

Wolli Creek Preservation Society Inc.

info@wollicreek.org.au

www.wollicreek.org.au



WCPS President's report for 2022/23

2023 marks forty years since the formation of the then Wolli Creek and Bardwell Creek Preservation Society. A long and turbulent history with some major successes and some significant losses. That history can be followed through the issues of the Wolli Creek Update, which this year reached its 100th edition in June. All 100 issues will be available online when our new website goes live later this year.

Advocating for the Wolli Creek Valley

As an organisation advocating for the protection of Wolli bushland for four decades, we are no longer surprised, but still appalled at how long things take and how threats and issues continue on or to resurface. So much of our time goes to matters that have been ongoing for one, two, or many years. Here are those that have taken time this reporting year.

Completing the Regional Park

For once there is good news on this. Thanks to our advocacy to local MLAs we saw a pre-election announcement of an ALP commitment to completing the Park. As at June 30, however, we had not seen any actual progress towards this. But the commitment has been strong, and I am hopeful that we will soon see steps taken to fulfil it.

• *Odour Control Unit (OCU)*

One of the things that must be resolved in order to complete the park is the transfer of land owned by Sydney Water in the Wolli Valley. In March 2022 we were advised that the proposed installation of an industrial scale OCU on Sydney Water land near the SWOOS at Unwin St had been suspended while an alternative site was assessed, with a decision expected in 6-8 months. Decision on this alternative was still awaited 15 months later.

We hope that the new government's commitment to park completion will add weight to our urging that the proposal be dropped altogether and the land be transferred to the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

• *Planting at the SWOOS*

Possibly as a result of representations made by Wolli Creek Preservation Society, Sydney Water has set about bush restoration on their land alongside the SWOOS and below the Two Valley Trail. This has seen much weed and rubbish removal and the extensive planting of native species. Wolli Creek Preservation Society volunteers, with supervisor Pat Thomas, have already been maintaining the bushland on the Sydney Water block, but above the TVT, so this land should be a good addition to the Regional Park, once the OCU issue is dealt with.

• *28A Bayview Avenue*

Another matter requiring resolution is the acquisition of privately-owned land within the bounds of the Regional Park. There are six such blocks, four of them of major size and importance. One of these was sold recently and the new owner began preparations to build a house and swimming

pool on the portion immediately adjacent to the section zoned for the Park. In doing so, they excavated rock and soil and pushed it downslope into the Park area, destroying much vegetation and having immediate and long-term impacts on one of our regeneration sites. The land belongs to them, so they may have assumed, as so many do, that they can do what they like with it.

The damage has been done, rectification would probably be even more damaging, and there seems reluctance or inability to penalise the owner for their vandalism. Such disasters remain an ongoing threat while these blocks of land remain in private hands. Our continuing efforts to address the disaster have been in the hands of committee member Chris Jordens; an unenviable task.

- *Unwin Green Street*

WCPS has been working with residents of Unwin St, Undercliffe on a proposal to 'green up' Unwin St by revegetating currently vacant blocks owned by the State Government, introducing locally provenance street trees, and making neighbourhood gardens bush-friendly. Seventy people attended a street launch of the residents' campaign and support has been coming from Canterbury-Bankstown City, local Councillors, and MLAs.

This proposal would help implement 'green corridors', in Canterbury-Bankstown as noted in the Council's Green Corridor plans, in State planning documents, and as advocated by the Government Architect, by linking Wolli Creek and Cooks River via Unwin St and Waterworth Park (which itself need additional vegetation). If successful it would extend the 'bush feel' of the Regional Park through to Cooks River.

Currently, progress is on hold for two reasons: the State Government has frozen land holdings while it reassesses what can be deployed for housing; and substantial amounts of asbestos have been found on three of the vacant blocks in Unwin St, requiring remediation.

Chris Jordens has been taking the lead role for Wolli Creek Preservation Society in working with the residents on this project, too.

- *Jackson Place*

The contaminated former RTA land opposite the stone cottages of Jackson Place has now been capped with clay, topped with soil and mulch, and landscaped and planted. All done before the land was officially handed over to National Parks and Wildlife Service late last year for inclusion in the Regional Park. This is a big addition and while the job was done well there will be much maintenance needed to keep weeds from invading.

Ideally, we would establish another bushcare group to take this on once the maintenance contract has ended. Meanwhile, the plants are still small and vulnerable and entry to the site should be avoided. Occasional 'guerrilla bushcare' sessions are held there, with committee member Kitty Hauser and family keeping an eye on any unwanted intrusions.

- *Johnston St*

We have been assured that the paperwork needed to transfer former RTA land between Bexley Road and Illoura Reserve is now underway and should be completed before the end of 2023.

Turrella Reserve Masterplan

National Parks and Wildlife Service has put out for consultation a masterplan for the Reserve. It includes a major upgrade to the play area between Finlays Ave and Arncliffe Rd and the installation of toilets and additional picnic facilities. WCPS has submitted concerns about the location and nature of the footpaths proposed, but we have not been advised of the ongoing status of the plan.

Cycleway

Wolli Creek Preservation Society is in support of there being a cycleway through the valley, but not at the expense of bushland or the riparian zone, which the latest proposal to surface does. In its Bike Plan, Bayside Council has included an 'aspirational' route between the railway and the creek (i.e., in the riparian zone) passing right through what has been part of the Flying-fox camp. We put in objections and drew attention to WCPS' alternative proposal, which uses existing streets.

Zombie developments

These are proposals that depend upon development approvals given years ago and not acted upon, but still available if the developer opts to activate them. We have seen two instances of this kind over the last year, both mentioned in last year's report on industrial sites. Chris Jordens and especially Joanna Robinski have been instrumental in our ongoing efforts to achieve better outcomes on both sites.

- *75 Henderson St, Turrella*

The illegal demolition and building materials processing business was seen off and cleaned up after Bayside Council action finally took hold. However, a new application has been submitted to use the site as a storage and servicing area for buses and coaches (though not by the existing Telfords business in the same street). There are many issues with this use, but key to Wolli Creek Preservation Society concerns is the fact that the statement of environmental impacts made relies heavily on the fact that similar uses were approved 40 years ago and have continued since.

WCPS feels that new approvals should align with changed community standards and not rely on quasi-zombie approvals received decades ago. We are seeing this as the opportunity to have a proper riparian zone of at least 30m established along the creek frontage of the site, something whose value was not appreciated forty years ago. It probably requires changes to the planning system, but is worth pressing for.

- *1-9 Henderson St, Turrella*

This site does have a riparian zone established across it, instituted by Rockdale Council years ago while the site was vacant. However, it has been trashed by Sydney Civil since they acquired it in 2011 for use as a civil engineering material storage and machinery parking lot. All the existing vegetation was progressively removed and the riparian zone used to store equipment and vehicles, effectively turning it into a hardstand. Bayside Council has seemed unwilling or unable to act against the destruction of the riparian zone.

Currently, the owner has reactivated a 2008 approval for the construction of industrial units to cover work to be done to restore a vegetated riparian zone. We objected in 2008 and have done so again, but so far unsuccessfully. Any town planners out there willing to help? Again, it looks as though the planning system does allow such zombie approvals to remain undead.

Other matters affecting the bush

- *The Highcliff Road Swale*

This collapsed early in 2022 (a long story of bad human decisions and the intensity and duration of La Nina), but, apart from the installation of some protective measures and the removal of vegetation grown over the water channel it fed into, nothing has yet been done to restore it.

- *The Johnston St Swathe*

Funding has been provided to repair and compensate for the damage done just over a year ago by Sydney Water's contractors for sewer access work. Wolli Creek Preservation Society has been able

to install coir logs to reduce erosion and has ordered 1200 plants from Marrickville Community Nursery for a spring planting on Illoura Reserve to replace the vegetation destroyed. Our own volunteers, led by Paul Ibbetson, have worked to protect the emerging regeneration on the site of the damage.

- *M6 Power Cable*

This is very slow-moving project, but, after a year, the cable contractors have begun work in streets leading to and away from the Wollie Creek crossing. The pit to be dug below Bray Avenue for the tunnel-boring to take the cable under the creek and railway line has been marked out so we can expect that to happen quite soon.

Enhancing Habitat, Protecting Wildlife

So much of Wollie Creek Preservation Society time is taken up with preventing or dealing with damage to the bushland that it's a relief to turn to enhancing it, which is what a lot of members do, learning from the more experienced as they acquire the knowledge and skills needed.

Bushcare

This year saw a change in the Bushcare Co-ordinator position with Peter Semple taking over from Georgina San Roque. Despite moving off to live in Castle Cove, Peter has continued in the role and still attends a session each month. My thanks go to Georgina for the years of effort she has put in and continues to put in in the Wollie Valley, particularly at the difficult Bray Avenue wetland. Her long experience as a bush regenerator has benefitted many volunteers, though I suspect she is relieved to see Peter take over as co-ordinator.

Other changes have seen Paul Ibbetson take over as supervisor at our Johnston St site and Maggie Aitken step up as supervisor for a new group working on the areas of Turrella Reserve planted out by WCPS in 2008/9 - around the pond and along Wollie Creek below the footbridge. Julie Deady has brought her meticulous efficiency to tracking volunteers and the hours put in across our various sites - these are important stats for us and for NPWS and Councils who usually ask for details at the end of each reporting year.

Some of our extra-keen and experienced volunteers have been adding to the regular monthly session at Paperbark Creek with weekly sessions of a smaller group. This has contributed to the record hours that Wollie Creek Preservation Society contributes to restoring the bushland. Over the past year this has been a bit more than the equivalent of a full-time worker.

That's a fact we have stressed to the Minister for the Environment when asking for additional resources for National Parks and Wildlife Service, particularly in Wollie Creek Regional Park. We would like to see NPWS at least match our own contribution, with a bushcare qualified and experienced officer working full-time in the section of the valley between Girrahween Park and Turrella Reserve, where Wollie Creek Preservation Society has, for historical reasons, no bushcare groups.

Paperbark Creek has also seen the removal of a very large Camphor Laurel (funded by NPWS), reduced to a tall stump with the aim of converting it into a Hollow Tree, with hollows created in the trunk for nesting options - very few of Wollie's trees are old enough to have developed natural hollows, a consequence of the almost complete clearing evident in aerial photos from 1930. Similar treatment is being considered for a large Blue Gum on Turrella Reserve, recently reduced on safety grounds.

Our collective thanks to all the volunteers who assist with bushcare. This is an important and positive part of the work of WCPS as we continue to improve the valley bushland and demonstrate our ongoing commitment to its preservation.

Monitoring

Several members are now contributing to our monitoring of the bushland. They were already fairly frequent walkers on a section of the Two Valley Trail and are now using a list of 'reportables' and their own initiative to identify problems so that they can be addressed, either by WCPS volunteers or by seeking action by appropriate bodies. With problems being identified earlier, they can often be solved quickly, before they grow. Valerie Atkinson, Chris Jordens, Abi Curtis, Alan Mitchell, among others, have seen successes from reported sightings.

We would welcome more contributors to this program - the more active eyes on Wolli, the better protected it will be. We'd also like to see more monitors for the streets adjacent to the bushland and for development applications in the Wolli catchment.

Hartill-Law underpass

Wolli Creek Preservation Society has long sought an effective pedestrian underpass below the Hartill-Law bridge for use in non-flood situations. We have twice thought that Canterbury-Bankstown City, which is responsible for the roadway and the space below, was gearing up to provide it. The project has once again been returned to the back burner until the new financial year and all the weeds cleared a year ago have come rampaging back.

But it's good to see that many walkers are using the informal track that exists and keeping it open. The underpass enables one to walk the 4.5 km from Bexley North to Tempe station, without crossing a road.

Educating and raising awareness

Return of pre-Covid activities

While Covid is still present and a problem, activities we reduced or abandoned while it was at its most menacing are now coming back. Bushcare (outdoors, well separated) continued pretty much unabated. As did our bird surveys and bat counts, similarly blessed with Covid-compliant conditions. Others that were suspended have subsequently been able to restart.

We have seen the restart of our water trips, now 'eco-paddles', organised for WCPS by Kate Flannery and Gina Svolos, in conjunction with the River Canoe Club, and others. They are informative, and serve as an introduction to a different view of the Wolli Valley and, for some, as their introduction to kayaking. They are also a valuable fundraiser and recruitment venue for the Society.

As is the Annual Dinner, which revived after a two year absence to be held in a new venue at the Bardwell Valley Golf Club in 2022 and, prospectively 2023 - over 70 people attended in 2022 and we hope to exceed that this year - be there! Gina Svolos, Julie Deady and Julie Muir from the committee, with contributions from various others, saw to the successful organisation of the 2022 dinner, with a talk given by Sue Castrique with Jennifer Newman, centring on the Gumbramorra Swamp.

Our walks program, organised by Gina Svolos, kicked off again in autumn 2023, with a fuller program to take place in the spring. A great way to learn about the valley and its life-forms and issues while enjoying the outdoors and getting some exercise.

And 2024 should see the return in March of the very popular Bat Picnic. At its peak, we saw 500 people enjoying the mass animal movement of thousands of Flying-foxes from the comfort of their picnic rugs on Turrella. Originator and principal organiser Deb Little will be assisting a new group of organisers to make sure this developing tradition gets off to flying start (pun noted).

Communication

Social media platforms are going through a rather tumultuous time at high levels, but, so far, we are sticking to our Facebook and Instagram accounts and occasional tweets (while wondering whether to move...) as they provide information to a different spectrum of people.

On the other hand, our Wollie Creek Update continues its steady appearance three times a year, reaching a major milestone when we worked out that the June 2023 issue was actually the 100th edition produced. It's a fine tribute to the Society and all the volunteer editors and writers who have kept it going through some hefty battles and occasional hard times.

We have seen it increase in sophistication, introduce colour, and move to an essentially electronic distribution over the years and there is more change to come. Current editor Laura Zusters puts her time and skills into doing a page layout version for each issue, but the time is coming for us to move to a less labour-intensive and more flexible format that makes use of the electronic facilities now available, so that it can be produced more frequently.

Website

Gina Svolos, Deb Little, Tim Pullen, and Laura Zusters have laboured on with the work of completely recasting our website's appearance and functioning with much technical assistance and advice from Penny Waterson. The content has been reviewed much rewritten and new pages created. It's a mammoth task, but we are hoping it comes to fruition later this year when we'll all need to revisit the website to refresh our knowledge of Wollie or to begin learning the depth and breadth of the information it contains.

One of the things it will contain is a listing of all the editions of the Wollie Creek Update from issue one in 1987, with links to pdfs of each one. Well worth some time to look back on the various battles and recurring issues that WCPS has engaged in.

Citizen Science

Bird surveys

WCPS has nine teams doing monthly survey of the species and numbers of birds seen or heard in the Wollie and Bardwell valleys. This data makes its way onto the Birdlife Australia database. Its regular, ongoing citizen science, and adds to our awareness of how bird presence is changing in response to changes in the valley's bushland (bush restoration work and bush damage episodes) and in the surrounding suburbs and, of course, climate change.

They are not easy to disentangle, but clever statistical work can help. For several years now, Dorothy Luther has been working with her Macquarie University students to see what can be learnt from them. This year, their work was selected as a **Highly Commended finalist** in the 2022 Judyth Sachs Prizes, with which the University celebrates the outcomes of its Professional and Community Engagement (PACE) program.

Bat Counts

Another of our citizen science contributions reached its fifteenth year in 2023. Bat co-ordinator Deb Little and a varying group of volunteer counters once again turned up each month at shifting times (bats fly out at dusk) to count/estimate the number of Grey-headed Flying-foxes (GHFF)

using the Turrella camp. Each quarter, the month's count data, plus Deb's mapping of the camp's extent, go into a database covering the whole GHFF range as part of the National Flying-fox Monitoring Program run by the federal government.

Other life forms

We have also welcomed this year visits to Wolli by the Sydney Fungal Studies Group, with quite a few WCPS members joining in to learn about those neglected but essential recyclers, in all their fascinating variety. These visits add to our increasing knowledge about life-forms in the Wolli Valley.

In the past, the Society for Insect Studies and the Australia New Guinea Fishes Association have also conducted surveys in the valley. We'd like to see more of such surveys and need members with an interest in particular life forms to liaise with a relevant group to add to our knowledge and hopefully to enhance our own citizen science endeavours.

Maintaining WCPS as a community organisation

Death of Judy Finlason

Last year I was reporting on an award made to Judy; this year we have to record her death. With that we lost one of the original and continuing leading lights of WCPS. Judy Finlason served in many roles on the WCPS committee, including President and remained an active recruiter of members and educator about the Wolli Valley right up to the final year of her life. WCPS would not be what it is or where it is without her contribution. Members have been sent much information about her history and I don't want to repeat that here, just to say thank you, Judy and farewell.

Facing up to technology changes

The last year has seen continuing changes in the way we use technology, both to support our work, save costs and adapt to new demands. As our members become more sophisticated users of new technology, so must the Society.

- *Website*

People expect more of a website than in the past and we are adding to the new website 'shop and cart' facilities for purchasing our publications and T-shirts, for membership and activity fees, and for making donations, all online. Developing the new website has been a vast labour of love by Deb Little and Gina Svolos on content and Tim Pullen, Penny Waterson and Laura Zusters on the more technical aspects.

- *EFTPOS*

Investigation undertaken by Treasurer Abi Curtis led to WCPS purchasing a Square brand handheld EFTPOS device during the year, which proved its worth at the Annual Dinner and will enable us to better adapt to an increasingly cashless approach to payments at events.

- *PO Box*

Another side of the new technology is the phasing out of older ones, just as years ago we moved from handwritten financial accounts to an electronic record and then to an online version linked to our bank. Over the past year we have had very little mail and indeed in the past six months, including the current membership renewal period, the only addressed item had been an invoice for the continued use of the mailbox!

So, the time has come to surrender our PO Box in Earlwood and proceed with the detailed task of eliminating its address from posters, flyers, brochures and our letterhead (the new one is at the

end of this report). From the Annual Dinner onwards our general address will be electronic only, via info@wollicreek.org.au

- *Remote meetings*

The committee has found that meeting via Zoom, adopted during Covid, has encouraged us to continue using it for the convenience and time-saving it offers. In addition, it offers a flexibility beyond anything we have had before, with Vice-President Gina Svolos joining a meeting from the Northern Territory in July. And the joy of not having to venture out in inclement weather, instead enjoying the creature comforts of home. We plan to meet in-person twice a year to allow us to get to know each other less formally.

- *On-line bookings*

We moved a year or two back to using Eventbrite to enable people to book into our annual dinner and kayak events on-line. We will move on to use the Humanitix platform, which is more congenial to our values, from July 2023 and will include booking our walks using this booking system as well.

- *Mobile technology*

With more and more people relying on their mobile phones for communications or liking the convenience of dealing with things away from home, we have aimed to respond to their use. The new website has been designed to be mobile-friendly and the planned move to a new format for the Wollie Creek Update will also be better suited to mobile technology. We have also begun to use QR codes on flyers and posters, since these work so well with mobiles.

- *Social media*

These were undergoing turmoil during the year, leaving us questioning whether to stay on Twitter. We will, at least for a while, though it has been a long while since Wollie Possum tweeted, but that may change. Our Facebook account (Protect Wollie Creek Valley) remains active, with Abi Curtis frequently posting material. With the growing confusion and proliferation of platforms it's hard to know where best to have a presence - it all takes up our human resources.

Recruitment and Volunteering

As of June 2023 we had 237 members (including 134 single memberships and 103 family memberships) compared to 203 for the same time last year. Its great to see our membership maintaining its strength but we need to keep up this momentum.

Increases in membership are important for the Society in several ways:

- membership fees and member donations are important revenue streams to support the volunteer activities that we undertake and to ensure that the Society continues when other funding is not available
- membership numbers are often key information sought by politicians, and the more we have the greater the weight our submissions and correspondence carry
- many hands make light work and more members means there are more people to share the work of the Society. My own stance has always been that we need many people each doing a little, rather than just a few doing a lot (that way lies burnout and loss).

Recruiting one new member each is one way for members to do their bit. There are materials available to support recruitment efforts with newer ones coming. For those able to do more or do other things there are lots of opportunities to volunteer with a large array of skills needed to work on achieving our vision and aims.

Committee

We are losing two of our current committee at this year's AGM. Deb Little is taking a break from a committee she has been on for thirty years, serving as President, Vice-President and Secretary at various times. She is currently the longest serving member of the committee and will be sorely missed. Her vast corporate memory will, fortunately, still be available and she will be continuing many roles off-committee, including being Bat Co-ordinator and Bushcare Supervisor for our Paperbark Creek site. Valerie Atkinson will also be continuing involvement off-committee as a reliable track monitor, so we won't be losing her reports, with their photos of the good as well as the bad in Wolli Creek Regional Park.

And I will be stepping down as President after a two-year return to the role. So there will be a fair bit of change on the committee and some significant vacancies, which we hope will be filled by interested new faces at the Annual General Meeting. I will however be hoping to stay on the committee as well as continue with some of the issues I have been engaged with.

Peter Stevens
President
6 August 2023