase in prescribed burning (two-fold) may be needed to mitigate effects of the 'low climate change scenario'.

The report's authors stress that other factors affecting the built environment will govern overall levels of risk to people and property, and that the results of this report summarise the contribution to urban risk posed by the condition of the landscape only.

The authors also stress that changes to ignition rates from lightning, the amount of fuel and the effects of elevated CO₂ on plant growth that may result from climate change were not addressed in detail. However, a preliminary sensitivity analysis indicated that a 10 per cent decline in fuel accumulation may reduce the area burnt by 20 per cent and that such an effect would cancel out the increase predicted under the 'high climate change scenario'.

The article above is from the OEH website

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/climateChange/bushfires.htm> Further information and copies of the report are available from the website by following the links.

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 wollombi.landcare@gmail.com

PLANT SELECTION IN BUSH FIRE PRONE AREAS

While the design of the garden is important, so too is the plant species selected. No plant is fireproof, however, many plants have features that minimise the extent to which they contribute to the spread of bushfires. Given the right conditions, all plants will burn. Low to moderate fires scorch or burn plants. Severe fires cause more damage and high-intensity fires incinerate plants.

Fire Resistant Plants, which are hard to burn, have the following features:

- High moisture content
- High levels of salt
- Low volatile oil content of leaves.

The following suggestions can reduce the threat of bush fire:

- **Ensure vegetation does not provide a path for the transfer of fire to the house** - Spread the plants out so that they do not form a continuous canopy. Do not plant species directly up against buildings.
- **Avoid plants that retain or accumulate dead leaves and twigs** - These are very flammable, especially if this material is continuous from the ground to the crown. Trimmed cypress hedges, for example, are an extreme fire hazard.
- **Avoid Plants with high levels of volatile oils in leaves** - Eucalypts, Callistemons and Melaleucas burst into flames on heating and increase fire intensity. In eucalypts, the amount of volatile oil in foliage can be over 4%, whereas conifers have up to 2% and Callistemons and Melaleucas up to 1%. Generally the figure is less than 1% for Acacias, Grevilleas and Hakeas. Introduced deciduous and evergreen hardwoods have the lowest amounts with less than 0.1% of volatile oils.
- **Avoid Trees with loose, fibrous or stringy bark** - This can easily ignite and encourage fire to spread through the crown of the trees. Wind can carry burning bark, especially loose, flaky or ribbon bark, away to start new fires. Use trees that have smooth bark.
- **Clear all fine fuels, namely grass, leaves, bark and twigs** - These fuels will ignite and burn easily. Fine fuels should be cleared from around the house and the lawn should be kept well watered and short. Clear all fuels from around the base of trees. This will decrease the likelihood of damage to the tree.
- **Flammable material should be away from the house** - This includes woodpiles, wooden sheds, combustible material storage areas, large areas/quantities of garden mulch, stacked flammable building materials.



For more information about preparing your property for bush fires go to the NSW Rural Fire Service web site www.rfs.nsw.gov.au or call 1800 654 443

FIRE RESISTANT NATIVE TREES AND SHRUBS INCLUDE:

Acmena smithii
Alpinia caerulea
Breynia oblongifolia
Ceratopetalum apetalum
Corymbia maculata
Cupaniopsis anacardioides
Doryphora sassafras
Elaeocarpus reticulatus
Eupomatia laurina
Ficus coronata
Glochidion ferdinandi
Myoporum acuminatum
Myoporum boninense
Myoporum insulare
Pittosporum revolutum
Pittosporum undulatum
Podocarpus elatus
Sloanea australis
Stenocarpus salignus
Synoum glandulosum
Tristaniopsis laurina

Lilly Pilly
Native Ginger
Breynia
Coachwood
Spotted Gum
Tuckeroo
Sassafras
Blueberry Ash
Native Guava, Bolwarra
Sandpaper Fig
Cheese Tree
Mangrove Boobialla
Mangrove Boobialla
Boobialla
Rough-fruited Pittosporum
Sweet Pittosporum
Plum Pine, Brown Pine
Maiden's Blush
Scrub Beefwood
Bastard or False Rosewood
Water Gum

GROUND COVER PLANTS THAT ARE HARD TO BURN INCLUDE:

Buckinghamia celssissima
Carpobrotus glaucescens
Cissus antarctica
Crinum pedunculatum
Dianella caerulea
Dichondra repens
Dioscorea transversa
Doodia aspera
Hardenbergia violacea
Pelargonium australe
Rhagodia spp.
Scaevola aemula
Scaevola calendulacea
Smilax glycyphylla
Viola hederacea

Ivory Curl
Pigface
Kangaroo Grape
Swamp Lily
Native Flax Lilly, Blue Flax Lily
Kidney Weed
Native Yam
Rasp Fern
Hardenbergia, False Sarsaparilla
Coastal Geranium
Coastal Saltbush
Fairy Fan Flower
Dune Fan-flower
Native Sarsaparilla, Sweet Tea
Native Violet