

# Wolli Creek Preservation Society

## Annual Report 2024

*By Chris Jordens, President. August 2024*



2024 has been a watershed year for Wolli Creek Preservation Society (WCPS). Two major campaigns came to fruition. The first was signalled by the Premier's announcement on 8 March that \$13M had been allocated in the state budget to complete the Wolli Creek Regional Park. It was no coincidence that this announcement was made at the foot of Nannygoat Hill, which is surely "ground zero" of Sydney's urban conservation moment, given that the struggle to preserve it began in 1967. The announcement raises many questions about how the money will be spent, but it should also be seen in its historical context.

The Regional Park was first proposed by WCPS in the mid-1980s. Preservation of the bushland was promised in 1988 under a coalition government, and in 1998 a Labor government promised to establish a Regional Park in the Valley. Over the next two decades, WCPS ran four campaigns seeking to hold the government to its promises. In 2010 the slogan was "12 years is too long". Who would have thought back then that the struggle was only half over?

As we know, the struggle is never over: the price of parks is eternal vigilance! But we should pause to celebrate the success of those who have campaigned tirelessly and successfully for the Regional Park.

Another campaign that came to fruition this year concerns the Odour Control Unit (OCU) that Sydney Water planned to build at the eastern entrance to the Regional Park. WCPS ran a campaign that featured an alternative location for this piece of infrastructure (Option W). In last year's annual report, Peter Stevens wrote that Sydney Water had suspended its plan. One reason Sydney Water gave was for this was that the OCU could not have dealt with one of the pollutants affecting the sewerage system. On 15 August 2023, Sydney Water announced it had finally abandoned its plans. So, this year we can say that the Society's campaign was a success in at least four respects:

1. A monstrosity will not be built at the eastern entrance to the Regional Park.
2. Wolli Bluff and the bushcare site there remains intact.
3. It's likely that our campaign helped to save Sydney Water the embarrassment of building a huge piece of infrastructure that was not fit for purpose.
4. Land that the OCU would have occupied can now become part of the Regional Park.

These two successful campaigns were led by our Vice-President and former President, Peter Stevens. Peter will be stepping down from the Committee at the 2024 Annual General Meeting. This marks the end of an era. As well as leading these two major campaigns to fruition, Peter has for several decades had a hand in many if not most of the other activities undertaken by the Society. So, this is also an appropriate moment to acknowledge his contribution and thank him for his tireless work.

The departure of Peter Stevens and Deb Little from the Committee marks a historical shift. The first wave of activists in the 1980s led campaigns that saved the bushland from destruction by a freeway. The second wave consolidated the successes of the 1980s through ongoing advocacy that has brought the bushland under the control of National Parks, and by

establishing a program of bushcare which is now a core activity of the Society. Deb Little was part of the first wave, and the second wave was led by the dynamic duo of Peter Stevens and Deb Little, who recently stepped down from the Committee after 34 years of tireless and effective work. While stepping away from the committee, Deb and Peter will no doubt remain active within WCPS through their various other activities. On behalf of the Committee and all our members, I thank and congratulate them for all they have done and wish them all the best for the coming years—which will hopefully be a bit more relaxing!

The activities of the WCPS are many and varied, but they can be summed up as follows. In the Wollie Creek Valley and Regional Park,

- we PROTECT and enhance wildlife habitat
- we ADVOCATE for the natural environment
- we EDUCATE and raise awareness about the value of the natural environment, and
- we ORGANISE as a formal society.

My review of the year is organised under these four headings.

## Protecting and enhancing wildlife habitat

### Bushcare

Bushcare sessions were interrupted in 2020-21 by restrictions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, but this year they were back in full swing. We now have six sites, each with its own experienced supervisor, and we have a new Bushcare Co-ordinator, Paul Ibbetson, who has extensive experience in bush regeneration with the National Trust and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). We also have a Senior Field Officer in the valley for the first time in seven years, Daniel Towning. He also has a background in bushcare and is expected to be working mainly in Wollie Creek Regional Park. I recently accompanied Paul and Dan on a tour of the bushcare sites and made the following observations.

The Regional Park presents major challenges for bushcare. Being a long, narrow corridor, it is highly exposed to the surrounding urban environment. One obvious consequence is the drainage of stormwater into the park and the litter that ends up in our waterways. Councils are responsible for stormwater, and fifteen years ago Canterbury Council obtained substantial grant funding from the federal Labor government to install Gross Pollutant Traps (GPTs) to help deal with this problem at various sites along Wollie Creek including Turrella Reserve, Bray Ave and Highcliff Road. Enthusiasm for GPTs has since waned, however, as the current staff baulk at the maintenance costs.

Another consequence of the proximity to suburbia is the dumping that occurs, typically along boundaries of the Regional Park. This includes garden waste, building waste, and household items dumped by residents who fail to phone the Council for a free collection. The Society alerted Canterbury Bankstown Council to one egregious example of dumped building waste on Bayview Avenue, Earlwood (See *Update* no. 99, February 2023). However, the Certifier appears to have convinced the Council that there is nothing to see there, and the Council has accepted this fiction. The Society lodged a complaint against the Certifier with the Department of Fair Trading, but it has gone unanswered. This exemplifies how weakly environmental protections are enforced in Sydney.

There are 5km of track through the park, and some of it needs upgrading. Walkers will appreciate the raised fibreglass walkway on the Girraheen Track near the bat camp. Other sections of the track would benefit from similar installations.

Many sites within the park have been subject to massive physical disturbances. Three examples stood out on the tour. One is the bridge that was built across Hartill-Law Ave in the 1950s. This turned a “meander” in the creek into a large billabong and, despite the efforts of WCPS since 2003, this still contains patches of a noxious aquatic weed (*Ludwigia peruviana*). Other weeds and rubbish wash in whenever Wolli Creek floods. Furthermore, the creek formed the legal boundary between two Council areas, so as well as creating an enduring physical disturbance, the straightening of the creek created boundary anomalies that are yet to be resolved.

A second example of physical disturbance lies at our newest bushcare site in Turrella Reserve. Because of the market gardens that were previously located there, the planted vegetation sits on fill as well as alluvial soil. This favours weeds, especially vines such as Madeira Vine, Morning Glory and Asparagus.

A third example of disturbance is the area opposite Jackson Place which, in the 1960s and 1970s, was used on the sly as a tip. NPWS would not accept this land until it was remediated. Now that it has been sealed and capped with sandstone, it has become part of the Regional Park. Because both Turrella Reserve and the land near Jackson Place have been re-planted, they will need a lot of maintenance, and we need contractors and volunteers working at both sites well into the future.

As well as physical disturbances, the environment is affected by the absence of bushfires, which are part of the natural cycle of bush regeneration. This favours the growth of fire-sensitive plants like Pittosporums, Cheese trees (*Glochidion ferdinandi*) and Water Vine (*Cissus hypoglauca*). Some walkers might have noticed that in 2024, NPWS conducted a controlled burn near Girraheen Park, which contains the largest piece of remnant bushland in the Regional Park.

As well as *Ludwigia*, many other weeds pose a constant challenge for bushcare activities. *Ehrharta* is a ubiquitous menace due to the speed of germination. Corky passionfruit (*Passiflora suberosa*) spreads on runners underground, is difficult to kill, and smothers trees. Morning glory (*Ipomoea purpurea*) and other vines also smother native vegetation and have thrived in the wet conditions that have prevailed over the past year.

Another set of challenges facing the bushcare program affects the Society as a whole: that of our limited capacity as a volunteer group. When I asked Paul Ibbetson whether we should establish formal bushcare sites near Jackson Place, Girraheen Park and (optimistically) at Unwin Street, he replied that the whole Park should be a bushcare site. He then highlighted the constraints we currently face. Many volunteers (including me) have had no formal bushcare training. Unfortunately, enquiries seldom yield boots on the ground, and even when they do, there is a degree of “churn” as volunteers move in and out of the Valley. Also, our most experienced Bushcare Supervisors are ageing, and although they put in an amazing effort (Deb Little and Peter Stevens between them attend no less than 15 sessions per month!), we will need another cohort of skilled and knowledgeable Supervisors to take their place.

During Paul’s tour, I was reminded of a proposal that we should record the history of each bushcare site. This should include both the specific challenges at each site (because they vary) and the remarkable improvements that have been made. Volunteers have attended some sites for 25 years, and the results are plain to see. This task poses yet another challenge to our limited capacity, however.

## Monitoring the Wolli Valley

### Track monitors

Track Monitors regularly walk through the Regional Park and report back to the Committee. Problems are documented and the relevant authorities are informed. Valerie Atkinson and Alan Mitchell monitor the Western end of the Regional Park (Girrahween Park to Bexley North). Abi Curtis monitors the central section of the park (Turrella Reserve to Girrahween Park) and I monitor the eastern end of the Park (Undercliffe and Jackson Tracks). We all enjoy regular walks in the Valley and work to our own schedule.

We would welcome any members who would also like to be Track Monitors. We provide guidance about what to look out for. You don't have to attend any meetings, and you can support the aims of the Society while you enjoy walking the trails.

### Monitoring and responding to developments

“Zombie developments” arise where lax environmental standards of the past are not updated, and thereby continue to adversely affect the environment in the present. In 2024, the Society continued to deal with two zombie developments.

One lies at 1-9 Henderson Street Turrella, where the owner has been able to turn part of Wolli Creek's riparian zone into a hard stand and, through protracted delaying tactics, evade responsibility for minimising the damage done to that important environment.

Another zombie lies further east along Wolli Creek on a site that was, until recently, occupied by a demolition company without the proper authority from Bayside Council. The site is now occupied by a company that washes buses. We need no longer lament the bad old days when industries such as wool washing polluted our waterway; we can lament bus-washing! It is high time that environmental standards were routinely upgraded when new leases are negotiated.

I have already mentioned the failure of Canterbury Bankstown Council to enforce environmental protections at a development on Bayview Ave. This case demonstrates the importance of buying back private land from owners before they can trash bushland that has been earmarked for inclusion in the Regional Park. Given the amount of rubble that was tipped down the slope behind the block (directly above one of our bushcare sites!), the State Government surely has grounds to heavily discount the purchase price.

In 2024, a [major new development](#) was proposed at the former Salvation Army site in Bexley North. If implemented, the proposal would remove 50 mature trees and increase density by 40 lots (some dual occupancies), with a meagre 600m<sup>2</sup> set aside for open space, replacing the current much larger area. Bayside Council letterboxed 100 nearby residents and received 66 submissions in response, overwhelmingly opposing the development. WCPS responded with a submission drafted by Peter Stevens that proposed an alternative plan—one that afforded adequate green space as well as new housing. We shared this alternative proposal with the same 100 residents, also via their letterboxes. We then wrote to the Minister for Planning, Paul Scully, who promptly replied that this was a matter for Bayside Council. Never mind that the developer's proposal contradicts the Premier's statement at Nannygoat Hill on 8 March 2024:

*We can't just build houses; we have to build world class beautiful parks, and that means preserving every bit of green space that we can possibly get our hands on. We see the housing agenda and the green space agenda working together.*

We applaud the Premier's fine words, but Councils and property developers need to adopt the same stance.

We monitored three other developments in 2024. One was tunnelling work to enable a power cable for the M6 tunnels further south to cross the Regional Park at Bray Avenue. Close monitoring by the Society helped to minimise the environmental impact of this work, but it caused damage that the bush will take several years to recover from.

In Johnston Street Earlwood, contractors working for Sydney Water cut a swathe through a bushcare site in 2022 (See *Update* no. 97, July 2022). The Society was able to secure compensation from the contractors in the form of new plantings in Illoura Reserve nearby. These will need ongoing attention to help them get established and prevent invasion by weeds. Some funding was also provided for this purpose.

We have been expecting remedial works on the Undercliffe Track where, early in 2022, a rain garden collapsed and released a stream of dumped garbage including asbestos. The Council appears to have done nothing here other than cover the garbage with black plastic that has recently been blown away by the wind. We are following up on this.

### Controlling non-native animals

In 2024, Bayside Council issued an [information sheet](#) to residents about responsible dog ownership. Given that [roaming pet cats kill about 65 million native animals annually in Greater Sydney](#), WCPS will press councils for a matching information sheet on responsible cat ownership.

### Controlling human impacts

In 2024, our efforts to control human impacts in the Regional Park were focussed on dumping and cycling. Damage caused by bikes in the Regional Park are to some extent due to misdirections on Apple Maps, OpenStreet maps and Google Maps. We have had these corrected, but mistakes are sometimes re-introduced by automated online systems that are unresponsive to human attempts to correct them.

## Advocating for the natural environment

### Campaigns

I covered two major, successful campaigns in my introduction. I should add that the campaign to complete the Regional Park is ongoing. We hope to secure another five hectares for the park, and we are also campaigning to connect it to other green corridors. This is an important goal of urban nature conservation, and we see the possibility of major gains at the eastern end of the Regional Park along Wolli Creek.

In December 2023 we developed a joint proposal with residents of Unwin Street, Earlwood, that seeks to preserve six blocks of land there for open space. Three of the blocks (14-18) are on the high, eastern end of Unwin Street. Being both contaminated and unstable, they are unsuitable for residential development. Although the bush there currently consists largely of weeds, it is a haven and breeding ground for small birds that are rapidly disappearing from the area due to loss of habitat. If a bushcare site were established there, within ten years it could be brought up to a standard that could make it suitable for incorporation into the Regional Park.

Furthermore, the current entrance to the Eastern end of the Regional Park lies behind a cyclone wire fence that many walkers mistake for a no-go zone. Right next to the entrance, there are two blocks at the foot of Wolli Bluff that have already been incorporated into the Regional Park. Together with the three vacant blocks at 14-18 Unwin St, these could form a more suitable “gateway” to the Regional Park.

The three remaining blocks lie at the bottom of Unwin Street. These were set aside for a road that will no longer be built, and so are considered by the state government to be “surplus to requirements.” Because they lie on a natural watercourse, they are prone to flooding; and being adjacent to what was formerly a tip, they are also undoubtedly contaminated. This is an ideal site for a constructed wetland, such as the one at Cup and Saucer Creek in the Cooks River Valley. The wetland would help to control stormwater runoff from the ridge that runs along Bayview Avenue; it would improve the quality of the stormwater that empties into Wollie Creek; it would help to preserve remnant saltmarsh on the banks of the Creek, and it would provide habitat for native water birds and other native fauna.

Another environmental win would be intensive re-vegetation of the riparian zone along Wollie Creek, on the south side of Waterworth Park. This land is also subject to flooding, especially during king tides. We are currently negotiating with sporting groups that are seeking to expand the number of sport fields in Waterworth Park. This would entail the loss of mature trees in the centre of the park. We accept that more sporting fields are need as the population grows, and we are working to develop a joint plan that would enable more sporting fields *and* a green corridor along Wollie Creek linking the eastern end of the Regional Park to the Cooks River Valley.

The “Unwin Green Street” proposal enjoys strong support from Canterbury Bankstown Council, particularly the current Mayor, Councillor Bilal El Hayek. The Council will soon commence works that will upgrade the path on the south side of Unwin Street and include plantings of local native trees that will add to the green corridor that we envisage. The joint proposal also enjoys support from the independent Councillor, Barbara Coorey, the local member, Sophie Cotsis, and the National Parks Association.

It should by now be apparent that the doors of the current state government have been open to us. In 2024, Committee Members have met with local MLAs Chris Minns, Sophie Cotsis, Steve Kamper and we will soon meet with Jo Haylen. We have also met with staff from the ministerial offices of Paul Scully (Planning) and Penny Sharpe (Environment). We have been given the chance to make our case; we have been listened to, and what we hear back is generally supportive. In short, the previous state election has been a game-changer for our campaigning efforts. But in the end, it is actions that count, and this time next year we will be reporting to our members exactly to what extent the espoused support has translated into positive environmental outcomes. And we will continue to campaign accordingly.

## Responding to Council Campaigns

Canterbury Bankstown Council invited feedback this year on its *Draft Urban Bushland and Biodiversity Strategy*, its *Draft Catchment and Waterways Strategic Plan*, and its (currently non-existent) *Urban Forest Plan*. WCPS submitted considered responses to each. A recent decision by Council stands as a warning, however, about the disconnect that can occur between written words and reality. Although the first of these documents extolls the importance of biodiversity and local species, the council decided to replace fig trees around Earlwood shops with a single species that is not local and that can spread to the regional park. Go figure!

## Educating and raising awareness

The Society’s stated mission is to protect both the natural and cultural values of the Wollie Creek Valley. The latter include the long pre-colonial history in which First Nations people cared for country. To help raise awareness of this history, and the ongoing presence of First Nations people in the Valley, the Committee issued a statement in support of a “yes” vote in the referendum on a Voice to Parliament, and some of us carried the Society’s banner in the

Yes23 Rally in September 2023. I also acted as a guide in the “Resilience Walks” that seek to raise awareness of same history from which we take inspiration (see below). The committee accepts that some members and some First Nations people disagree with our position on the referendum, but we unanimously agreed that to remain silent would have been to neglect our stated mission.

## Website

The Society’s [website](#) is one of the mainstays of our virtual existence (which I discuss in the final section of this report). Our new website went live on 10 September 2023, thanks to a hard-working subcommittee consisting of Deb Little, Tim Pullen, Gina Svolos, and Laura Zusters, with Penny Waterson leading the technical work. This was an enormous task that required sustained attention to detail. The result is not only functional and informative; it is also beautiful.

## Events and informative talks

Many of the Society’s regular outreach events were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They have since resumed.

Annual Dinners resumed in 2022 at the Bardwell Valley Golf Club. These are a collective effort, but the effort is driven by Julie Deady and Gina Svolos who ensure seamless organisation. The annual dinner in October 2023 quickly sold out, and we maintained our record of fabulous guest speakers. Our speaker in 2023 was Peter Ridgeway, a conservation ecologist who works with Aboriginal communities, farmers, community and government to conserve and restore the Cumberland Plain as both a human and natural landscape. Peter gave a fascinating presentation about how our cultural history often has surprising roots in the geography, geology, and ecology of our natural landscapes.<sup>1</sup>

The Annual Bat Picnic resumed in March 2024 thanks to the efforts of the indefatigable Deb Little. Between three and four hundred participants enjoyed the spectacle of thousands of Grey-headed Flying Foxes becoming airborne in the early evening. The mood was festive and relaxed, and as usual, the face-painting and kite-flying were a hit with the young people. It was great to see our young members outdoors looking up instead of down at their phones.

WCPS also hosted a Picnic for Nature” at Girrahween Picnic Area Earlwood under the auspices of the Nature Conservation Council NSW, on 21 October 2023. Thanks to Dorothy Luther for organising this.

## Kayak trips

WCPS continued to partner with the River Canoe Club of NSW to run our popular [paddle trips](#) up Wollie Creek. Some events had to re-scheduled due to rain, but tour groups were successfully launched on 9 Sept and 4 Nov 2023, and on 19 May 24. All three events were fully booked, with places for 12 participants on each tour.

The River Canoe Club provides canoes, life jackets, insurance and makes the clubhouse available for afternoon tea. The Society handles ticketing and communications with participants. We also guide the tour, with several stops along the route for commentary. After the tour, we provide afternoon tea for participants.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Ridgeway is the author of *Made by Nature: How Sydney’s wild landscapes made us* (Megalong Books 2022).

Upcoming paddles are planned for the Spring 2024, on 8 and 14 September. Be sure to book early this year to avoid disappointment! Many thanks to Kate Flannery, who co-ordinates these excellent adventures.

## Bush-Friendly gardens

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) runs a project called *Shopfront* that links students to community organisations for the purpose of completing projects that have real-world impacts.

We are keen to encourage our regional park neighbours to have gardens that minimise the escape of invasive weeds into the park and perhaps even provide extended habitat for birds and small animals. To this end Susie Cornish submitted a successful *Shopfront* proposal this year for students to help design a short campaign video, information sheets and a flyer for park neighbours, all on the topic of bush friendly gardens. Students will also enjoy being immersed for a day in the Regional Park.

## Engaging with schools and families

To complement our annual bat picnic and regular walks, one of our committee members, Kitty Hauser, organised a “walk and sketch” in November 2023, in collaboration with local artist and educator, Robyn Chiles. Participants were guided through the Girrahween Track and given an opportunity to draw with others and learn about the flora, fauna and rock formations of Wolli Creek, and the pleasures of drawing nature outdoors. About 20 people (both children and adults) attended and shared a picnic at the end. This event was a roaring success, so we hope to run another “walk and sketch” again soon.

## *Update* newsletter

Laura Zusters continues to compile and edit our *Update* Newsletter, which still appears three times a year. More than 100 back issues of *Update* are now available on the WCPS Website. We hope to transition soon to a different format online to enable more timely and frequent communication with our members.

## Guided walks

In the Spring of 2023 and the Autumn of 2024, Gina Svolos co-ordinated a series of guided walks that shared the history, landscapes and nature with those who attended. These included

- A Wildflower Walk from Girrahween Park to Turrella Reserve (27 August 2023)
- A Story of Survival Walk from Bexley North to Tempe (30 September 2023)
- Nature Connection and Wellbeing Walks (14 October and 18 November 2023 and 24 March 2024)
- Walk from Bardwell Park to Tempe (29 October 2023)
- Fighting for Wolli (12 November 2023)
- Walk from Bexley North to Turrella Reserve to Celebrate the Wurridjal Festival (9 March 2024)
- Walk from Girrahween Park to Tempe (21 April 2024)

The walks in Autumn were conducted in partnership with Canterbury Bankstown Council. Thanks to all the volunteers who shared their time and knowledge with our community.

The WCPS is currently working on a self-guided interactive walk through the Regional Park. I hope to say more about this in next year’s Annual Report.

I also led a “Resilience Walk” from Tempe House to Girrahween Park on 1 June 2024. These walks aim to highlight the enduring presence of First Nations People in the Valley and are organised by Barton RAG with support from the office of the Hon. Linda Burney, who launched the inaugural walk on 1 June at Tempe House, with Aunty Jennifer Newman giving a moving acknowledgement of country.

## WCPS on Social Media

Our Facebook page ([Protect Wolli Creek Valley](#)) has 2.5K followers and continues to be monitored by Abi Curtis and Laura Zusters.

Abi also monitors our Instagram account, @protectwollicreek, which has 147 followers.

I monitor the Society’s account on X (formerly Twitter), Wolli Creek Preservation Society @wollipossum, which currently has 486 followers.

Why not follow us on one or all of these platforms?

## Citizen Science

### Wolli Creek Birdos (by Ann Fardell)

Some bird surveys had to be delayed or cancelled this year due to the persistent wet weather. Nevertheless, new and enthusiastic people also joined up, including a PhD candidate from Macquarie University who was investigating “effects of habitat enhancement on bird assemblages in an urban park”. Her study was based on Waterworth Park, and she was awarded a high distinction for the final report. Dorothy Luther assisted by providing historical statistics, and Rod Byatt from the Waterworth Park team was an enthusiastic mentor and guide, along with the rest of the team.

Membership of the Birdos of Wolli Creek (private) [Facebook page](#) continues to grow. Members—some of whom are professional photographers—frequently post about interesting bird sightings and provide photos.

Thanks to all who contributed to the ongoing success of this initiative.

### Bat Count (by Deb Little)

We are now into the 16th year of monthly bat fly-out counting. This is a way of monitoring the population of Grey-Headed Flying Foxes in Wolli Creek.

The bat camp there continues to occupy an area along the Two Valley Trail between Turrella Reserve and Girrahween Park, over a recently installed boardwalk. The camp was continuously occupied over the year from the end of June 2023 to the end of June 2024, and the count varied from a high of 19,850 individuals in July 2023 to a low of 2,770 in July 2024.

The bat e-list has 175 people on it. Twelve new people joined the counts this year, with half adding to a core group of 22 regular attenders (i.e., they attend at least two out of three counts over a year). We meet at sunset, and because this time changes during the year, some members are unable to get away from work or other commitments in time. Nevertheless, even in the depths of winter, 12 to 16 people turn up for the count, and this easily allows us to cover the three counting locations (Turrella Reserve, Coolibah Reserve and Ron Gosling Reserve). Overall, the counts have gained in popularity over the past 16 years

We continue to contribute quarterly data to the [National Flying-fox Monitoring Program \(NFFMP\)](#). A recent (March 2024) [peer reviewed paper](#) that was based on 10 years of results

from the NFFMP (and that was also summarised in [The Conversation](#)) warrants cautious optimism concerning population trends in this vulnerable species:

*Despite the general perception that the species is in decline, our raw data and the modelled population trend suggest the grey-headed flying-fox population has remained stable during the NFFMP period, with the range also stable. These results indicate that the species' extreme mobility and broad diet bestow it with a high level of resilience to various disturbance events.*

With more funding now going to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, I hope we will soon see more information about the biology and ecological role of Grey Headed Flying Foxes made available to visitors in the Regional Park.

I also hope that, when circumstances allow, we will be able to manage and reduce the invasive Morning Glory vine which, after the recent wet weather, is visibly encroaching on the camp. This will require caution, however. The need to preserve canopy and subcanopy must be balanced against two other considerations. First, disturbance and distress to the Flying Foxes should be minimised, especially during breeding season. Second, the vine provides them with cover/refuge during heat waves.

### Fungi Forays

Twice a year the [Sydney Fungal Studies Group \(SFSG\)](#) organises “fungi forays” in the Wolli Creek Valley. These also prove to be a popular citizen science initiative among our members. The recent forays led by [David Noble](#) booked out in no time. In this respect, the recent wet weather during the past year has been a boon.

## ORGANISE as a formal society

### Membership

Our membership numbers have rebounded from a dip during the COVID19 pandemic. Our total membership on 22 July 2024 was 366, which was up 7.6% on figures from July last year.

### Committee

The Committee has maintained an average of eight members over recent years. During the past year, Kitty Hauser stepped down from the Committee due to competing commitments. I covered the recent departure of Peter Stevens and Deb Little from our committee in the introduction to this report. Susie Cornish joined in August 2023 and Julia Frecheville joined in March 2024, bringing new energy and commitment.

The committee works co-operatively. Each member contributes according to the time and skills they have available. I think of it as a smart hive-mind. Deliberations are characterised by mutual respect and arrive at sensible decisions. And the decisions lead to action. The committee also currently faces several challenges, however.

I have already alluded above to one of these challenges. There is a large imbalance between the scope of our activities and our capacity. Because of that imbalance we have prioritised certain activities.

Another set of challenges arises from being a virtual organisation. WCPS has no central office. We have access to a storeroom in Girrahween Park, but it floods, and this limits what we can keep there. We have relied on the generosity of members for years to store our

physical records in the spare rooms and cupboards. Increasingly, documents are stored on personal computers, which minimises the demand for physical space but makes records inaccessible. WCPS increasingly exists as a virtual organisation. This makes us incredibly cost-effective: money that we might otherwise have to spend on rent can be diverted into activities that have a much more direct impact on the Valley and Regional Park, such as bushcare. But virtual existence poses its own challenges.

We recently dealt with one of these challenges, i.e., our website (see above), but we now face another set of challenges that implicate our member database, our email communications, our newsletter and our records. These are all vital components of our virtual existence. They are interlinked. They have cybersecurity implications, and they require software platforms we're not familiar with. We have some digitally savvy members such as Tim Pullen, who has done a lot of heavy lifting in this area both on and off the Committee. And we are fortunate to be able to draw again on the expertise of Penny Waterson who has already helped us so much with our new website, because these challenges require professional expertise.

I see this as one of the main challenges now facing the Committee. If you can help, please get in contact. And if there is anything else in this Annual Report that appeals to you, please make contact. Consider joining the Committee. We meet every two months, usually online via Zoom, so there's no travel involved.

If you don't have the time or inclination for committee work, you can still contribute to our activities off-committee, doing something you are good at, and that you enjoy doing.



**Wolli Creek Preservation Society**