



O.F.F. NEWS



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RARE PLANTS DOOMED

A proposed development at South Maroota (north-western Sydney) has shown up the inadequacies of the Threatened Species Conservation Act, the State legislation which is supposed to protect endangered plants and animals.

Baulkham Shire Council is proposing to construct a pony club and motor bike track at the end of Paulls Road, Maroota. The problem is that the site they have chosen includes a large area (about 2 ha) of flat sandstone rock which is the habitat for the rare and endangered Rock Kunzea (*Kunzea rupestris*). This plant species is listed as Vulnerable on the Threatened Species schedule. A few years ago it was only known from one site on the western edge of Maramarra National Park. Then a few plants were found at West Head and a large stand at Paulls Road. This latter site probably represents half the known number of this species. Even though half the known population of this rare plant will be destroyed, the legislation does not allow the NSW government to intervene. The other concern is that the Environmental Consultants report on the area for the Council did not mention this large rare population of plants, just as the consultants report for Hutchison Telecom for Oatley Park did not mention the 4 rare plant species threatened by the Oatley Park tower. It seems that all the developers need to do is to produce a flora report - it doesn't need to be comprehensive, accurate or scientific. The consultants, apparently, just tell the developer what they want to hear.

What is happening in Maroota could happen anywhere, even in our Council areas. The legislation must be more proactive, and allow for the Threatened Species Unit or the relevant Minister to step in and protect our threatened plants and animals.

Additional Note On 23 September, the Threatened Species Unit, which was previously a part of National Parks and Wildlife Service and

based in Hurstville, was taken over by the Department of Environment and Conservation. The effect of this change is difficult to assess at this early stage.

E-MAIL ADDRESS CHANGES

This message is a little like that of the teacher at roll call who asks 'please put up your hand if you're away'. But if you are not receiving your newsletter because you have changed your email address, please let John Winters know on jwwhse@optus.net.com.au. John emails out *OFF News* and reports that a few are not reaching their destination.

LORD HOWE PHASMID UPDATE

Members will no doubt remember the presentation by Nicholas Carlile on the Lord Howe Land Lobster at the OFF meeting in April 2002. He told the fascinating story of how a NPWS group rediscovered this remarkable flightless insect on the near vertical slope of Balls Pyramid 23 km off Lord Howe Island and how it was hoped to bring it back from the point of extinction by captive breeding.

A report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (18 October) brought the story up to date. Of two pairs being bred, 4 young have hatched at Melbourne Zoo and 5 young at the home of a Sydney stick insect expert. The problem now is what to do with them. They cannot be returned to their Lord Howe Island home until all the island rats are eliminated, an expensive project which may take 5 to 10 years.

ISLAND RATS AND OTHER PESTS

And talking of rats...Did you know that it was the introduced rat which almost led to the extinction of the New Zealand Kakapo, a flightless parrot? Currently only 57 Kakapo are known to have survived, some too old to breed.

Meanwhile, the introduction of the mongoose to the West Indies to control rats was a major mistake as it has led to the extinction of a number of the local animals. Poisoning for rats in Mongolia has drastically reduced the number of falcons in that country. The delicate balance is so easy to upset.

Meetings are held at the **Uniting Church Hall, Frederick Street, Oatley.**
(near the corner of Letitia Street)
Please make yourself known as you come in.
It is intended that meetings commence promptly at 7.45 pm.
Visitors and children are welcome to attend all meetings and field days.

Coming Events

November 24 (Monday). Peter Olde will talk to us about **The History of Grevillea Collecting in Australia.** Peter comes to us with a fine reputation as an interesting speaker and wildflower photographer. He is also one of Australia's experts on the *Genus Grevillea* and the co-author of the authoritative 3 volume *The Grevillea Book*. Unfortunately, Peter had to cancel his programmed talk to OFF in August, so we are looking forward to this presentation.

November 29 (Saturday). FIELD DAY. Bundeena-Maianbar Heritage Path in Royal National Park. Coastal forest, dune vegetation and historical features, including Deeban Spit, Old Fish Hatchery and Cabbage Tree Basin. Total distance about 7 km - generally easy walking except for about 500m along Hordens Beach and several sets of steps. Meet at Gunnamatta Bay Wharf, Cronulla, in time to catch the 9.30am ferry to Bundeena. Suggest 8.50am train from Oatley, changing at Sutherland for Cronulla. Car parking anywhere the wharf at Cronulla is very difficult but OK at Bundeena if you want to drive to there. Ferry arrives about 9.55am. Return by the 5pm ferry from Bundeena. Bring water, lunch and afternoon tea. Leader : **Fred Bell** tel 9525 0552. Mobile 0409 449 770.

December 8 (Monday). Annual Picnic/Barbecue. Venue :the grounds of Oatley Bowling Club. Time : From about 6pm. Bring your food and drink, and a gas barbecue if you have one. There will be a \$1.00 a head donation to the Bowling Club.

RECENT OFF ACTIVITIES

Oatley Lions Festival.

The OFF stall at this Festival was very popular and we had a large number of enquiries from the public. We hope some of these will convert into memberships. Sales of native plants were also good, adding some money to OFF funds. Thanks to all those who helped put up the stall and assisted with being behind the counter, especially Val Douglas, Val Boyan and Alan Fairley who were there all day. It was particularly pleasing to hear that the Society was well known in the community and has a positive image. Our presence at the Festival continues to promote OFF and its conservation aims.

Volunteer Award Night

As mentioned in last newsletter, Val Douglas was our nomination for the 2003 Georges River Community Award. Thirteen OFF members attended the presentation of these awards on 23rd October and enjoyed a good meal and a pleasant evening among friends.

SMIGGIN HOLES 2004

Interested in joining fellow OFF members at Smiggin Holes, Kosciuszko National Park, in January? A tentative booking has been made with Smiggins Chalet for January 17th to 24th 2004. Costs are \$42 per person per night (double/share) or \$62 single. Walk the alpine tracks or just relax. Expressions of interest should be lodged with Robin Dickson on 9580 5663.

COFFEE ON GEORGE

As one of the winners of the four \$10.00 vouchers donated by Coffee on George for our Annual Dinner, I would like to say how much my wife and I enjoyed the coffee and fruit and nut slice when we went there last week. We intend to make a return visit and would recommend the shop to members. It is located just near the station at Mortdale. Alan F.

Wanted : Interested people to serve on OFF Committee in 2004. Please think of nominating at the AGM.