

Wolli Creek Update

PO Box 270, Earlwood NSW 2206

FEBRUARY 2003



Restoring Wolli Bush restoration project starts

In this SPECIAL EDITION of Wolli Creek Update

- Who's undertaking the project
- Why the valley is important and how it survived
- Some principles and practices of bush restoration
- How you can get involved

WITH the support of Canterbury and Rockdale Councils and local organisations, the Wolli Creek Preservation Society is organising volunteers from the local community to undertake bush restoration work near the creek at Bardwell Park. This partnership project is only a beginning, but an exciting step on the haul to restore long-neglected areas of the creek and bushland. It will complement the work being undertaken elsewhere in the Valley by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

How the Wolli bush survived

Those of us who know Wolli Valley know how special it is. Satellite photos of Sydney are very revealing. From the coast to Prospect, from the Harbour to the Georges River, almost all is the pinky-grey of developed land. Only one sizeable island of the dark green of dense tree cover stands out – this small ribbon visible from space is the Wolli Valley, the largest remnant of bushland in this entire region.

Within this small span there are rugged sandstone cliffs, woodlands, heathlands, mangroves, a wetland or two, and even a few rainforest coachwoods. It supports an astonishing variety of birdlife, a wide range of reptiles and frogs, possums, bats, and, of course, a huge mass of insects, spiders and other invertebrates. It is a vital corridor for many birds and animals and a seed stock for many native species. Its overall regional significance has recently been recognised in the State Government's commitment to consolidate the various land holdings into a Regional Park under the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

That there is still something worth consolidating is a small miracle. Clearings made for farmlets and floodplain areas once used for market gardens remain in parts, but the rugged nature of the valley deterred the most intense forms of development for a very long time. The railway, opened as late as 1931, is a major exception. In a fine irony, the M5 road reservation dating from 1948, precluded other develop-



Topknot pigeon. This rainforest species uses the Wolli bush as a migration route through hostile Sydney suburbs.

ments for a long period. Meanwhile, awareness of the natural value and importance of the valley grew in the community from the 1960s, to the point where the M5 was forced underground at the end of the century, leaving a relieved but somewhat neglected valley in its wake. Fortunately, in recent times, management for bush values has become more of a priority.

Getting the road out of the valley and gaining commitment to Wolli Regional Park have been the prime focus of Wolli lovers for many years. The struggles are not over and threats remain: the stack, the proposed creekside route for the cycleway, and unsympathetic development

prominent among them. But there is now enough security to encourage real investment in restoring some of the good but neglected bushland that we have been so lucky to retain here. Here, we can build on some earlier work by the National Trust and others. We can't return Wolli Valley to its pre-European state – we don't even know in detail what was where! But we have enough knowledge and enough bush remnants to aim for something that approximates that state. We can provide significant corridors and areas for local native wildlife and still leave open areas and paths suited to human recreation.


Two hundred years of disruption and neglect have to be overcome and new attitudes and practices need to be taken up by local residents to achieve and sustain that vision. It will not be a short process!

What is bush restoration?

The work of restoring bushland has two broad elements:

Bush regeneration aims to tip the balance against weeds and in favour of natives by removing and reducing threats and competition and supporting the regrowth of native species from the resilient stock of seeds and roots still in the soil. In the less damaged areas, it's best to leave several years after such work to allow a satisfactory diversity of native plants. Only where this fails is consideration is given to:

Revegetation (planting) This is a temptingly fast way of creating cover. But it is very difficult to recreate the range, diversity and intermingling of species characteristic of natural areas, particularly among the smaller plants. (Needless to say, blitz-type approaches are not appropriate – in fact they are not sustainable even in back gardens!) Where areas are severely degraded or where regeneration is unsuccessful, planting may be the best we can do but it's always important to use plants grown from seeds of local native plant because they're the best adapted to local conditions! We're lucky to still have so many of these left.

Protecting young plants is important in both regeneration and revegetation. 

More about bush regeneration

Tipping the balance involves dealing with a number of threats to native species. Key among these are:

Stormwater Both the volume and quality of stormwater are important to the bush. The hard surfaces of roofs, pavements and roads create faster run-off, causing erosion of the creek's banks, and siltation and clouding of the stream. It also carries street rubbish (plastics, paints, cigarette butts, car oil, even deliberately dumped pollutants) and high levels of nutrients, from detergents, garden fertilisers and pet droppings. Excess pesticides and herbicides also go with the flow. This all makes life tough for native water dwellers and for native plants which are adapted to low nutrient levels. Drainage lines and the creekside itself are where the greatest densities of weeds (and rubbish!) are found in Wollie.

Weed spread Many, though by no means all, of the exotic plants common in our gardens actively spread out into the bush through creeping and climbing, or by wind, water or bird carriage of seeds. Any privets, ochnas or asparagus ferns removed from the valley can be immediately resupplied from gardens as can a number of other major weeds, even some Australian native plants can become weeds in Wollie!

Dumping Rubbish dumped in bush areas smothers young and small natives, and if it is garden rubbish it also directly introduces weeds as competition.

All of these are areas where everyone can contribute to tipping the balance - by minimising hard surfaces, reducing pesticide and fertiliser use, making sure that "only rain goes down the drain", reassessing the plants in the garden, disposing of wastes responsibly and so on (see our leaflet: *Be Bush Friendly*).

Weed reduction Reducing competition by removing weeds is a critical part of bush regen-

eration. It is intensive work. Removal with hand tools where possible and poisoning individual larger plants are important. But weeds also provide habitat for wildlife so instant wholesale removal isn't a good idea.

Protection of natives Avoidance of dumping, changing mowing practices, fencing off areas for a period, marking the limits of play areas, and other supportive changes are needed to assist in giving native plants a good start.

How you can contribute

(there are so many ways, with something to suit everyone!)

■ Learn more about bush restoration and help to educate others - community support over the long term is important to the success of bush restoration. In addition to the information here and in the *Be Bush Friendly* leaflet, there will be an **orientation session** to explain things further.

■ If you're active, have some time and are willing to learn - join our volunteer team doing bush restoration work. Age is no barrier (except for the very young) and there's plenty of non-strenuous work. There'll be a preliminary **training session** with a professional supervisor during work sessions.

■ Support a volunteer by making a donation to a **special restoration fund** to meet the costs of hiring the supervisor (roughly, every \$5 will cover the costs for one volunteer for an hour).

■ Support restoration work, educational work, and campaigns to conserve and protect the valley by taking out **membership** in the Wollie Creek Preservation Society.

■ Learn how to make your garden Bush Friendly and gain Backyard Buddies by following the *Be Bush Friendly* guidelines and by attending an introductory **Backyard Buddies session** to get more information.

■ Help with the further **distribution** of *Be Bush Friendly* leaflets and other material to encour-

age other residents to take an active role in supporting Wollie.

Your support in any of these forms will be most welcome, as will any suggestions for other things you might do. The idea is to have a lot of people doing a little - together we can make a big difference to the restoration of the valley's bushland. So please join in!

Orientation Session

Information for anyone interested in the principle and practices of bush restoration: **7:30-9:30pm Wednesday February 19** at the Earlwood-Bardwell Park RSL Club, adjacent to Bardwell Park station.

Backyard Buddies Session

Guidance on how to (gradually!) make your garden supportive of the local bush and creek and how to gain buddies from the bush to support your gardening efforts: **7:30-9:30 pm Wednesday March 5** at the Earlwood-Bardwell Park RSL Club, adjacent to Bardwell Park station.

Regeneration training session

For those considering undertaking volunteer work in the Valley on a regular basis. **9-12 am Sunday March 16** at the Earlwood-Bardwell Park RSL Club, adjacent to Bardwell Park station (a good part of the session will involve visiting the site of the restoration work). The first working session is set for **Sunday March 23** and the fourth Sunday each month thereafter, except December, which will be on the third Sunday; exact session times will reflect the availability of those volunteering.

Donations, membership, distribution

Please complete the attached form and return to the Wollie Creek Preservation Society or send an email to: dmps@ozemail.com.au or speak to Peter on 9554 3176.

Wollie Creek Preservation Society Inc.

I wish to Join the WCPS
 Donate to the bush restoration fund
 Be more involved - please contact me

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

POSTCODE _____

PHONE NOS _____

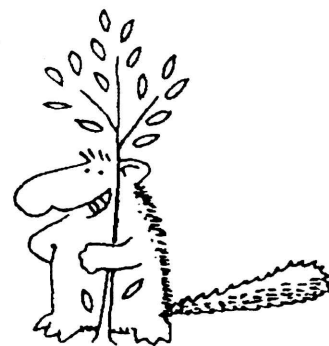
EMAIL _____

SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

Post to WCPS, PO Box 270, Earlwood NSW 2206

Membership enquiries 9554 3176

Make cheques payable to Wollie Creek Preservation Society Inc.



Family membership\$12.00
 Individual membership\$8.00
 Concession membership...\$5.00
 Donation to bush fund\$.
TOTAL\$.

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