



WCPS Annual Report: 2021

This report is being written for the second year in a row at a time when we are dealing with COVID 19 restrictions and as we come out of a four-month lockdown. This has continued to have an impact on some of the activities of the WCPS.

Our activities during this last year have continued to include our bushcare, advocacy, bat counts, bird counts, information and newsletters and updates to members. We have had to modify how we do some of our activities again with another COVID 19 lockdown from June to October 2021.

Unfortunately, due to lockdowns and other restrictions we have been unable to hold our annual dinner for a second year and our bat picnic could not be held in March due to restrictions. Our guided walks for both autumn and spring were planned during a time when there were very few restrictions but most of these had to be cancelled due to another lockdown and ongoing restrictions due to the Delta variant in Sydney.

During these times of restrictions, the Wolli Creek Regional Park has become a very popular local walk. We are now concerned that damage is occurring due to this increase in usage. Also, NPWS staff were unable to enter this area from July to end of September as it was considered an 'area of concern' which resulted in further restrictions. Several members have undertaken extra activities approved by NPWS to try to reduce the impact of these restrictions including putting up signage in vulnerable areas.

The Wolli Creek Preservation Society has continued to protect and preserve the Wolli Creek Valley during this time in many different ways as you will see outlined below in the various reports.

Committee developments

We were very pleased to be able to fill all positions on the committee at our last AGM. We welcomed one new committee member, Julie Muir. Committee member, Helen Campbell decided not to stand for nomination again.

The current committee members are:

- Gina Svolos – President, Walks Coordinator
- Deb Little – Deputy President, Bat Coordinator, Bat Picnic Coordinator
- Treasurer - Social Media admin, Schools Liaison
- Tim Pullen – Secretary and currently sharing the Membership team member
- Laura Zusters – general committee member, editor, designer and major contributor to our newsletter and social media admin.

- Karen Paroissien – general committee member
- Kate Flannery – general committee member and Membership team member
- Jakki Trenbath - general committee member and Membership team member
- Julie Muir – general committee member

Committee meetings have continued to be held via Zoom during this time.

Membership

Our Membership continues to be managed by a team of committee members to help spread the workload. Tim Pullen has continued to manage our database and other membership activities with assistance from Kate Flannery and Jakki Trenbath.

As of the 29 September our membership was at 316. This was an increase on our previous year's membership reported in the last annual report of 296. This was a pleasing number as with us continuing to have fewer public events due to COVID 19 we were unable to promote membership as we normally would. However, people did hear about us through our ongoing campaigning, promotion of the society on the walking tracks and as a result of the promotion of some of our other activities and we have increased our membership as a result. Committee members once again did ring many members to remind them to renew their membership which has also helped to keep our membership numbers higher.

Advocacy Update - Odour Control Unit – Report by Peter Stevens, Campaign Manager

WCPS has continued to oppose Sydney Water's proposed location for an Odour Control Unit (OCU) at the eastern end of the Wolli Creek Regional Park. A campaign, involving many volunteers letterboxing and handing out flyers at railway stations, markets and the WCRP, was begun to support a petition to the Water Minister, seeking a change. This was launched in January 2021 and was presented to the Minister once 4,000 signatures had been reached (May 2021). There has been no formal response from the Minister.

Meanwhile, three local Councils (Canterbury-Bankstown, Bayside, InnerWest) passed supportive motions and four local ALP MLAs (led by Sophie Cotsis) provided continued support, along with Greens Jenny Leong and Cate Faehrmann.

In June 2021, two articles about the issue, one focused on the support for the bushland by David Kirby QC, appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald. Other articles appeared in the St George Leader.

Using Public Access procedures, WCPS obtained a copy of the site assessment used by Sydney Water to reject the Society's alternative site. It had many flaws and these were drawn to the Minister's attention

in late July 2021, along with WCPS's Option W. This still uses the same site, but with a radical improvement on the layout Sydney Water used in its assessment.

Possibly as a response to this accumulation of pressure, Sydney Water made it known that the project was being redesigned and a new Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) would be conducted in late 2021. Sydney Water distributed a leaflet to residents in Unwin Street and Bayview Avenue in September 2021, announcing the review and has claimed that it has a new option that "alleviated all concerns". To address its misleads and evasions, WCPS distributed its own leaflet in the same.

Over August and September, WCPS provided to Sydney Water: WCPS expectations as to the wide range of stakeholders involved; the criteria that should be used in the MCA; and the weighting that should be given to each one. Other than informally agreeing to the stakeholders, an agreement later withdrawn, Sydney Water has declined to give any indication of its views or to make known in even the broadest terms the nature of its new proposal.

Sydney Water has effectively delayed any exchange of views or involvement of stakeholders until it tries to resolve all issues in just two workshops scheduled for late 2021. We have been assured that the MCA will specifically compare their new option with Option W. Meanwhile, OCU construction has been rescheduled for the second half of 2022.

Bird Surveys – Report by Ann Fardell, Birdos Coordinator

In last year's report I noted that it had been a memorable year for all the wrong reasons, bushfires and Covid. Well here we go again! Too early for bushfires of course and I hope we don't have any this Summer but Covid just won't leave us alone

In the early part of the year before the Delta variant knocked on Australia's door our survey teams were out and about surveying their sites. Some of our teams lost members but as we welcomed a number of new surveyors during the year we did not have any lack.

We presently have 8 active sites, 3 of which are not accepting new members as they have reached their practical limit. There are also 2 closed sites which could only open if 2 people volunteered as the terrain is difficult: Nanny Goat Hill and Bardwell Quarry and another closed site, Fauna Street Circuit.

As many of you know we have been entering our survey statistics to the Atlas of Living Australia's Biodiversity Data website. However many of us, particularly Dorothy Luther our Statistician, have been unhappy with the difficulty in extracting data from the ALA.

Dorothy therefore began investigating Birdlife Australia's "Birdata" website and liaising with members of the Birdata team. Dorothy communicated positive results of her investigation to all survey teams and everyone agreed that it would be beneficial to move to Birdata. Not only because of easier access for researchers to our data but also as the Birdata app is very user friendly making it simpler for survey teams to enter their data.

The changeover took many months as Dorothy and the Birdlife Australia Birdata team had to work out the best way to copy our data from ALA and the Birdata team also had to set up a portal specifically for Wolli Creek Birdos.

Before this was completed Dorothy and I organised a “Birdos Get Together” at Laura Zuster’s home so that Dorothy could update all teams on progress and everyone could talk “birds”. About 12 people attended and everyone brought a plate so we enjoyed delicious home-made savouries and cakes.

At the meeting it was agreed that once Wolli Creek Birdos Birdata was ready to go we would hold another get together for the sole purpose of training attendees on the Birdata app. Our trainer would be Holly Parsons from Birdlife Australia. Also discussed was setting up a Facebook group as Birdos had reported experiencing difficulties posting to the existing Wolli Creek Birdos Facebook page. It was unanimously agreed to start a new private group “Birdos of Wolli Creek”.

Then Delta arrived. At first as lockdowns were limited and as outdoor activity was encouraged our survey teams were still able to go out. However, the planned training could no longer be held in person, therefore a Zoom training session was organised. Again attendance was fantastic and we all learnt a great deal about the Birdata website and how to enter our statistics.

Everyone (even the technically challenged) are now using Birdata and report the app is indeed user friendly.

Recently, Dorothy has organised 3 students from Macquarie Uni to analyse our data. They will not only analyse present data but the 20th century data collected by Neil Rankin. The 3 questions they will seek to answer are:-

1. Identify which bird species visit the Wolli Creek valley seasonally
2. Identify whether there are greater populations of all species during Spring
3. Identify any changes in the seasonal patterns over time (40 years)

The students reported in September and Dorothy organise a Zoom meeting with Birdos to discuss results.

The Birdos of Wolli Creek Facebook Group is also up and running. It is a private group therefore people wishing to join must send through a request. So far we have 43 members many of whom post pictures and/or information on a regular basis. See <https://www.facebook.com/groups/birdoswollicreek>

Monthly Grey-headed Flying fox counts – Report by Deb Little, Bat Coordinator

Our monthly population counts of the Wolli/Turrella Grey-headed Flying-fox (GHFF) camp have been continuing, from late 2020 and into 2021; up until June 2021, when more severe restrictions on movement and gatherings due to the Covid pandemic (and the Delta variant arrival) were enacted. Up

until that time there continued to be a good roll up of regular and new counters for our third Friday of the month fly-out count. There have been some very enthusiastic people in that mix.

During 2020, the Flying-foxes were absent from the camp during July, September and October, so no scheduled counts took place for those months. To date in 2021, the flying-foxes have been present each month - although we were unable to count from June to August due to the Covid related restrictions. In September with restrictions on 'recreation' eased somewhat for those of us in LGA's of concern (ie a lot of us counters), we resumed counts with a limited number of (household related) people involved, in accordance with the NSW Gov. Public Health Order.

Sadly we were not able to hold our 'Bat Picnic' event in March 2021, due to the Covid restrictions. We commenced this annual event in March 2014.

We continued in late 2020 and in 2021 to contribute the relevant monthly count data to the National Flying-fox Monitoring Program, where data is collected on a quarterly basis (in Nov., Feb., May and Aug.). However this too was suspended in August 2021 due to Covid. restrictions. [Monitoring flying-fox camps and populations | NSW ...https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au > native-animals](https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/native-animals)

In late 2020, I was pleased, on behalf of WCPS, to nominate Meg Churches, WIRES Inner West bat co-ordinator, and a former Wolli bat counter, for an Australian Wildlife Society (AWS) Wildlife Rehabilitation Award. Even more pleasing, Meg won the award in early 2021, and was presented with her award (which included a cheque for \$1,000) at an AWS event held at NSW Parliament House.

Another event of note in 2021 was the arrival of some Little Red Flying-foxes in the Wolli GHFF camp; first noticed at the end of March. Numbers were estimated at 200 to 300, and this was a first for the Wolli camp, and quite an unusual event given their 'normal' distribution in Australia. They were gone from the camp by the end of April, which was a good thing for them, as they, unlike GHFF and Black Flying-foxes (the latter sometimes seen in very small numbers in the Wolli camp) give birth to their pups in winter months.

Identification of the Little Red Flying-foxes presence in the camp also coincided with ABC Everyday filming a segment about the Wolli camp with me and Peter Stevens.-
<https://www.facebook.com/abc/videos/376102113732444>

While the GHFF camp was initially established (around mid 2007) on the southern side of the creek on Sydney Trains-owned land, in recent years they have preferred to roost on the northern side of the creek by the TVT bush track on NPWS land - only visiting the southern side from time to time. It's not known why they changed their preference for roost sites.

Bushcare – Report by Georgina San Rogue, Bushcare Coordinator

Bushcare continued steadily through the year, with some breaks due to Covid restrictions especially since late June 2021 which continues on through to October.

There are 5 bushcare sites where volunteers carry out bush regeneration: from west to east Johnston Street, Paperbark Creek, Bray Avenue, Undercliffe and The Bluff. The Society is in the fortunate position of having three former professional bush regenerators to supervise the work at these sites, Deb Little, Pat Thomas and Georgina San Roque. In addition, Julie Deady has kindly helped with administration work for Bushcare.

Volunteers have carried out 1,423 hours of bush regeneration during the year. Covid requirements plus our normal break in January has meant the cancellation of bush regeneration in 4 of the 12 months in the period (and of course no sessions for the current financial year so far). Covid-safe measures put in place have been physical distancing, a maximum of 10 people on site for sessions, participants bring own morning tea, strict use of gloves for handling tools.

The Bushcare email list has 130 members, with approximately 45 people who have actually come to one or more sessions. Some volunteers have come very regularly to several sites and others only on occasion.

I would like to make special mention of Ann Porter who has volunteered since the start of Bushcare by the Society, and for many years also brought morning tea and looked after the tools on the Bray site. Ann has had to stop Bushcare in the last year due to health difficulties and we have missed her a lot – we are still trying to keep on top of the Asparagus, Ann!

There has been an influx of enquiries about joining Bushcare since the start of the pandemic. Sadly, we have not been able to accept most of those interested, either because there were no vacancies in groups or because of the difficulties of keeping physical distance while training new people on site. However, in May this year during a non-lockdown period we did hold a Training Day for 10 keen participants, supervised by Paul Ibbetson, Ute Foster and Georgina.

In March Jakki Trenbath organised a successful Clean-up event which removed lots of rubbish from the Creek surrounds.

In April, Gina Svolos organised a successful Planting Day at Illoura Reserve. She was assisted by Tim Pullen, Deb Little, Peter Stevens, Georgina and a happy roll-up of supporters and kids. Members will have seen this and other Bushcare news recorded by Laura Zusters in the Update.

During the year the Society completed a Communities Environment Program Grant received through Federal Member Linda Burney's office. All the events and bushcare volunteers assisted in carrying out the hours recorded in this grant. Regular bushcare, the events mentioned, bird and bat counts and guided walks through the Valley all contributed to a large number of volunteer hours of on-ground work and citizen science as reported for the Grant.

In addition, the Society funded a team of professional bush regenerators once a month to work on the various volunteer sites. This enabled the extension of worked areas, as at Paperbark Creek, and follow-up work in areas not suitable for volunteers, such as in the Wetland at Bray Avenue. This approach of having a team assist on volunteer sites has been an important aspect of the Society's care for the bushland for some years now. It has often been funded by grants from Federal and State bodies, and more recently by direct funding from the Society. A further year of funding is planned.

It is notable that members of the Society put in so much work in bush regeneration, citizen science and advocacy, all done by quite a small core group who are clearly passionate about the Valley. There is always room for expansion of this core group, particularly of course once we are all able to meet together again. However, from the bushcare perspective, we need to find ways of training new participants in understanding more about bush regeneration and working effectively and carefully on site. One pleasing aspect is that many of those enquiring about Bushcare seem to be from a somewhat younger generation (!). It is hoped that this will bode well for looking after the Wolli Creek Valley for the future.

Other activities

- **Bush walks** –Unfortunately due to COVID 19 walks were not planned for the second half of 2020. Only two of our autumn 2021 were held. One led by Laura and Sarah in April, and another led by Ute and Maggie in May. All of our spring 2021 walks had to be cancelled.
- **Update Newsletter** – continues to be an informative publication sent out to members and available at any time on our website. Laura Zusters continues to compile and layout this informative newsletter. Thanks to all who have contributed stories and reports.
- **Annual Dinner** – as mentioned above the October 2021 dinner was not held due to COVID 19 restrictions. The inability to plan for this dinner will unfortunately affect our income again for this coming year.
- **Neil Rankin Award** - due to COVID 19 restrictions this did not proceed this year.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank everyone involved in our activities and programs. Whether you have participated in bushcare, bird surveys, bat counts, bushwalks, or other activities such as contributing to our newsletter or joined or renewed your membership, or perhaps you made a donation, your contribution to our work is appreciated. This year our campaigning against the Odour Control Unit has been really important so thank you also to all who have participated in writing letters to your MP, signed the petition, letterboxed or handed out leaflets at stations or markets.

It is great to see that the WCPS continues to work towards its valuable aims of protecting the Wolli Creek Valley with the help of its members and supporters even with the restrictions imposed on us by COVID 19.

Gina Svolos
President
19 October 2021