



VOLUNTEERS CELEBRATE \$39,000 FROM STATE GOVERNMENT

Volunteers from the Wolli Creek Preservation Society recently celebrated the award of a three-year grant from the State Government's Environmental Trust with activities at Bexley North. The grant, for \$39,000, is for bush restoration work, including some planting, in a stretch of land running east from Bexley Road on the northern bank of Wolli Creek. The Society is working with the support of Canterbury City Council to carry out this project.

"This grant provides further recognition of the regional importance of the Wolli Valley bushland", Society President, Jennifer Druce, said, "and it enables us to increase the amount of bush restoration work the Society is able to do. Most of the work has to be done by volunteer labour, but this provides a great way for everyone to build community contacts and a sense of 'ownership' of the bushland."

A newly formed volunteer group also took time to familiarise itself with the site, consisting of two hectares of land owned mainly by the RTA, but soon to be handed over to the National Parks and Wildlife Service for the Wolli Creek Regional Park. The six areas within the site targeted for initial work were examined and baseline data gathered. Weed removal in the bank area has already been underway with the assistance of teams from Conservation Volunteers Australia.

To mark the occasion and celebrate the grant, two local eucalypts were planted near the creek bank. This will begin a process of introducing more native plants to an area much affected by floods and by weed problems.

Big grant boosts bush restoration



Planting this tree at Bexley Road is only a small part of the bush restoration task, but it is very satisfying!

Additional bush restoration volunteers are always welcome, tools and training are provided, and the group plans to work from 9 – 12.30 on the second Wednesday of each month. Anyone interested to join

in can contact Peter on 9554 3176 or via info@wollicreek.org.au. A larger planting occasion will be held at the end of July in conjunction with National Tree Day.

WOLLI BIRDMAN HONOURED

Award will encourage primary kids' interest in the environment

The Neil Rankin Award for primary age children is being introduced this year for the first time. It aims to encourage children's knowledge of the natural environment using the Wolli Valley as a resource. Groups of children from primary schools and community groups are eligible to enter. The Award, which was made possible through a donation from Danny Rankin to honour her late husband Neil – 'the Birdman of Wolli Creek' – will be presented in October during Children's Week.

Notices have been sent to all primary schools in the catchment area. If you are a parent or otherwise involved with a local school, please encourage them to participate. For details see the Rankin Award section on the website at www.wollicreek.org.au or contact rankin@wollicreek.org.au or Judy Finlason on 9559 2821.



Seven threats to the Valley

Just when you thought it was safe to go back ... to on-the-ground bush restoration work and the like, a batch of new threats to the Wolli Valley have surfaced, requiring more campaigning. There are currently seven of them.

Threat 1

Road reservation

The M5 road reservation has yet to be lifted, six years after State Government commitments to create the Wolli Creek Regional Park. We understand that this is in the RTA's hands and we know the RTA (and MetroStrategy) wants to expand the M5.

Threat 2

Regional park delays

Perhaps as a consequence of this, there has been no addition to the lands under NPWS management for the regional park. It is now two years since all agencies indicated at our March 2004 public meeting that they had few or no concerns and a readiness to make the transfers. Does this suggest that a road through the valley is still seen as an option?

Threat 3

Revised park boundaries

And on top of this, the Minister for the Environment has advised that there are to be revised boundaries for the regional park (the only known result of two years of work!). The changes have been made without any consultation with the Society and, while many of them are slight and often sensible, they leave highly significant bushland blocks outside the boundaries. We have written to the Minister putting our case. You can see a copy of our letter on the website at wollicreek.org.au, under Issues, Regional Park.

We are calling a fresh public meeting to get to the bottom of the problems involved with these three issues and to press for changes to include the key areas. The meeting, "Where's our Regional Park?", will be at 7pm on Tuesday April 4 at the Canterbury-Earlwood Caring Association Ltd (CECAL) hall at 15 Clarke Street, Earlwood (opposite Coles). The support of as many members as possible at the meeting is essential if we are to press our point – The Regional Park is not yet a reality – and won't become one without continued community pressure. Be part of the pressure by coming along and organising your neighbours and friends to come with you.

Threat 4

Desalination plant

A desalination plant is surely a low-order priority for Sydney, not to be considered ahead of recycling the huge volumes we currently discharge to the oceans, to say nothing of the damage to Botany Bay and other areas from construction works and pipeline laying across the Bay, damaging important marine plants

and probably stirring up sediments and their heavy metal contents. And we fear that the recent Government announcement shelving the proposed desalination plant at Kurnell may only be for the short term. Were it to go ahead, the present consultation rounds imply two scenarios affecting our immediate local concerns.

The Government's announced longer-term objective was to build a 500 megalitre a day plant. Were it to go for this in the future, a tunnel would be drilled from Kyeemagh to the main Sydney pressure line. One option for its route would involve drilling under Wolli Creek, another option would go under the Cooks River, presumably a fair way underground, but there has been no detail on this.

In the second scenario, and the one the Government was publicly pursuing, a 125 megalitre/day module first step would make the economics of a tunnel very problematic and a 'trench and fill' pipeline would be built from Kyeemagh to Allawah reservoir, or, more probably, to Marrickville reservoir. Sydney Water's indicative route for this latter option was essentially the riparian zone along the much-abused Cooks River to the Wolli Creek junction, crossing Cooks at the railway bridge, then up through Mackey Park to the streets leading to the reservoir. This is a recipe for undoing some very good work in this riparian zone by Councils and community groups.

We put in a submission concentrating on getting this route changed, while opposing the whole project in favour of recycling. The submission can be found on our website under Issues, Desalination.

Threat 5

Recycling pipeline

Even good things can have bad consequences! One proposal in the air (perhaps more so if the desalination plant really has been canned) proposed a water recycling plant at Sydney Airport that would mine water from the sewage system, debugging it and returning it to the Hawkesbury-Nepean system. According to a Sydney Morning Herald article, one option being considered is using the M5 and M7 road reservations for a pipeline – yet another reason to worry about the non-removal of the reservation over the Wolli Valley.

We have been assured by the proponents of the recycling that this is no longer a preferred option, and that the option was anyway for a tunnel under the M5E tunnel, not through the valley. But this is still one to watch. Further announcements by the proponents are expected in mid-2006.

Threat 6

Modifications to Waterworth Park

The Touch Football Association has sought Council agreement to an increase in the pitches on Waterworth Park, from four to ten pitches. Waterworth Park is outside the revised boundaries of the regional park, close to the junction of Wolli Creek and Cooks River. Late in 2005, Canterbury Mayor Furolo issued a press release indicating expansion of playing field areas and new picnic facilities along Wolli Creek. The Society was not consulted on the proposal, but was able to bring it up with him when he received a delegation to present our plans for a distance walk through Canterbury LGA from Bexley North to Campsie. He assured us that consultation would be arranged.

Subsequently, the Society has learnt more detail of the proposal, which would cost at least \$150,000 in levelling the park, eliminate many mature trees, and remove or significantly impact on the other vegetation, which is important native bird habitat. The Society has developed a preliminary position and a set of counter-proposals and written formally to the mayor seeking the promised consultation. The letter and position paper can be found on the website under Issues, Waterworth Park. Our proposals include a modest expansion of the vegetated area and extensive bush restoration work to reduce weeds and improve native habitat.

We have also decided to hold our Clean-Up Day activities this year at Waterworth Park to underline community concern about the future of the park. Please come along if you can, we will meet at 8.45 am at the car park outside the velodrome on Waterworth Park and work from 9 to 12. The site is very level and much easier than our last year's effort in the creek bed at Bexley North! For details ring Yvonne on 9718 0515 or email to yvonne.s@bigpond.net.au.

PUBLIC MEETING

WHERE'S OUR REGIONAL PARK?

Tuesday April 4, 7.00-9.00 pm at CECAL, 15 Clarke Street Earlwood (opposite Coles). Further information from Peter on 9554 3176 or via info@wollicreek.org.au.

- Six years since the Government undertaking
- Two years since promises renewed and green lights assured
- No new land acquired
- No consultation on changed boundaries
- Road reservation remains

WHY? WHY? WHY?

Come along, bring the neighbours, press the questions



A canoeist's view of Wolli Creek. in conjunction with the Cooks River Canoe Club the Society will be holding its popular Wolli – From Creek to Crest event in November. See back page for booking details.

Threat 7

M5 discharge to Wolli Creek

After a year of correspondence and being passed from organisation to organisation, we are now told, by the operators of the water treatment plant for the M5E tunnel discharges, that they will not give us the data they collect on the quality of the water discharged or of the receiving waters (Wolli Creek). This data is collected “for operational purposes only, which are not designed for compliance monitoring and are therefore not publicly available.” We asked for the information to complement other data being gathered on stream and bank organisms for the RiverScience project on the estuarine parts of the Cooks River (including Wolli Creek to the weir). So, we have a (temporary) block, but some interesting questions remain.

This is probably the best-treated run-off in the State, so why isn't its success being trumpeted? Or isn't it a success? Or might its success lead to calls for other road runoffs to be treated? The data gathering is clearly being paid for by the public from the tolls on the M5, so why isn't it in the public domain? Either there is no environmental problem about the discharge, in which case the results must be good news, or there is one and we should be told. Either way, there is a shocking lack of transparency, with which the Department of Environment and Conservation, the RTA, Baulderstone, Hornibrook and BHEgis (the sub-contracted actual operators) all seem to be quite satisfied. We don't want Wolli Creek to be getting the treatment given to the Cooks River over so many years. Other channels will have to be explored.

Annual General Meeting 2005

Community Development Organisation, Bardwell Park

The Annual Report on the Society's activities for the last year demonstrated how busy we have been. Activities included liaison with local and state government and other community groups; follow up on issues affecting the valley; conducting bush regeneration programs; organising volunteers; revising publications and conducting walks and other activities in the valley.

The continuing success of the Society is due to the hard work of the committee and the many members who make contributions in a variety of ways. In particular our Vice-President, Peter Stevens, has devoted many hours to supporting special projects and membership activities.

There are several changes on the committee: Jennifer Druce, after eleven years as Treasurer, was elected President. Judy Finlason, who has held the position of President for some years, will continue as a committee member. Yvonne Singleton is the new Treasurer, and Ramona Sen Gupta, Secretary.

Committee elected at AGM

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|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| Jennifer Druce –President | Judy Finlason |
| Peter Stevens- Vice President | Gavin Gatenby |
| Ramona Sen Gupta – Secretary | Emma Lane |
| Yvonne Singleton – Treasurer | Melissa Lane |
| Debra Little – Public Officer | James Sen Gupta |

2005 Annual Dinner was a great success

Last year we held our dinner at the St George Rowing Club for the first time. It was an excellent venue and ideal for our purposes, in fact we have already booked it for our 2006 dinner on 20 October – thank you to the staff of the Club for their excellent hospitality.

Our guest speaker, Australian Museum entomologist Martyn Robinson gave a fascinating and amusing insight into the love life of invertebrates in his talk entitled Sex and romance in a spineless world. It provided our first introduction to the amazing mating of leopard slugs recently starring in David Attenborough's Life in the Undergrowth TV series.

Over forty members attended. Our thanks to members of the committee who organised the event, especially Yvonne Singleton, and to all those who donated items for our successful fundraising raffle.

New edition of Wolli birds book on the way

The first edition of Neil Rankin's *Birds of Wolli Creek* has recently gone out of print. Between its publication in 1989 and his death, Neil recorded a further eleven years of observations, extending the records of birds in Wolli Valley to sixty years. The Society has been keen to update the first edition to include these more recent years, ending in 1999. Neil's records have been painstakingly transferred from his notebooks to electronic tables by Danie Ondinea, and both notebooks and tables have now been lodged with The Australian Museum to enable public access to them.

An editorial committee has now thoroughly revised the book, with additional materials for beginners, and has incorporated the observations of 1989-1999 so that basic comparisons of bird presence and frequency across four time periods can be readily made – and there have been some fascinating changes.

The book is in the final stages of editing, and funding for publication is being sought from a number of sources to enable us to raise the upfront costs (about \$8,000) for design, layout and printing. We are hoping to have the second edition on sale in the middle of the year. To be sure of a copy at the earliest moment, register your name with Peter on 9554 3176 or via info@wollicreek.org.au. We will also be looking for avenues for selling the book more widely and if you could help in this way, please let Peter know.

Society gains new resources, volunteers, grants

Canterbury City Council has awarded us a grant of \$2,000 to support the oral history project detailed in the last Update.

Generous support from **Sony Australia**, arranged for us through an application to Landcare Australia's Sydney office, means that we now have a very fine data projector to support our work in making presentations to community groups and others to increase community awareness of the valley, and to raise knowledge of house and garden practices impacting on bushland and how to modify them.

Continued cooperation with **Conservation Volunteers Australia** has enabled us to make great strides with pathways and preliminary bush regeneration work in a number of areas in the western sections of the regional parklands. And that relationship has also enabled us to bring CVA workers together with community groups working on the Cooks River and in Bardwell Creek.

We are grateful to all the above organisations for the support provided for

forthcoming events

The WCPS Committee meets every month on the first Wednesday at 7.30 pm at 11-15 Hartill-Law Avenue, Bardwell Park. All members are welcome to attend. Please advise Peter on 9554 3176 if you intend to come (in case of late venue change).

Regular bush regeneration sessions on the first Saturday, second Wednesday and second Sunday of each month, 9.00-12.30. Tools and training provided. Contact Peter on 9554 3176 or via info@wollicreek.org.au

Sunday March 5, Clean-Up Day, 8.45-12.00 am. Meet at velodrome car park, Waterworth Park, at the junction of the Cooks River and Wolli Creek. For further information ring Yvonne on 9718 0515 or email to yvonne.s@bigpond.net.au.

Sunday March 26, Riverworks - promoting environmental sculpture and river health, Whitlam Park 10 am – 4 pm.

Tuesday April 4, Public Meeting, 7.00-9.00 pm at CECAL, 15 Clarke Street Earlwood (opposite Coles). See Threats section of this Update for background and display ad. Further information from Peter on 9554 3176 or via info@wollicreek.org.au.

Sunday April 9, Cooks River Festival, Steel Park, 1pm – 5 pm. Food, info, performances, workshops etc.

Sunday May 7, Members' Walk, from 8.45am. Free to members. This year we will walk from Bexley North to Jackson Place Undercliffe, using newly cut paths in places and visiting several of the Society's bush restoration sites. An environmental and historical commentary will be provided. Pre-registration essential, contact Peter on 9554 3176 or via info@wollicreek.org.au. New members especially invited.

Monday June 5, World Environment Day activities for schools. We plan to hold a celebration in the valley for local schools on World Environment Day, with walks through the valley and a range of hands-on activities. Help is needed and we would like to hear from any members who can lend a hand – if you would like to take part please contact info@wollicreek.org.au or Judy Finlason on 9559 2821.

Later in the year – planning is under way for:

September – Wildflower walk

September – Catered picnic at Tempe Reserve with guided tour of Cooks River Valley Garden

October - Birdwatching walk

October – Children's Week. Presentation of the inaugural Rankin Award

October 20 - Annual Dinner at St George Rowing Club on Lower Wolli (Cooks River)

November 1 – Annual General Meeting

November – repeat of the popular kayak trip – Wolli from Creek to Crest

Early notification of interest will ensure you are kept informed as these develop. Let Peter know via info@wollicreek.org.au or 9554 3176.

our on-ground projects, but, as always, we rely on our own volunteers and members' subscriptions and donations to provide our core funding and thus ensure our independence to continue campaigning to protect the valley and its catchment.

An application by **Rockdale and Canterbury Councils** to the **Cooks River Foreshore Improvement Program** – supported by the Society – has been successful. The grant will provide funds towards building a fishway to overcome the barrier to fish migration formed by the Henderson Street weir at Turrella. Further funds are expected to come from the **Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority** and the two councils. We are hopeful that this will also enable the fishway work to be integrated with additional revegetation of the creekside below the weir and some work to involve local factories and businesses in improving the industrial side of the creek and reducing their own impacts.

A word about snakes ...

Red-bellied Black Snakes are sometimes seen on the valley bottoms, near the creekline, where frog, their favourite prey, live. During their mating season, they sometimes travel further afield, maybe 50 metres or more from the stream. Recent sightings at Bardwell Park and Undercliffe prompt us to remind members walking in the valley that these snakes are venomous. However, red-bellied black snakes are very shy, and are rarely seen because they sense the vibrations of your approach. In fact the sightings have been a real thrill for those making them. Care when with children or dogs is indicated, as their smaller size makes death a possible outcome of a bite, unless anti-venene is used as soon as possible. It is available at hospital emergency departments.