



O.F.F. NEWS



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QUEENSLAND WILD RIVERS

Late last year, in a momentous win for Australian conservation, the mighty rivers of western Queensland's Lake Eyre Basin - Cooper Creek, Georgina River and Diamantina river - were protected under Queensland Wild Rivers Act. The rivers are great Australian icons, immortalised by bush poet Banjo Patterson. Explorers Burke and Wills died on Cooper Creek. They are among the last, near-natural desert river systems left in the world. When it rains, the desert transforms from an arid environment to one bursting with fish, birds, wildflowers, and lush grasses, as water travels hundreds of kilometres from the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range in North Queensland to South Australia's Lake Eyre. A massive 4.5 million hectares now fall within special buffer zones around major watercourses, lakes, wetlands and floodplains. Strip mining, irrigated agriculture and other destructive industrial activities are banned from these areas; coal seam gas and other petroleum activities have been prohibited. The area of these high protection buffer zones is more than three times the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and 27 times larger than Fraser Island. The Wilderness Society has worked closely with other environmental protection groups, graziers, traditional owners and local governments to secure the future of this special river system.

Three years of extensive negotiations did appear to have paid off, with the mining industry losing the battle. However, the new Queensland Premier, Campbell Newman, has stated that he may overturn Wild Rivers protection to allow mining in sensitive river areas across Queensland. The Lake Eyre Basin has now become a major target for the mining industry, with 80% of this special country now covered in exploration or mining permits. The Wilderness Society continues working to ensure that the hard-won protection of this sensitive area stays in place, and is seeking wider support. [From Wilderness News Autumn 2012]

SUSTAINABLE LAND

In March 1995 Dr Mary White spoke at an OFF meeting on *Browning Australia*. Her theme was that Australia's poor soils and aridity can sustain only a limited population, and continuing soil degradation is a serious problem. A well-qualified palaeobotanist, and author of *After the Greening: the Browning of Australia*, a geological history of Australia over 200 million years, Mary was optimistic about viable soil rehabilitation, but by communities, not by governments. 17 years on the NSW Dept of Environment and Heritage has noted that soil degradation is a serious global environmental problem, involving loss of organic matter; and decline in soil fertility. Soils host the majority of the world's biodiversity, and healthy soils are essential to securing food and fibre production and providing an adequate water supply. They are one of our fundamental natural resources, and maintaining and improving the condition of the land and soil resources is crucial to our well-being. NSW now has a State Plan to improve soil

condition and to increase the area of land managed within its capability. To measure progress in achieving the targets, there is now a MER program "monitoring, evaluating and reporting" on land condition.

www.environment.nsw.gov.au/soildegradation/

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

World environment day was established in 1972 by the general assembly of the UN. Each year the emphasis is placed on a certain earth topic of crisis. It is hosted by a different city and commemorated with an international exposition through the week of June 5. The UN uses world environment day to stimulate awareness of the environment and enhance political attention and public action. The topic this year is Melting Ice, climate changes and the effects on ice and snow-covered areas of the world. Hosted by Norway, the main celebrations will be held in Tromsø, a city north of the Polar Circle, gateway to the Arctic. http://www.planetpals.com/world_environment_day.html



THE GARDENS OF STONE

The Gardens of Stone skirt the western edge of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. The Coalpac Consolidation Project threatens to rip up a part of this pristine area for an open cut coal mine. The area is dotted with internationally significant, 'platy' pagodas and an abundance of native birds, plants and animals. Both the Colong Foundation and BMCS are seeking support to protect this iconic natural area from destruction. www.bluemountains.org.au/ www.colongwilderness.org.au/



WHAT IS CONSERVATION?

"Conservation is humility. It is realising that life is not a pyramid with the human on top and everything else below. Conservation is love - for other people. Everyone relies on the earth for life. It is the total acceptance of others and oneself that must lead to ecological harmony and peace. Conservation is being in the bush and feeling that it is a part of us, and we part of it. We want to preserve it and nurture it because the trees, plants, rocks, animals, and we are interdependent." (Paddy Pallin)

MYLES DUNPHY STREAMWATCH

This is a regular testing program by volunteers of the creek lines flowing through to the Georges River. The cumulative impact of small tributaries is often overlooked as threat to downstream water quality and aquatic ecosystems. The Group gathers on the Tuesday after each OFF meeting, and that makes the next at 9am Tuesday 29th May. For more detail ring Sharyn (9579 1262) or Heather (0425 291 879).

Meetings of the Society are held at the Uniting Church Hall Fredrick St [corner Letitia St] Oatley starting at 7.45pm, usually on the fourth Monday of the month.

Visitors and accompanied children are welcome at meetings and excursions.

COMING EVENTS

May 28th (Mon) 7.45pm Regular monthly meeting with **Michael Mobbs** speaking on **Pioneer architect in sustainable urban home design**. Michael was an environmental lawyer who spent 19 years working on aluminium smelters, coal mines, water and infrastructure programs. During this time his interest in sustainability grew. He renovated his inner Sydney terrace home to create an off-the-grid sustainable home and then wrote his book "Sustainable House" outlining the pitfalls and choices of the best systems to implement for home builders to architects.

June 2nd (Sat), Field day: 7 hour walk from **Cowan station to Hawkesbury station**, 12km one-way. The walk is difficult with steep descents and uphill rock climbs. Beautiful scenery includes views of Jerusalem Bay and Hawkesbury River. Catch the 8am train from Mortdale station and 8:45am Wyong train from Central, platform 12, arriving at Cowan station at 9:36am. We aim to return on the 4:37pm train from Hawkesbury station to Central. Wear sturdy footwear, hat & sunscreen. Bring morning tea, lunch, snacks and lots of water for a full day of adventure. **Leader: Lesley Wylie**

June 5th World Environment Day [see note page 1]

June 8th World Oceans Day [see note below]

June 25th (Mon) 7.45pm Regular monthly meeting with **John Davoren** speaking on the **Climate Change Debate** and its complicated social impact.

June 30th (Sat), Field day: Wattamolla - Marley (whale watching) - **Leader: Alan Fairley**

July 23rd (Mon) 7.45pm Regular monthly meeting with **Julian Sheen** speaking on **Travels through Syria, Conflict and History in Syria and Jordan**.

MONITORING FAUNA TALK 23rd APRIL

Chris Rehberg spoke on *Camera Traps to Monitor Fauna*. His detailed Powerpoint presentation demonstrated the diversity of cameras they have installed, where and how they locate them and the kind of pictures they take. He displayed a great range of photos of fauna at leisure, with their not knowing they were being studied.

Chris gave a brief history of the camera traps from his launching Wildlife Monitoring in March 2009. The idea rose from his background in retail management, IT and environmental biology. Robert Nelson joined the team in 2010 as the business manager. Their client numbers have grown rapidly coming from government, business and private agencies. Wildlife Monitoring is committed to environmental best practice, supporting tree planting programs, a paperless office, use of recycled paper when required, and utilising green web hosting.

GECKO WALK FRIDAY 27th APRIL

Nineteen people met at 7 pm, at Mortdale Heights, on the edge of Lime Kiln Bay wetlands. It was a beautifully clear autumn night and we were all equipped with torches and headlights.

The leader, Matt Mo, who has researched the life and habitat of the geckos, guided us to the areas where we were likely to see these fairly common geckos. We explored the sandstone rocks and ledges along the edge of the bush-land area. All up, 19 geckos were seen, some out on the rock-face, some in crevices, and one attaching to the underside of an overhang. We all had the opportunity to see them up close, and to inspect their natural habitat. About half the group left after about an hour, when 10 geckos had been seen, and the remainder continued with their nighttime explorations and observations for another hour.

All were back at the cars by 9pm. Generally it was agreed that it was a most enjoyable event. Many thanks to Matt Mo for a most interesting and informative outing. [Report by Alison Gilroy]

KIAMA COAST WALK 6th MAY

Eight walkers set out from Loves Bay Kiama in perfect weather. The seaside track is a mown path over undulating hills. Originally covered by thick forests, the hills were cleared for dairy farms. There are some forest remnants on farms and tiny fragments close to cliff edges. Frequent rain has left some low lying areas very wet and muddy, but we made good progress to Werri Lagoon. We saw many sea birds, including gannets and one sea eagle. Two emus near the Lagoon created plenty of interest. It is also interesting to see many small native plants regrowing now that cattle have been removed from the headlands.

The track has many stopping points, all with signage, pointing out interesting geological features or providing information about the history of the area since European settlement. The lunch spot on the headland overlooking Werri Beach had magical views, and with the delightful

weather it was hard to leave for the return walk. A good day was had by all. [Report by Leaders, Peter and Lesley Cox]

MORE BIRD SIGHTINGS FOR OATLEY

March was a productive month for unusual bird sightings in Oatley Park. OFF member and keen birdwatcher, David Koffel has reported seeing a number of visiting species including Scarlet Honeyeater, Rose Robin, Mistletoebird and Musk Lorikeet. He notes that within a month six raptors were observed over Oatley Park and Lime Kiln Bay. They were Pacific Baza, Square-tailed Kite, Eastern Osprey, Brown Goshawk, Australian Hobby and Peregrine Falcon. The total number of bird species recorded for the Oatley Park area is now 105. This is a remarkable number and proof that the Park is a vital conservation area for the region.

Meanwhile, David Waterhouse reports the sighting of a Top-knot Pigeon feeding in a large fig behind the Oatley Fitness Centre and a flock of 200 Little Corellas feeding on playing fields at Carrs Park.

PROTECTING TREES!

A man has been found guilty of destroying a tree in Kiama without the consent of Council and contrary to Council's tree preservation order. The Land and Environment Court imposed a penalty of \$12,000 plus costs of \$15,000.

BRIEFLY

World Ocean Day 8th June. UN's designation of World Oceans Day is important boost to ocean conservation and health. For years, the sheer vastness of the oceans made us think that they could swallow up everything, but this is not so. www.squidoo.com/world-oceans-day

Australian Plant Society provides great information about our native flora. Details about our neighbours, the East Hills Group of the Society are at <http://easthills.austplants.com.au/>

Landcare The National Landcare Conference is in Sydney this year, 3rd to 5th September, Convention and Exhibition Centre; theme *Landcare- The Future in Our Hands*.

Oatley Park blooms in May. <http://off.oatleypark.com/>

