

Wolli Creek Preservation Society

Annual Report 2025

By Chris Jordens, President. October 2025



Preamble

The past year has been marked by encouraging developments in the Wolli Creek Regional Park, and by a few big setbacks.

We are beginning to see benefits flow from funding that the state government committed to the Regional Park in its 2024 budget. Three blocks of land at the eastern end of the park that the government had previously decided to sell off (14-18 Unwin St) are currently undergoing remediation, and when the remediation is complete, they will be transferred to the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) for inclusion in the Wolli Creek Regional Park. The reversal of the decision to sell these blocks is a win for our ongoing campaign to “green” Unwin Street in Earlwood. With the completion of works on Unwin St undertaken by the City of Canterbury Bankstown, and new plantings along the Two Valley trail in Waterworth Park, we are well on the way to seeing results for our wider campaign to link two green corridors, one in the Wolli Valley and the other in the Cooks River Valley.

The flow of funding is also evidenced by new projects undertaken by NPWS in the Regional Park and by more staff on the ground there. This has led to greater co-operation between WCPS and the NPWS, facilitated by the Area Manager, Ben Khan. Members will also have noticed the upgrade to the playground at Turrella Reserve, and the welcome addition of picnic shelters and public toilets there.

One major setback in the past year was the state government’s decision to sell off two blocks of publicly owned vacant land at Wolli Bluff. These blocks were part of our Unwin Green Street proposal. We believed they had been set aside for inclusion in the Regional Park, so we were blindsided by what we argue is a poor decision—and one that contradicts a previous undertaking by the Premier to preserve urban green space. Another major setback occurred when contractors at a development between Bayview Ave and Highcliff Road in Earlwood dumped tons of spoil into the Regional Park, onto one of our bush care sites. Yet another was the sale of land in Bexley formerly occupied by the Salvation Army. All three setbacks portend a wider environmental challenge to the inner southwest, namely, threats to urban green space posed by the increasing “densification” of residential development.

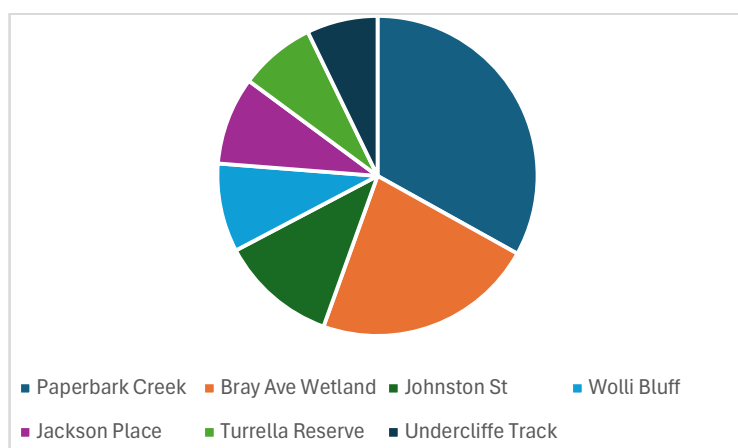
The encouraging developments and the setbacks are described in more detail below, with updates on our regular activities. The latter include important progress that the Committee has made to our virtual and historical existence. With only eight members, we struggle to stay on top of everything, so please contact us if you are interested in joining the committee or contributing your time and skills “off committee”.

Protect!

Bushcare

In the year from July 2024 to June 2025, WCPS volunteers contributed 1,950 hours to bush care activities across seven sites in the Wolli Creek Regional Park (Figure 1).¹ Over half (55%) the hours were dedicated to bush care at Paperbark Creek and Bray Ave wetland.

Figure 1. Distribution of 1,950 hours of bush care by WCPS volunteers across Wolli Creek Regional Park



Monthly bush care sessions are held at six of the sites, supervised by an experienced member. Extra sessions occasionally run on weekends. One volunteer works regularly at Jackson Place. The Society funded bush care by contractors at Johnston St, Bray Avenue and Paperbark Creek. NPWS funded work by contractors at Nannygoat Hill, Turrella Reserve, Jackson Place, and the east end of the Regional Park. These contracts have recently been renewed.

Progress across Regional Park is slow but steady. The Johnston St site, which includes Illoura Reserve and which is supervised by Paul Ibbetson, was recently expanded with two areas of Privet and Ochna monoculture cleared. The recent planting on the edge of the Illoura lawn is now established and requires less maintenance. The bush care team there is trialling a small planting in the lawn to start breaking up the sea of mown grass.

The Paperbark Creek site, supervised by Deb Little, takes in connecting patches of emerging bushland in the otherwise (mainly exotic) grassy areas along Bray Ave. An increase in monthly sessions here has allowed for both maintenance and new work.

The battle against weeds continues at Bray Ave Wetland under the supervision of Rose Collins. There has been some expansion into the privet forest, and lantana has been removed from the regenerating lawn edge.

¹ Figures exclude 13 hr bush care at the Bat Camp and 30 hr bush care by the National Trust, where the location was not recorded. Figures provided by Julie Deady.

The site at Turrella under the supervision of Maggie Aitkin is in a much better state with the pond area under control and the vines cut out of the trees by the creek.

Pat Thomas supervises two group working at the eastern end of the Regional Park, along Undercliffe track and including Wolli Bluff. Some of the sites here are notable for the diversity of the flora, but they have also been affected by developments on the northern boundary. Developments at 28A Bayview Ave² and 44-48 Bayview Ave (see next section) stand out as egregious examples of contractors dumping spoil directly into the park, or onto land that will soon become part of the park.

Monitoring the Wolli Valley

Former WCPS President Peter Stevens co-ordinates a team of track monitors who regularly patrol different sections of the Two-Valley Trail inside the Regional Park. The monitors report on a list of recurrent issues, and on any new issues arising.

This year, one monitor warned NPWS about a development at Bayview Ave and Highcliff Road. Contractors were resuming work on a retaining wall where they had previously dumped spoil into the park. The warning went unheeded, and the contractors then dumped about a hundred tons of rubble into one of our bush care sites. This illustrates how (if our warnings are heeded) monitors can help prevent disasters before they happen. It also illustrates how the perimeter of the park needs to be closely monitored, as well as the tracks that traverse it.

The Society is currently looking for more Track Monitors. If you are interested, please [contact us](#). We are also seeking to expand our monitoring to streets adjacent to or near the bushland, and to cover Council newsletters and meeting agendas and minutes, plus development applications and media, among other things. The more “Eyes on Wolli” there are, the more likely we are to be able to head off or mitigate ongoing threats to the valley. If any of these activities interest you, please email monitor@wollicreek.org.au.

Advocate!

Campaigns

Our campaigning during the last year has focussed on linking the Wolli Valley to the Cooks River Corridor. This campaign has seven distinct elements which we report on below.

1. Completing the Regional Park

At the end of June 2025, 2.73 hectares of land near Turrella Reserve was transferred from the City of Canterbury Bankstown to the Regional Park. Additional blocks owned by Sydney Water, as well as parts of some private blocks, are yet to be transferred.

² “Ongoing delay leads to destruction below Bayview Ave.” [Update #99](#), February 2023, p. 5

2. Gateway to the Regional Park at Wolli Bluff

As reported elsewhere³, the NSW Department of Planning has sold off two blocks of publicly owned, vacant land adjacent to Wolli Bluff (16-18 Bayview Avenue). Like NPWS, we expected these blocks would become part of the Regional Park. Despite the Premier's public commitment to "[preserve and protect](#)" urban green space in the inner south-west, the blocks were listed for sale at the end of 2024 without any warning or community consultation. WCPS was not alerted to the sale until February 2025, which left us little time to respond.

WCPS entertained the possibility that the sale was some kind of mistake arising from a decision made at a desk with no understanding of the location or significance of the land, nor of the restrictions that would apply to any future development there⁴.

The Premier received more than a hundred letters and emails from our members and supporters objecting to the sale. WCPS met with local MLA Sophie Cotsis on 27 March seeking last-minute political intervention, to no avail. The blocks were offered for sale by auction in the city on 2 April 2025.

WCPS turned up to warn bidders about restrictions to development on the blocks including a re-zoning motion before Council proposed by independent Councillor Barbara Coorey. Along with other members of the public, we were barred from entering the auction room. The winning bid was \$2.93M. Four weeks later, Councillor Coorey's motion was defeated at a Council meeting by Labor Councillors voting as a block.

In the ensuing months the buyer withdrew from the contract and the sale fell through, so we renewed our campaign. We sought another meeting with Sophie Cotsis, but we were stonewalled. Members and supporters sent the Premier a second tranche of letters and emails opposing the sale, but the Dept of Planning found another buyer who purchased the blocks for an amount that the Department has chosen not to disclose, despite our inquiries and despite its professed commitment to transparency. The community will now have to wait and see what is built in front of Wolli Bluff.

In the meantime, WCPS will try to ensure that the current height restrictions on development remain, and that a 5-metre-wide strip of land at the base of Wolli Bluff which did not form part of the sale is transferred to NPWS to preserve the option of an access path linking the Regional Park to Bayview Ave.

Along with [the government's proposed overhaul of planning laws in NSW](#), this episode has shaken our confidence in the current government's commitment to protect the natural environment during an incipient epidemic of *developo-mania*.

3. Bird sanctuary

We have been lobbying the state government to reverse its decision to sell three other blocks nearby at 14-18 Unwin St. Our efforts, combined with those of local residents, have been

³ E.g., [Update #106](#) pp. 1-3, [Update 107](#) p. 3.

⁴ [Mistaken identity: Dilemma for Minns](#). 29 March 2025.

successful! These blocks will soon be remediated and handed over to NPWS as part of the Regional Park. In time it will provide multi-level, diverse vegetation that will support local birds and bats. The NPWS is planning to establish informational and educational resources for Regional Park visitors on the curtilage of the blocks along Unwin St.

4. Unwin Green Street

The City of Canterbury Bankstown has completed works that help to “green” the rest of Unwin Street. They include widening the southern verge, planting trees that provide food for birds and bats, installing a culvert at the bottom of the street to divert stormwater, and a bench and a bike stand nearby.

5. Constructed wetland

Transport for NSW owns three blocks of flood-prone land at the lower (eastern) end of Unwin Street. In August 2024 we met with Jo Haylen in her then capacity as Minister for Transport to discuss our idea to transfer these blocks to Crown Lands as an extension of Waterworth Park. We also propose that a constructed wetland should be built there. This would help relieve flooding. It would create habitat for native species and preserve remnant saltmarsh on the bank of Wolli Creek. It would also remove silt and nutrients from stormwater before it enters the Creek and the Cooks River of which it is a tributary, thereby improving water quality in the wider catchment. We were encouraged by the Minister’s response and look forward to resuming the conversation with the new minister.

6. Wildlife passage

A constructed wetland and remnant saltmarsh will effectively block access to the eastern end of the Lower Track, restricting the Lower Track to native wildlife movement. For human walkers, the Lower Track poses many problems as an access route into the Regional Park. Access is tricky. It floods and promotes the spread of weeds into the Park. We therefore think closure is desirable.

7. Waterworth Park revegetation

WCPS has also been advocating for a wide band of local native vegetation to be planted on either side of the Two Valley Trail from the base of Unwin Street to the velodrome on Cooks River. We have made little if any progress over the past year in our negotiations with sporting groups that use Waterworth Park. Nevertheless, in line with our vision, new plantings have gone ahead in the park under the aegis of a partnership between the City of Canterbury Bankstown and Greater Sydney Landcare. 120 volunteers turned up to a planting along the northern verge of the Two-Valley Trail in Waterworth Park on 12 July 2025. The land on the southern verge next to Wolli Creek has been laid with mulch, ready for the next planting. Walkers now find themselves passing through what is becoming a pleasant green tunnel, and what we hope will eventually become a wide, green canopy.

Over-development in Bexley

In October 2024, on behalf of WCPS, our former President Peter Stevens lodged an objection to a proposed re-development of the former Salvation Army site at Kingsland Road in Bexley⁵. At the time, his was one of 66 other submissions overwhelmingly critical of what is certainly an instance of *overdevelopment*.

Peter's submission proposed an alternative that allows for greater density, but which also preserves existing green space. This was uploaded to Planning Alerts and sent to local Councillors and MPs and to the *Leader* newspaper. Peter later represented WCPS at a hearing of the Land & Environment Court on 18 December 2024. Unfortunately, the hearing upheld the developer's proposal to maximise residential density at the expense of green space that might be preserved for the benefit of future residents and local fauna.

The loss of mature trees and green space in this location will make our aim to connect remaining green spaces even more difficult. Outcomes like this also highlight how the current planning laws permit the incremental loss of green space in a part of Sydney where little remains. And given [proposed changes to NSW environmental protection laws](#), this problem is set to worsen.

Hartill-Law underpass walkway

WCPS has long advocated for works that would ensure walkers can traverse the Two-Valley-Trail from Tempe station to Bexley North Station without crossing a road. The final gap in this dream is a path that would allow walkers to pass under the bridge at Hartill-Law Ave in Earlwood. Completion of the path has been delayed due to difficulties that contractors have had stabilising the embankment under the bridge. We hope a solution is found soon.

Educate!

Communications

WCPS continues to publish [Update](#) newsletter three times a year, thanks to the efforts of our current Vice President, Laura Zusters. Between issues, we use blog posts on our [home page](#) to keep members updated about events, issues and campaigns. We also post regularly on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). The Society is no longer posting on X (formerly Twitter). Our presence on social media is curated largely by Laura Zusters, with support from several other members of the Committee.

Events

2024 Annual dinner

The 2024 Annual dinner was held on 17 October at Bardwell Valley Golf Club. As usual, it was a lively evening featuring a sit-down dinner, a raffle, and a silent auction. The speaker

⁵ See [Update #103](#) p. 4 and [Update #105](#) p. 9.

was Matthew Huan from the Chau Chak Wing Museum at the University of Sydney. Matthew spoke about butterflies in his life, in his work at the museum, and in the Wolli Valley. His presentation was enhanced by images that illustrated the beauty and diversity of our local *lepidoptera*. At the end of the evening, Matthew was mobbed by members of the audience plying him with questions.

Eighty members attended the event, which is right on average. After expenses, the dinner raised almost \$4,900 for the Society.

2024 fundraising gig

Additional funds were raised at a gig where two bands, *Bouncer Fodder* and *Aviatrix*, played to a lively audience at a private residence in Earlwood on a Spring afternoon in late October.

2025 Bat Picnic

The annual Bat Picnic was held on 7 March 2025. More than 300 revellers attended on a perfect evening in Turrella Reserve. Volunteers assisted with batty craft activities that consumed 117 egg cartons and vast amounts of face-paint, and that produced 130 bat masks and approximately 100 kites. The Grey-headed Flying-foxes received a standing ovation as they rose from their roosts and took to the skies at dusk.

Due to poorly placed stake in one of the plantings around the new playground, the new public toilets blocked up early in the evening. Picnickers took this in their stride, however. We will have some portable loos handy at the next event, just in case.

History projects

As noted in last year's Annual report, one of our members, Ute Foster, catalogued the private papers of Judy Finlason, a founding member of WCPS. Ute continued her archival activity in 2025 when, over many weekly half-day sessions, she patiently catalogued WCPS Committee minutes and other paper records dating back to the 1980s. These records will eventually be accessible as archives in the Campsie Library.

Also mentioned in the previous annual report was a generous bequest from Judy Finlason. This year, the Committee set aside \$20K from this bequest to kick-start a publication that will update the history of the Wolli Creek Valley and the role of the Society in saving the bushland that has since become a Regional Park. Peter Stevens and Gina Svolos have drafted a proposal that was subsequently endorsed by the Committee. Whoever takes on the contract will have access to the archival material mentioned above. Any interested and experienced writers can [contact us](#) for more information. A suitable memorial for Judy Finlason will soon be installed near her long-term home in Jackson Place.

Walkers may have noticed an upgrade to the sign in Jackson Place about the eponymous Mr Jackson. This was organised by Committee Member Julia Frecheville in consultation with descendants of William Jackson, who now reside in Queensland and who paid for the new sign.

Canoe trips

The Society continued to host “eco-paddles” up Wolli Creek in September 2024 and in May and June 2025. These trips are excellent opportunities for existing and future members to see the Regional Park from the perspective of the Creek and listen to informed commentary about the history and environment. Kate Flannery organised these events, and was supported on the water by Thor Blomfied. Laura Zusters, Gina Svolos and Julia Frecheville assisted with set up and afternoon tea.

Guided walks in the Wolli Creek Valley

Guided walks are another way we introduce people to the valley, its history and the role of the Wolli Creek Preservation Society. The walks are usually scheduled during the cooler months in Spring and Autumn. To cater for a range of people, we host both short walks of only a few kilometres and longer walks that cover the full length of the park (5km). All walks are led by volunteers who are knowledgeable members of the Society.

We conducted five walks in past year. Full-length walks were led by Ute Foster and Tim Pullen. Walks covering shorter sections of the park were led by Rose Collins, Deb Little and Gina Svolos, who also co-ordinates all our walks. The Spring Wildflower walks led by Deb Little and Maggie Aitken remain popular. We also trialled some new walks. In October 2024, Peter Stevens shared his knowledge of the ongoing threats and challenges facing the valley and its wildlife.

Our Autumn walks were sponsored by the City of Canterbury-Bankstown and promoted through the Council’s *We Love our Rivers* program, which reached a wide audience. Walkers frequently express amazement that native bushland still exists in this part of Sydney, and some walkers become members of the Society.

In June 2025, Chris Jordens took Paul Powlesland on tour through from Tempe to Girrahween Park. Paul is a UK barrister and environmental activist who founded the [River Roding Trust](#). He was accompanied by several campaigners with the [Total Environment Centre](#). Paul was interested to learn about the work of environmental groups in the Wolli and Cooks River Valleys, and he was surprised to learn that the Regional Park is home to several thousand of the largest bats in the world. Paul clearly took inspiration from what we have achieved in the Wolli Valley, and we wish him success in his advocacy for a struggling river back in the UK.

In August 2025, Chris Jordens and Susie Cornish took Ashvini Ambihapahar on a tour from Tempe Station to Turrella Reserve. Ash is the new member for the Federal Seat of Barton. The previous Federal member, Linda Burney, was a long-time supporter of the Society’s work and mission. We hope Ash falls in love with the Regional Park and supports our future efforts.

Citizen Science

Birdwatching

In May 2025. Sixteen volunteers from the various Wolli Creek Birdo groups gathered at a meeting hosted by Laura Zusters to discuss training, bird apps, and the value of survey groups learning from each other.

Ann Fardell, who co-ordinates the Birdos' activities, attended a Committee meeting later in the month. She noted that the Birdos include many long-term volunteers, but that new people are joining, including some younger members. There are currently eight active survey sights in the Valley. Observations are entered into the Birdlife data set. Anne also noted that, due to an increase in the number of noisy miners, fewer small birds have been observed in the survey areas, and that more small, dense bushes are needed to provide them with food and protection.

Bat Counts

Bat counts are another popular citizen science activity. They are co-ordinated by long-time member and bat maven, Deb Little. Deb has 173 names on her email list, but a core group of 20 dedicated volunteers regularly attend counts, which function as a social as well as a scientific event.

The Society has now accumulated 17 years of data. Bat numbers in the Regional Park vary depending on the availability of food (fruit, blossoms, nectar and pollen). Counts are shared with the National Flying-fox monitoring program. There is disagreement about the national figures. Some argue that numbers are stable. Others argue that more data is needed before that conclusion is justified.

Many walkers become aware of the bat camp as they walk the Two-Valley Trail between Turrella Reserve and Girrahween Park. Increasing interest in the camp gave rise to the Bat picnic, which attracted 80 people in its first year. It now attracts hundreds (see above).

Ongoing concerns about the bat camp include global warming, as hot weather can cause death and interfere with reproduction. WCPS has established contacts with [WIRES](#), an organisation that cares for injured animals. We are also concerned to minimise disturbance to the bat camp from works conducted by NPWS and contractors. The management plan for the bat camp is due for an update as it is now 10 years old and the Flying-foxes have, since it was written, changed their principal roosting site from the southern side to the northern side of the creek (from Sydney Trains to NPWS land).

Organise!

WCPS Committee

WCPS is a registered charity governed by a constitution and run by a committee that consists of four executive members (President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer), and regular committee members of which there are currently four.

Just before Christmas last year The Committee was reduced to seven members due to the sudden departure of our former Treasurer, Abi Curtis, whom we thank for her years of service. Early in 2025, Kirsten Forrester agreed to take on the role of Treasurer. With extensive experience in the not-for-profit sector, Kirsten is spectacularly well-qualified for this position and has proven to be an excellent fit for the Committee whose membership in 2025 is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. WCPS Committee in 2025

Christopher Jordens	President
Laura Zusters	Vice President
Gina Svolos	Secretary
Kirsten Forrester	Treasurer
Susie Cornish	Committee member
Julie Deady	Committee member, Public Officer
Julia Frecheville	Committee member
Jakki Trenbath	Committee member

Over the past year, the Committee has gradually transitioned to an online platform (Google for Non-profits). Our aim is to phase out paper files completely and transfer digital file storage from personal computers to a shared drive. This ensures ongoing accessibility of the files, control of access, secure storage, and constant backup to the “cloud”. Committee members now use role-based email addresses, and we have trialled and adopted an app that is more suitable than email for rapid and targeted communication.

Our shift further into the digital realm has been enabled by a dedicated Subcommittee that combines the skills of Susie Cornish, Tim Pullen, Gina Svolos and Laura Zusters, with additional support and guidance from Penny Waterson. The shift is ongoing as we gradually transfer historical files to the “cloud” and adjust to a new digital environment that we hope will enable collaboration and co-operation into the rest of the 21st century.

The Society aims to maintain a physical presence with a storage facility in Girrahween Park. Susie Cornish is also negotiating access to the new amenity block in Waterworth Park where we hope to secure access to a bookable meeting space, toilets, storage space, and an outdoor area with signage about the Wolli Valley.

The Committee is supported by members who take on important responsibilities “off committee”. These members include Paul Ibbetson (Bushcare Co-ordinator), Peter Stevens (Monitors Co-ordinator), Deb Little (Bat Count), and Ann Fardell (Birdos Co-ordinator).

If you are interested in joining the Committee or working “off committee” in some capacity that allows you to exercise your abilities and pursue your own interests, please do not hesitate to contact us. We meet online six times a year, and in person once a year for a planning meeting. The committee works in a collegial, co-operative and mutually supportive manner. Members enjoy frequent contact between meetings as they work on various subcommittees, according to their desired level of commitment.

Membership

On 22 July 2024 the Society had 366 members.⁶ On 20 July 2025 we had 371 members. Membership numbers matter because they lend weight to our campaigns. They remind politicians and other decision-makers that we are constantly working not only to protect bushland and all the life it supports, but also to keep our members informed about the effects of decisions on the Regional Park and the wider natural environment in the Wolli and Bardwell Valleys.

Thanks to the following members for information and feedback provided in the compilation of this report:

- Paul Ibbetson and Julie Deady (bush care)
- Gina Svolos, Julie Deady, Julia Frecheville and Laura Zusters (2025 bat picnic)
- Gina Svolos (walks)
- Julie Deady (2024 annual dinner)
- Deb Little (bat counts)

⁶ WCPS has both individual and family memberships. When tallying memberships, we count family memberships as two individual memberships