



2014 MAY BE THE WARMEST YEAR EVER

Our exceptionally warm weather was egged on by an emerging El Nino in the tropical Pacific. Europe, Central Asia, Russia, Japan, Australia, Southern Africa, Brazil, Eastern Canada, and Western North America were warmer than normal last month. Besides shifting weather patterns worldwide, the extra El Nino-fuelled ocean warmth is supercharging the Earth's temperature. This could help make 2014 the warmest year ever recorded. El Nino's effects should peak by December and could continue into early 2015. [giz.com/147455/el-nino-may-make-2014-the-worlds-hottest-year-yet/](http://gizmodo.com/147455/el-nino-may-make-2014-the-worlds-hottest-year-yet/)

KOALAS DISCUSSED IN CANBERRA

Friends of the Koala note that the state government has approved the proposed western route of the Pacific Highway's Ballina to Woolgoolga duplication to pass through the middle of the region's koala colony in the Blackwall Ranges. The Koala Carers thought they had the support of Ballina Council in asking the government to reroute the road to the east of the town; but Council decided against the alternative proposal. Now, because of the potential impact on koalas, the federal environment minister Greg Hunt must decide. www.echo.net.au/2014/07/koala-carers



PEAK HOUR TRAFFIC

At least one in three drivers who commute to work during peak periods could significantly reduce traffic congestion by choosing a different time to travel, according to a University of Sydney [Business School survey](#). In Sydney, the number of peak hour drivers who said they could leave home at a different time to avoid traffic congestion was one in four.



The study concluded that a peak period charge of around five cents p/km on major roads could encourage up to 35% of drivers to travel at a different time, or shift to public transport. "A fall of about 6% of peak hour trips would make a significant difference to levels of congestion."

<http://sydney.edu.au/business/>

CONSERVATION DINGO

Australia's very first conservation dingo is training for action at [Lithgow's Secret Creek Sanctuary](#). Fred, a one-year-old purebred dingo, is to become a pest control dog, and is showing a lot of promise in his initial training.

"The dingo is a natural enemy of foxes and cats," Secret Creek owner Trevor Evans said. "This gives the dingo an edge over more domesticated dogs in trying to detect feral pest animals." Fred is set to be the first of many conservation canines, with Secret Creek working to help create one of Australia's first conservation dog foundations. The new Australian Conservation K-9's Society, founded by Australian Ecosystems Foundation Inc. (AEFI), is designed to promote and facilitate the use of dogs in the conservation field to help in locating endangered species, finding pest animals and preserving the natural environment. <http://www.lithgowmercury.com.au/>

SYLVAN GROVE NATIVE GARDEN VISIT

The East Hills Group of the Australian Plants Society has invited Oatley Flora and Fauna members to join them on a spring visit to [Sylvan Grove Native Garden](#), Picnic Point, on Wednesday 10th September.

Sylvan Grove Native Garden was established in 1964 and is now under the authority of the Bankstown City Council and the Georges River Parkland Trust. This 1.5ha bushland area features the richly diverse flora of a typical Hawkesbury Sandstone outcrop while the Dry Rainforest forms a canopy over the fern understorey. There are over 1500 native plants there, including many orchids that bloom spectacularly in spring. easthills.austplants.com.au/. More details in next issue of OFF News

OUR PARKS UNDER SERIOUS THREAT

The Colong Foundation notes that the Coalition parties are attempting to wreck our national parks. The Federal Government apparently considers that Australia has too many parks, and the NSW Government has put national parks on trial. The Game Council has been abolished, hunting of feral animals occurs in 12 national parks, and in 358 state forests, including Newnes and [Ben Bullen State Forest](#). Shooting in parks is subject to a three-year trial. In July 2016, the Natural Resources Commission will report on this trial, and it is likely to find in favour of hunting in parks. Depending on which party wins the NSW election in March 2015, hunting could then be allowed in up to 75 parks as previously announced under the Government's deal with the Shooters and Fishers Party. See more at www.colongwilderness.org.au/news/2014/national-parks-trial

NATIONAL TREE DAY: SUN 27TH JULY

This is Australia's biggest community nature-care event that aims to inspire, educate, and recruit carers for our land and to encourage committed environmental custodians. OFF members are encouraged to participate in these events, and to promote OFF activities in their area.

Hurstville [HCC] and Kogarah [KCC] Councils have events. HCC is hosting a native plant giveaway at Olds Park, next to Penshurst Branch Library in Forest Rd, from 8am to 2pm. To receive two free native plants, local residents just need to present their rates notice, and a small carry bag for the plants. In addition, there will be tree-planting activity at Riverwood Park (Coleridge and Mary St entrance) 9am to 1pm. Tools will be supplied. For information, contact HCC ☎ 9330 6222. KCC is hosting an event next to the playground in Poulton Park (corner of Morshead Dr and Rickard Rd, Connells Point). Come along from 9 - 11am to do something positive for the environment and reconnect with nature! Gloves and drinks will be provided. There will also be a Plant Giveaway on Sat 26th and Sun 27th July from 8am to 3pm at KCC Works Depot, 78 Planthurst Rd, Carlton. Residents who bring their Kogarah rates notices can collect two trees, shrubs, or perennials; stock is limited. For more information, contact KCC's Coordinator Parks and Recreation ☎ 9330 9476.

DONATION TO LOCK GATE ALLIANCE

Following the audience's enthusiastic response to Nell Schofield's presentation on the problems relating to the dramatic expansion of coal mining and coal seam gas extraction, the OFF committee has donated \$250 to the Lock the Gate Alliance.

UPCOMING EVENTS

July 28th (Mon) 7.45pm monthly meeting with Rodger Robertson speaking on Travelling the Silk Road
Aug 2nd (Sat) Field day to Blue track. The Blue walk will commence across the road from the ANSTO car park (Rutherford Ave) off New Illawarra Rd. We will gather there and cross the road together as a group. It is approximately 2.6 kms long with reasonable gradients, although there is a long decent and ascent to the creek. Bring sturdy shoes for walking, morning tea, and lunch. **Leader J Cockayne** ☎9570 8559
Aug 25th (Mon) 7.45pm monthly meeting - with the speaker to be announced. Unfortunately, **Leroy Gonsalves**, the scheduled speaker will not be able to speak on Microbats on this occasion.
Aug 30th (Sat) Field day to Sphinx & Bobbin Head wildflower stroll, Leader: **Alan Fairley** ☎9570 8332
Sept 10th (Wed) Spring visit to Sylvan Grove Native Garden [See note above.]
Sept 22nd (Mon) 7.45pm monthly meeting with Chris Lloyd speaking on The Changing Ecology of the Georges River & Powerful Owls
Oct 10 -12th Weekend at Capertee National Park: Numbers have already booked for the homestead and cottage. If you want to book, please do so quickly, and indicate if you wish to stay over Sun night 12th Oct. Contact **Liz Cameron** ☎9580 6621 or **Leader: Debbie Andrew** ☎9570 2695 [see more below*]

COAL AND GAS PROBLEMS

Our June 23rd meeting was attended by more than 80 members and guests and featured film star, now environmental campaigner, Nell Schofield. Nell may be best known for her lead role in the Aussie cult classic *Puberty Blues* and later as a TV presenter with CNN, Channel 9, ABC, and Showtime.

Sydney Campaign Coordinator with [Lock the Gate Alliance](#), Nell spoke about problems communities are facing under siege from coal and gas companies, and about the coalition of community groups uniting to protect land, water, and future from reckless mining expansions. The coalition's primary goal is to ensure policy reform to protect land and water resources before the next elections.

Nell works with other the environmental groups, including the [Nature Conservation Council](#) and [Our Land Our Water Our Future](#), and speaks at a number of group meetings.

[Two documentaries](#) from Lock the Gate Alliance were shown. They were a) *Undermining Australia: Coal Versus Community*, & b) *Fractured Country: An Unconventional Invasion* [on CSG]. [Report from Matt Allison - OFF Program Officer]

HODDLES TRACK FIELD DAY 28th June

In the 1830s Robert Hoddle, assistant surveyor under Surveyor General John Oxley, was charged with finding a route from the Southern Highlands to Kiama so that agricultural produce could be shipped to Sydney. The walking track from Saddleback Mountain Lookout to the lower edge of Barren Grounds Nature Reserve is a remnant of that route, now derelict after a better way over the escarpment was found.

On Sat 28th June, under clear sunny skies 14 walkers assembled at 10am at the lookout at the end of Hoddles Road to tackle this steep, sometimes slippery track. We were rewarded with magnificent views up and down the coast along the track and at its end. The first and steepest portion was on fire trails, while the second portion flattened somewhat as the track wound along the perimeter of Noorinan Mountain in Barren Grounds. On looking closely, we could see the over-grown formation that had been formed to allow access, probably for pack animals. Nature has reclaimed much of it now, with the rocks covered in moss and lichen and re-growth popping up on the unused parts. This section was also over-looked by impressive cliffs and interesting rock formations, and we marvelled at the effort that must have gone into making the track.

The early portion of the track led through patches of sub-tropical rainforest containing Sassafrass and Lillypilly trees, while the later sections in Barren Grounds Nature Reserve passed through beautiful rainforest with Coachwoods and lianas. At the very last section, we climbed up into quite different vegetation with Grass Trees, Banksias and other heath species. These forests also contain many birds most of which we could only hear, not see. Lyrebirds, which are now in their breeding season, were very vocal, and Lesley alone was privileged to see one. Other birds seen were



Brown Gerygones, Topknot Pigeons, and Red-browed finches. Finally, near the end of the walk we saw a Wedge-tailed Eagle harassed by a suicidal Grey Goshawk.

At the very end, we lunched on a large rock overlooking Foxground, with brilliant views and the ocean in the background. We could also see the lookout where we started. We then returned the way we came, again enjoying the landscape and panoramas, so different in the afternoon light. As we arrived back at the lookout, the wind sprang up, clouds arrived, and we appreciated the timing of our splendid walk. [Report by Graham Lalchere, walk leader.]

*O.F.F. CAPERTEE WEEKEND, 10- 12TH OCTOBER

The [Capertee National Park](#) is situated in the picturesque Capertee Valley north-west of Lithgow. It protects poorly reserved temperate eucalypt woodlands, and is renowned for its woodland birds, including the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater, and unique and interesting flora.

The Capertee River flows through the national park immediately adjacent to the Port Macquarie homestead and cottage. Activities undertaken over the OFF weekend are likely to include some easy graded walking along the Capertee River and Ulumbra Creek, bird watching, plant spotting, spotlighting for nocturnal mammals and birds, micro-bat trapping, possibly some frog searching, and perhaps swimming.

FOR NOTING

Australian Plant Society [APS] invitation to OFF members to a Sylvan Grove Garden visit on 10th Sept.

Myles Dunphy Streamwatch, next meets 9am on Tues 29th July. [Info: Sharyn ☎9579 1262, Heather ☎0425 291 879]

National Tree Day Sun 27th July & **Schools Tree Day** Friday 25th [see note page 1]. <http://treeday.planetark.org>

Native Plants Hassans Walls Reserve This 160 page book, on sale for \$20, has 870 colour photos, 390 featured Wildflowers, Orchids, Grasses, Rushes, Sedges, Eucalypts, Ferns, Liverworts and Mosses, and a sample of 40 Fungi and Lichens. Details on the launch in Lithgow on 24th July from suzalol2@bigpond.com or ☎0417899796.

