



**HAZARD REDUCTION AND BACKBURNING**

Following the recent dramatic bushfires, heated debate continues on what are the most appropriate and effective ways of fighting bushfires.

Hazard reduction is any activity that reduces or removes fuel before the onset of a bushfire. Back burning, on the other hand, occurs during a bushfire, burning back towards the oncoming fire to reduce fuel in its path.

The debate is about whether hazard burning is effective enough to justify its potential damage to the environment.

It is generally agreed that there is no way of stopping bushfires altogether at this stage, but there is considerable evidence that a) dry forests and bushland, and even some areas of farmland, need fire regimes to preserve biodiversity, and b) that reducing fuel loads by prescribed burning reduces the rate of bushfire spread. Fire in an area with prescribed burning every three years will spread more slowly, and much less intensely, and thus be more likely to enhance biodiversity. In an area with no hazard reduction fires are more likely to devastate the bush.



There is a need to develop a regime of cautious burning with due allowance for different types of landscape, preferably in winter, with lower temperatures, and winds, and with some humidity, helping limit the intensity of the burning.

More at <http://bushfirefront.com.au/issues-on-public-and-private-land/examples-of-the-value-of-burning> & *Fires, facts and friction* in the December Colong Bulletin & [www.nationalparksandwildlife](http://www.nationalparksandwildlife)

**BIRD WATCHING IN RNP - Dec 1<sup>st</sup>**

A keen group of birders assembled at Fig Tree Flat at the northern end of Lady Carrington Drive at 7:00 am. The sun had emerged and the Hacking River was still and glassy, creating beautiful reflections of the reeds and cliffs. We all admired a stunning Azure Kingfisher as it perched low in a eucalypt and watched the antics of the Australasian Grebe and Dusky Moorhen and Coot chasing each other about the reeds. At 8:00 am, with the addition of a couple more birders, we set off on a leisurely walk along Lady Carrington Drive. The calls of the Rufous Whistler were strong and clear, a species present in Royal only in the summer. The Golden Whistler is present all year round and has a beautiful call. In the treetops were Leaden Flycatchers, with their silvery grey plumage, and the Black-faced Monarch. The very unusual call of the Cicadabird was heard, sounding something like cicadas. Its close relation the Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike was seen by many. We also saw a few of the smaller LBB's or "Little Brown Birds" such as the Brown Gerygone, White-browed Scrubwren and Brown Thornbill, which are often a challenge to new birders. We reached Jersey Springs (1.5 kms) where a pair of Black Ducks were hoping for a few nibbles, and we admired a Coachwood in full bloom on the river. After a snack we ambled back to Fig Tree Flat, spying a bird of prey, identified as a Collared Sparrowhawk, departing from a nest. A Catbird made an appearance on our return route, and a Superb Lyrebird was heard mimicking the call of the night bird, a White-throated Nightjar. During a lovely morning tea at Fig Tree Flat we heard the soft whoooing call of the Wonga Pigeon. 50 bird species were observed and an enjoyable walk had by all.

Leader: Debbie Andrew with expert assistance from Liz Cameron and Graham Fry.

**PUBLIC OFFICER - JOHN WATTERS**

John has resigned as OFF's Public Officer, a position he has held since 2003. This is an appointed position, essential in the governance of the Society. Before taking on the role, John served as Treasurer from 1993 to 2002 and handled difficult financial matters with care and professionalism. We thank John for his extensive service in these and other capacities, including as leader of five OFF trips to Lithgow, and representing us at a number of conservation conferences. He received the Georges River Community Award in 2002. The committee has appointed Julian Sheen to replace John.

**UPLAND SWAMPS - WORONORA PLATEAU**

Dr. Ann Young, our speaker at the 25<sup>th</sup> November meeting, addressed one of her areas of expertise, *Upland Swamps, and Ecology & Mining Threats*.

Upland swamps are treeless areas found on the sandstone plateaus around Sydney. Banksia thickets, restioid heaths, cyperoid heaths and sedgelands are located across the swamps, a range of valuable ecological niches that:

- ✚ provide green feed and water to many animals (e.g. wallabies, birds, snakes, frogs, crayfish)
- ✚ support stygofauna (groundwater-dependent fauna) such as crayfish, skinks
- ✚ are breeding sites for endangered fauna (giant burrowing frog, giant dragonfly)
- ✚ release clean water to streams especially during dry spells
- ✚ store carbon, probably at similar rates to temperate forests

Upland swamps are resilient to fires, their dense root mats are not easily eroded, and the vegetation recovers quickly.



However, they are suffering serious impacts due to the surface subsidence of some 2m above longwall coalmines. The water table in the swamps drops when the bedrock surface under the swamp sediments is cracked. This means that the sediments dry out, and become more susceptible to

damage from fires and to rapid erosion. Coal leases underlie 90% of the water catchment areas south of Sydney, and several large swamps have already been damaged by the subsidence impacts, losing water, being invaded by shrub species and having significant erosion channels cut into them. These are permanent impacts with no available practical means of rehabilitation. We cannot quantify how much catchment yield is lost by this damage, but visible loss of water and sediment dehydration, cracking of streambeds, iron staining of water, and drying of once-permanent pools strongly suggest significant impacts on water quantity and quality.

These swamps need to be protected, both for their recognised ecological value and for their role in Sydney's water supply. [www.planning.nsw.gov.au/planningsystem/southerncoalfieldinquiry](http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/planningsystem/southerncoalfieldinquiry)

**SNOWY MOUNTAINS 2014**

Our annual trip to Smiggin Holes Chalet is from Sat 8<sup>th</sup> to Sat 15<sup>th</sup> February. [Costs per night are \$113 double, or twin share, \$93 single, and \$43 per child 6-18]. For information and booking, phone Robin Dickson ☎ 9580 5663.

**Please confirm your booking by 20<sup>th</sup> January.**

Meetings of the Society are held at the Uniting Church Hall, Fredrick St Oatley [near Letitia St] starting at 7.45pm, usually on the fourth Monday of the month. Visitors and accompanied children are welcome at meetings and excursions.

## COMING EVENTS

**Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> (Mon) 7.45pm Annual General Meeting** with election of officers bearers and committee, followed by a slideshow of interesting photos and a social supper.

**Feb 8<sup>th</sup> (Sat) the Smiggin Holes Chalet week.** [See the note on page 1]

**Feb 24<sup>th</sup> (Mon) 7.45pm regular monthly meeting and Social Supper** with **Matt Mo** speaking on "Frogs, Reptiles and Timber Harvesting: the balance and the bright side". The practices for timber harvesting in Australia are changing - and so too should our view of this industry. Public perceptions of native forestry are plagued with generalisations and the outdated legacy of a former era. Forest and wood products are used by all, and the ecological sustainability of forestry is being realised through scientific research. Come with an open mind for an exploration into the balance between herpetofauna and timber harvesting.

**Mar 1<sup>st</sup> (Sat) Field trip to the Sydney Observatory** on the night of a new moon when there is a maximum of stars to be seen. Anyone interested in coming must pay beforehand, as it is prepaid to secure the booking. Fee is \$16 per person, with a limit of 20 people. Travel by train, leaving Oatley 19.13 or Mortdale 19.15, to arrive at the Observatory for the 20.15 start. The viewing will take about 1½ hours, and there will be viewing in the 3D planetarium, even if it is cloudy

**Mar 2<sup>nd</sup> (Sun) Clean Up Australia Day 2014.** The Day inspires and empowers communities to clean up, fix up and conserve our environment. A simple concept became an international success story thanks to the foresight of its founders.

### INCOME AND EXPENDITURE STATEMENT - 3/01/2014

Rodger Robertson - Treasurer

Income	2013	2012
Subscriptions	\$3,691.00	\$3,550.00
Donations received	\$2,011.00	\$1,299.00
Sales Stalls etc.	\$259.85	\$153.00
Oatley RSL donation	\$500.00	\$0.00
Hurstville Council Grant	\$2,000.00	\$678.00
NSW Government Grant	\$1,500.00	\$0.00
Misc. Income	\$19.00	\$0.00
Interest (cheque acct)	\$1.56	\$1.37
Annual dinner	\$0.00	\$1,919.00
Total income	\$9,982.41	\$7,600.37
<b>Expenses</b>		
OFF Newsletter printing postage	-\$831.49	-\$765.61
Insurance	-\$290.00	-\$749.52
Mail box rental	-\$99.00	-\$93.00
Church Hall hire	-\$408.60	-\$399.60
Dept Fair Trading	-\$51.00	-\$49.00
Oatley Lions stall	-\$120.00	-\$120.00
Brochures Printing	-\$5,275.75	-\$600.00
Print programs	-\$266.20	-\$266.20
Other expenditure	-\$552.30	-\$695.70
Donations out*	-\$3,230.00	-\$2,100.00
Annual dinner	\$0.00	-\$1,724.00
Total expenses	-\$11,124.34	-\$7,562.63
Net Profit/Loss	-\$1,141.93	\$37.74
<b>BANK RECONCILIATION</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2012</b>
Balance as at 1 January 2013	\$6,989.46	
Outstanding cheques	\$1,607.65	
Loss on year -	-\$1,141.93	
Cheque account balance 31 Dec	\$7,455.18	\$6,970.46
12 month term deposit (net)	\$10,392.30	\$9,907.56
Total balance at bank	\$17,847.48	\$16,878.02

Notes:

- The loss for the year was a deliberate strategy in view of the \$17000 in the coffers.
- Donations to allied conservation bodies [noted below] increased in 2013 by \$1130.
- Accounts include advance subscriptions for 2014; the Term Deposit interest of \$484.74 not included as income, but as asset.
- The accounts are with the auditor.

\*Donations to the following totalled \$3230 for 2013 and \$2100 for 2012.

NCC Membership including fees	\$300.00	\$200
Environmental Defenders Office	\$600.00	\$500
Colong Foundation	\$400.00	\$300
Wilderness Soc	\$300.00	\$200
WIRES	\$300.00	\$200
Kuringai Bats	\$300.00	\$200
Total Environment Centre	\$300.00	\$200
Blue Mountains Conservation Soc	\$300.00	\$200
Sydney Wildlife	\$200.00	\$100
Friends of Royal	\$30.00	\$00
Lithgow District Community Nursery	\$200.00	\$00

### AGM FIRST MEETING OF 2014

Best wishes for 2014 to all our members and friends. The first meeting of the year will be the Annual General Meeting on Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb when the 2014 office bearers and Committee will be elected. We would like to hear from anyone interested in joining the committee. The AGM will be followed by a slide show and supper. Members are encouraged to bring and display interesting photos, [Ø>15!] and some finger food for supper.



### FOR NOTING

**C**lean Up Australia Day 02/03/2014. The Day inspires and empowers communities to clean up, fix up and conserve our environment. Details of OFF participation will be in next News and at the February meeting. [www.cleanupaustraliaday.org.au/](http://www.cleanupaustraliaday.org.au/)

**C**olong Foundation, the successor to Myles Dunphy's National Parks and Primitive Areas Council, continues the battle for the wilderness. <http://www.colongwilderness.org.au/>

**E**arth Hour 29/03/2014 between 8.30 and 9.30 pm local time. [www.timeanddate.com/earth-hour](http://www.timeanddate.com/earth-hour)

**E**nvironmental Defenders Office facing renewed attacks [us5.campaign-archive2.com/](http://us5.campaign-archive2.com/) & [www.edonsw.org.au/have\\_your\\_say](http://www.edonsw.org.au/have_your_say)

**L**inked organisations. OFF has affiliation through membership, donations or common purpose with a significant number. They are listed on our website at <http://off.oatleypark.com/>

**M**yles Dunphy Streamwatch, next meets at 9am on Tues Feb 25<sup>th</sup>. Details: Sharyn (☎9579 1262), Heather (☎0425 291 879).

**N**ature Conservation Council in these challenging times for our fragile environment is involved in so many important conservation issues. <http://nccnsw.org.au/content/take-action-1>

**O**atley Heritage & Historical Society: The next meeting and AGM is on 28<sup>th</sup> February at 10.30 am in the Oatley RSL, Alan Fairley speaking about OFF. [www.oatleyheritagegroup.com/](http://www.oatleyheritagegroup.com/)

**O**atley Park Walking Tracks: OFF has recently published a walking guide to 7 walking tracks in the bushpark. [off.oatleypark.com/](http://off.oatleypark.com/)

**R**enew membership - Welcome New Members Details of OFF Membership are on our website at <http://off.oatleypark.com/>

**S**nowy Mountains Trip Note that Jan 20<sup>th</sup> is the deadline for booking in.