



VICTORY FOR OATLEY: BOWLING CLUB TO REMAIN OPEN SPACE

At a Georges River Council meeting on 18 December, 2018 Mayor Kevin Greene made the shock announcement that the bowling club site in Myles Dunphy Reserve would remain open space. This ended community division dating back to 2006 when it was proposed to rezone the site to allow construction of a five-storey senior housing project.

OFF was at the spearhead of an energetic campaign against the proposal, with members attending Council meetings, lobbying Councillors, writing letters and signing petitions. The Society's argument was based on the loss of public open space as the site is a part of Myles Dunphy Reserve (even though Council claimed it was "adjacent" to the reserve). It is also in a bush-fire danger area with poor access, putting any future senior residents in danger.



Cr Greene pointed out that GRC's draft Open Space Strategy identifies many shortfalls in the current supply of open space and that the provision of council-owned sites for aged-care and senior housing should not occur at the expense of open space and recreational facilities. "The provision of open space for the public is a more critical priority for Council as they are rarely provided to any large extent by the private sector", said Cr Greene. He noted that the traditional role of government is to provide open space and recreational facilities to service the needs of the population.

It was proposed that the whole of the site should be retained as open space zoning and Council should explore opportunities to address the shortfall in recreational facilities at the Bowling Club site.

The full text of this minute can be read here:

http://infoweb.georgesriver.nsw.gov.au/grinfocouncil/Open/2018/12/CCL_17122018_AGN_AT_SUP_WEB.htm

The St George and Sutherland Leader reported this on its web site:

<https://www.theleader.com.au/story/5817176/oatley-bowling-club-site-to-remain-as-open-space/?cs=1507>

OFF FACEBOOK PAGE

In case you weren't aware, we are on Facebook at Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society. The page is updated regularly with news and photos and you are welcome to send in any items of interest. Click here to follow us on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/OatleyFloraandFauna?>



2019 ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS NOW DUE

Annual OFF subscriptions are now due. Subscription is still only \$25 per person or family (living at the same address), for the year.

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND CALL FOR NOMINATIONS TO JOIN OFF COMMITTEE

Best wishes for 2019 are extended by the 2018 Committee to all our members and friends. The first meeting for the year will be the Annual General Meeting on **Monday, 4 February** where the 2019 office bearers and Committee will be elected. Come along to the meeting for a report on OFF activities and accomplishments over the past 12 months. This is your chance to comment on activities, management and direction of your society. Meeting start time is 7.30 pm. **Also, a reminder that we are calling for members to form a new Committee for 2019, you are invited to nominate at the meeting.**

MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT VISIT TO OATLEY

On 11 December 2018, Gabrielle Upton, the Minister for Environment, Local Government and Heritage visited Oatley to inspect the second round of planting at River Rd Reserve, carried out by OFF members and funded by the state government. She was accompanied by Mark Coure, Member for Oatley.

Members took the opportunity to raise several issues with the Minister. These included the establishment of a national park for koalas in south-west Sydney, improving and enforcing land clearing laws, introducing a ban on single-use plastic, the abuse of carbon offsets resulting in inappropriate plantings in 18 national parks, and the need to cull feral horses from Kosciusko National Park.

They also spoke about transitioning to renewable energy, the protection and restoration of bushland and forest habitat, the loss of green space in the local area, the ending of logging in native forests, and the transfer of the responsibility for recycling of packaging to back to manufacturers.



For further information on the visit, see:

<https://www.theleader.com.au/story/5818315/environment-minister-visits-oatley/>

MURRAY-DARLING DISASTER

Pictures of a million dead fish in the Darling River near Menindee have shocked the public. The cause is not just the long drought, but government policy allowing exorbitant amounts of water to be drained from the Murray-Darling Basin, over decades. You can voice your concern by writing to the NSW Water Minister, Niall Blair and to the NSW Premier.

OFF SUPPORT FOR KOALAS

At the November meeting, \$111 was raised from the sale of jams made by Bev Watters and additional donations. This money will be sent to the Total Environment Centre's Save Sydney's Koalas campaign. Fruit for Bev's jams were donated by Deb Stephenson (oranges) and Heather de Moore (lemons and limes). Thank you to everyone who was involved and donated.

Coming OFF Events in January/February 2019
OFF Full Year Events Calendar at: off.oatleypark.com/program

4 February 2019 - Annual General Meeting

The first meeting for 2019. Hear reports about what OFF has been doing in the past year, followed by election of the new committee.

25 February 2019 – Australia’s Dry Lands, Talk by Professor David Eldridge

Prof. David Eldridge talking on Australia’s dry lands and the effect of agriculture and feral pests on our fragile landscapes.

Advance Notice – Clean-up Australia Day

Sunday 3 March, 2019. This year OFF will be cleaning up the edges of Poulton Park. Meet at Morshead Cr. at or after 8.30 am.

Advance Notice – Field trip to the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney

Tuesday 5 March, 2019. Morning tour led by Gardens Guide and OFF member, Amanda Gibson. Details to come in OFF News February, 2019 issue.

Meetings of the Society are held at the Oatley RSL Club, 23 Letitia St, Oatley (lower level sports room) from 7.30 pm to 9.30 pm, usually on the fourth Monday of the month. Visitors and accompanied children are welcome at meetings and field days.

BRIEFLY SPEAKING

OATLEY PARK BUSHCARE group is on the second Saturday of each month starting at 12.00 pm. Meet at the entrance on Douglas Haig Street.

MYLES DUNPHY STREAMWATCH Details Heather Stolle 0425 291 879. This activity usually takes place on the Tuesday morning (9.00 am) after OFF General Meetings.

OFF ACTIVITIES 2019 The Activities Officer, Graham Fry is putting together the OFF program for 2019. He is looking for more outings for the program. So would members please consider leading an activity in 2019, it doesn't have to be a bushwalk, as visits to interesting places are always popular. Please contact Graham Fry fryg45@gmail.com with any suggestions.

POOL TO POND Ku-ring-gai Council has developed a program to help residents convert unused swimming pools into vibrant beautiful outdoor ponds - a great idea! To find out more, go to: www.kmc.nsw.gov.au/pooltopond

OFF ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT 2018

The Annual Financial report is shown in the following tables. The year on year comparison is impacted from the following factors.

- The injection of grant moneys in one year and spent in later years causes the large variations in surplus and later deficits.

- Also impacting the annual figures in any year is the holding by OFF of grant money for other organisations as they do not have the required accreditation.

- Activities that are 'one off' in nature, under miscellaneous.

OFF did show a slight surplus but that is offset by the moneys we owe or hold for others. We have an underlying balance of around \$16K and continue to budget and work to reduce this amount to a level more consistent with our continued financial commitments and ideals. We are committed to offering research grants as a means of reducing our total balance.

Rodger Robertson
January 2019

FINANCIAL SUMMARY OF OATLEY FLORA AND FAUNA CONSERVATION SOCIETY INC FOR YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2018

Income and Expenditure Statement 2018	2018	2017
INCOME		
Subscriptions	\$3,600.00	\$3,871.00
Donations	\$1,721.00	\$2,276.70
Sales stalls etc	\$141.00	\$170.50
GRC Grants various	\$6,750.00	\$74,686.00
Interest	\$722.14	\$0.00
Annual dinner	\$1,672.00	\$1,846.00
Calendar sales 2018 2019	\$1,806.00	\$3,934.00
Lions Loan for calendar	\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00
Bird cards	\$39.00	\$356.50
Miscel Income	\$1,591.30	\$383.70
Total Income	\$21,042.44	\$90,524.40
EXPENSES		
OFF Newsletter printing postage	(\$912.99)	(\$1,474.70)
Insurance	(\$495.00)	(\$360.00)
PO box rental	(\$127.00)	(\$124.00)
Brochure printing various	(\$477.75)	(\$499.31)
Dept Fair Trading	(\$95.00)	(\$44.00)
2018 Calendar repay loan and profit distribution	(\$3,214.00)	\$0.00
Donations and Membership to other bodies	(\$895.26)	(\$400.00)
Annual dinner	(\$1,482.00)	(\$1,672.00)
2019 Calendar expenses	(\$3,561.80)	(\$3,494.70)
Grants expenditure	(\$3,131.73)	(\$37,902.20)
New Computer	\$0.00	(\$650.00)
Research grants	(\$4,386.00)	(\$5,000.00)
Lions stall	(\$150.00)	(\$210.00)
River road project	\$0.00	(\$1,054.00)
Miscellaneous	(\$1,484.05)	(\$640.10)
Total Expenses	(\$20,412.58)	(\$53,525.01)
Surplus	\$629.86	\$36,999.39

BANK RECONCILIATION and Other information	2018	2017
Chq acct Balance as at 1 January	\$14,970.45	\$12,971.06
Surplus on year	\$629.86	\$36,999.39
Cheque account balance 31 December	\$50,600.31	\$14,970.45
Various term deposits	\$8,490.07	\$43,490.07
Total balance at bank 31 December	\$59,090.38	\$58,460.52
Grants held for other organisations (balance)	\$3,866.27	\$380.00
Grants for OFF unspent	\$36,404.00	\$36,404.00
Loan from Oatley Lions	\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00



THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS: GRAHAM LALCHERE

At the recent AGM meeting, Graham thanked the outgoing committee, stating that OFF could not function without a hardworking, productive and stimulating committee. He particularly thanked Melina Amerasinghe who is resigning from the committee after 16 years. She will continue as web site editor until the committee can find a replacement.

Graham also thanked the newsletter team including the new editor, Adelina Cubelic, who despite being busy with a young family, finds time to attend our editorial meetings and put together the newsletter in a timely and creative way.

He then thanked other groups for their efforts during the year, all of whom helped to make our 64th year another great one, as outlined by our diligent Secretary, Liz Cameron in her update.

Graham thought it timely to remind members of the great things that OFF has been involved with over the years and the battles that our predecessors have fought. He is indebted to Alan Fairley for documenting OFF's history in 'Being Green'. To view, visit the OFF web site at:

<http://off.oatleypark.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Being-Green-first-50-yrs-OFF.pdf>.

Rafe and Moira Kowron along with a few others, started OFF in 1955, when they became concerned about the wanton destruction and vandalism that was taking place in the natural bushland surrounding their new home.

Over the years, OFF grew along with Oatley - which changed, not always for the better when it came to its natural environment. OFF members have fought many battles to retain and improve their local environment, including:

- Proposal for an "all-tide" swimming pool at Oatley Baths.
- Road across Lime Kiln Bay from the Park to Peakhurst.
- Dumping of rubbish in Lime Kiln Bay.
- Second oval in Oatley Park.
- Marina off Jewfish Point projecting 76 metres into the Georges River.
- Disposal of rubbish in the bays of the Georges River.
- High tension power lines with associated stanchions routed through Oatley Park.
- Application for a Commonwealth grant to build a swimming pool in park.
- Application for a helicopter pad on Oatley Park oval, refused by Council.
- Threats to the environment increased in the 1980's but there was also increasing community awareness during this time.

Over the years, OFF also had members on Councils. Julian Sheen was Deputy Mayor of Hurstville for a time. One result was the Oatley Park Advisory Committee to oversee Oatley Park. However, threats continued - excessive hazard reduction burning by the Fire Brigade, leading eventually to a park fire policy. Hutchison Telecom communications tower and facilities constructed on edge of the park oval - which were removed after court action by Hurstville Council. Another challenge was mountain bikes causing significant damage to park.

On the positive side in 1990's OFF obtained nearly \$400,000 to rehabilitate various local bushland reserves. Our battle for the Oatley Bowling Club site is just the latest and continuing fight. Threats will always be there, so we need to remain vigilant and keep working to protect our precious environment, building on the legacy of past members.

THE SECRETARY'S REPORT: LIZ CAMERON

Highlights for 2018 included:

- Georges River Council has decided to retain the Oatley Bowling Club site in public hands. OFF has campaigned tirelessly for this.
- OFF identified six environmental priorities on which to base its political efforts for the State and Federal elections.
- The grants sub-committee submitted consultant's report on the restoration of Oatley Park Castle to Council.
- OFF awarded grants to two post-graduate students and a previous recipient gave a talk on her project during the November 2018 meeting.
- The 'Nature of Georges River 2019' calendar made a surplus, and was sold at: four street stalls in Oatley, Mortdale and Lugarno and stalls at Oatley Lions Festival and Oatley West Community Festival.
- We undertook revegetation at River Road Reserve and Moore Reserve, planting 1000 natives bought with funds from the NSW Government and Councillor Grekas.
- Monthly Bushcare sessions in Oatley Park have continued.
- OFF helped at Council's National Tree Day plant giveaway but despite diligent monitoring and reporting by OFF members, trees are still dying and being illegally removed in our local government area.
- We supported: People's Referendum on coal and gas, banning mining under water catchments, investment in renewable energy, plastic-free Oatley, reducing pollution in our waterways, and saving the Streamwatch program.
- OFF recommended the names Boorea Reserve for the River Road Reserve, and Myles Dunphy Creek for the stream in Myles Dunphy Reserve.
- We hosted varied and interesting speakers at monthly meetings, which attracted an average audience of more than 50.
- We held 10 field outings averaging 11 participants per outing.
- The OFF Annual Dinner was fully booked and the raffle raised \$190.
- 27 people helped with Clean Up Australia Day in Lime Kiln Bay.
- OFF and Bankstown Bushland Society cleaned up Beauty Point Reserve on the Georges River.
- Melina Amerasinghe resigned from the committee after 16 years of service. Adelina Cubelic was appointed Editor of OFF News.
- Conservation Advisor Deb Andrew helped with submissions on environmental issues.
- Sharyn Cullis received a St George Community Award for her work in the Georges River Koala Network.
- OFF Rules were revised to become a Constitution, and a Mission Statement was adopted. Membership is just under 300.

'NEW' RARE PLANT FOUND AT BANKSTOWN AIRPORT

The Bankstown Bushland Society reports the discovery of the rare *Hibbertia fumana* by an ecologist working on a survey of developments near Bankstown Airport. It is a species first collected in the early 19th century, the last being in 1823. It did not come to light again until 2016 at a site in Moorebank. The population at the Airport appears to be about 100 plants.

The good news is that it is not threatened by the planned enlargement of the Airport and Bankstown Airport Ltd is committed to sympathetic management of the species.



Hibbertia fumana, Source: The Herald

Coming OFF Events in February/March 2019
OFF Full Year Events Calendar at: off.oatleypark.com/program

25 February 2019 – ‘Conservation and Management of Australia’s Drylands’ talk by Dr David Eldridge

Dr David Eldridge is from the School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences at UNSW, and is a research scientist with the Office of Environment and Heritage. He is currently working on management of biological soil crusts (lichens, mosses, etc.), woody plant encroachment (which is the change from grasslands to shrub lands), the impacts of grazing on plants, reptiles, soils, birds, etc., and the impacts of native and exotic animals on soils, e.g., what bilbies and bettongs do to soil and plants, impacts of wombats, rabbits, etc. He has also been looking at the impacts of feral horses in Kosciuszko National Park, which is a fairly hot topic at the moment. Most of David's work is carried out in the western part of the state, so it has an arid zone focus. David was a member of OFF back in the 1960's when George Dibley was President, and still holds a lot of fond memories of talks and outings from that time.

3 March 2019 – Clean-up Australia Day

This year OFF will be cleaning up the edges of Poulton Park. Meet at Morshead Drive at or after 8.30 am. We will supply gloves and bags, but you are advised to bring your boots for the swampy ground.

5 March 2019 – Field Trip to the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney

The group will catch the train leaving Oatley at 9:05 am and Mortdale 9:07am and meet at the Woolloomooloo gates at 10.00 am. The morning tour will be led by Gardens Guide and OFF member, Amanda Gibson. This will be a pleasant walk around parts of the RBG. The walk will occupy the morning, and be followed by lunch in the gardens – either bring your own or purchase at the cafe. The afternoon is free with the option to inspect the Myles Dunphy display at the State Library, or visit the Calyx in the RBG, where there is currently a display of carnivorous plants. Phone Amanda on 0419 010 994.

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MYLES DUNPHY STREAMWATCH details Heather Stolle 0425 291 879. This activity usually takes place on the Tuesday morning (9.00 am) after OFF General Meetings.

CITIZENS CLIMATE LOBBY meetings at Oatley RSL, held on the second Sunday or every month. All welcome.

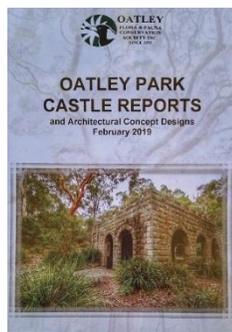
OATLEY GREY-HEADED FLYING FOXES Geoff Francis has been keeping records of the flying foxes in Myles Dunphy Reserve since 2010. Presently, there are more than 4000 roosting there. The majority fly out northwards at about 8.00 pm, with around 200 flying east.

THE CASTLE AT OATLEY PARK

The Castle is a sandstone shelter in Council heritage listed Oatley Park, constructed during the Great Depression (1930's). It is in desperate need of restoration, as much of the building has deteriorated due to exposure to weather and drainage problems. It also suffers from concrete cancer and in short, is rather shabby.

OFF obtained a grant to employ professional consultants to advise what is needed to refurbish the castle and improve its amenity for the local community. Architectural, heritage and engineering reports, which include assessments of what work will be required, have now been completed and sent to Georges River Council (GRC) for consideration.

Refurbishment will require repair/waterproofing of the roof, repair and possible strengthening of the roof slab and supporting beams and columns, rectification of drainage, cleaning of, and repairs to, and possible replacement of some sandstone blocks (including removal of internal paint), updating the barbecue and seating arrangements, and repairs to, and



improvements to the safety of the roof balustrade. Due to the requirements of the *Federal Disability Discrimination Act* disabled access to the roof has also been considered in the architectural concept plans. OFF has indicated to Council that it has concerns about the potential impact of such a structure on the building and its surrounds and urged council to undertake community consultation prior to final designs. Members attending the recent OFF AGM heard and saw more details of the consultants' reports, which are now in the hands of GRC.

OFF MEMBERS TRIP TO KOSCIUSZKO NATIONAL PARK

During the week of 6-13 January, 2019, 10 OFF members stayed at Pygmy Possum Lodge in Charlotte Pass. The coolness of the air was a refreshing respite from Sydney's heatwave. The vegetation in the area was flourishing. Wildflowers were not as profuse as in some previous years, but still colourful and varied, and swarming with insects.

The group met two biologists studying the pollinators – the bees, flies, butterflies and beetles, and shrewdly wearing pale loose clothing to deter the March flies. No mountain Pygmy Possums were sighted in the nearby boulder fields, but they are reported to have benefitted from the monitoring and trapping of cats. Unfortunately, a cat was sighted during the stay, and the group also encountered four deer near Sponnar's Inn one night.

The group spent the last evening on the banks of the Thredbo River – paddling, bird-watching and enjoying 'happy hour'. Just as most people departed a platypus emerged to feed – just as Deb Andrew had predicted.



During the week, many of the popular tracks were walked – Porcupine Rocks, Waterfall, Blue Lake, Main Range, Thredbo to Kosciuszko, Mount Stilwell, as well as Rennix and an overgrown roadway down Spencers Creek valley.



OFF POLICIES FOR UPCOMING STATE ELECTION

OFF is calling on all candidates contesting the upcoming NSW state election to take a stand for our unique and precious natural environment. In September 2018, six environmental protection principles were adopted by the OFF committee. They are:

1. Establish a Sydney Marine Park – to protect this world-class coastal region.
2. Create a koala sanctuary in south-west Sydney – to protect this iconic species.
3. Set up a \$2 billion regional renewable energy fund – to fast-track the transition to clean energy away from coal.
4. Set up a \$1.5 billion land, biodiversity and forest habitat, and end logging of public native forests.
5. Remove of feral horses from Kosciuszko National Park.
6. Legislation to ban lightweight single-use plastic bags.



These principles were forwarded to the local political candidates for their comments. Liberal, Labor and Green candidates have each replied and their responses can be found on the OFF web site at:

<http://off.oatleypark.com/2019/03/07/2019-state-election-oatley-candidates-responses-to-our-questions/>

We held a street stall at Oatley on Saturday, March 9, 2019 to help raise awareness and gain further support. We will hold another one next Saturday morning (16 March) at Mortdale shops.

FERAL HORSES IN KOSCIUSZKO NATIONAL PARK

Our February, 2019 speaker Dr David Eldridge, when presenting on the harmful effects of exotic animals on dryland soils, raised the current hot topic of feral horses and their impacts on Kosciuszko National Park. He showed photos of erosion along creeks and wetlands caused by the hard hooves of these horses which now may exceed 6000 in number.

His discussion is backed by a new fact sheet printed by Reclaim Kosci <https://reclaimkosci.org.au/>. This group aims to repeal the *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act* passed in June 2018 which prioritises horses over the fragile ecosystems of the national park.

It argues that these horses do not have heritage value, that there is overwhelming scientific evidence that current numbers are causing severe damage, and that a number of critically endangered animals and plants are threatened. A recent study concluded that trampling, soil compaction and wallowing is resulting in stream disturbance, sphagnum bog and wetland destruction.

It seems that the most effective method of control, supported by the RSPCA, is aerial culling - shooting by professionals from helicopters. The NSW Government's decision to ignore scientific evidence sets a dangerous precedent for our protected areas.

OFF WEBSITE OFFICER NEEDED

OFF is looking for a website officer. If you are interested in the position, or would like more information on the role, please contact Graham Lalchere at mailto:glach@gmail.com

GEORGES RIVER COUNCIL TREE MANAGEMENT POLICY

After many years of struggle and disappointment, OFF is pleased to report that the Georges River Council has adopted an interim tree management policy. At a meeting of council on 25 February, 2019 there was a recommendation by two councillors to defer the policy pending a future report.

OFF members attended this meeting and Kim Wagstaff spoke of OFF's concerns. These included a call to implement the policy without delay and opposition to the inclusion of three ward councillors on the review panel. This meant that councillors with no expertise would adjudicate on tree matters and that the process would lack consistency across wards and give the appearance of political interference.

The Council finally adopted the policy as an interim measure with the Council Manager to report to the April meeting on outstanding issues. This was reported in the *St George and Surterland Shire Leader*, to view the full article visit: <https://www.theleader.com.au/story/5930770/tree-change-at-georges-river/>

CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA DAY 2019

Clean-up Australia Day was on 3 March, 2019, held along the mangrove shores of Poulton Park, and was a great success. 25 people filled 18 bags of rubbish and collected various other items like shopping trolleys, timber pieces and fish traps. It was pleasing to see family groups and non-OFF members of the public volunteering. Thanks to Alan Fairley for organising the day and manning the OFF marquee, and to all those involved.



To view more photos from the day visit:

<http://off.oatleypark.com/2019/03/03/clean-up-australia-day-2019-at-poulton-park/>

EXTINCTION – BY CLIMATE CHANGE?

A report in late February, 2019 notes that a small rodent (*Melomys rubicola*) which lived on a sandy cay in Torres Strait had become extinct. According to the Queensland Government, this is the first recorded mammal species-loss because of human-induced climate change. It was known for decades as being in a precarious position. Being a long way from anywhere and also being a rat, it did not have much public advocacy. Its loss is a clear warning that other Australian animals are at risk.

BANKS VOLUNTEER AWARD 2019

Melina Amerasinghe was nominated by the OFF Committee to receive the Banks Volunteer Award which was presented by MP for Banks, David Coleman and Ken Wyatt, Minister for Aged Care and Indigenous Health at a ceremony on 12 March. Melina has been on the OFF Committee for 16 years and performed a number of tasks including Program Officer and the management of the Society's web site and Facebook page.

Coming OFF Events in March/April 2019
OFF Full Year Events Calendar at: off.oatleypark.com/program

25 March 2019 – Protecting the Fragile Ecosystems of the Kosciuszko National Park – by Linda Groom, Save Kosci Inc.

Convener of Save Kosci Inc. - Linda Groom - will speak of the recently completed walk from Sydney to the summit of Mt Kosciuszko to highlight the plight of Kosciuszko National Park whose threatened plant and animal species continue to suffer from damage by wild horses and other feral animals. The walk took place between 3 November and 8 December 2018, and totalled 560Km.

28 March 2019 – Planting and Maintenance Moore Reserve

Planting and maintenance at Moore Reserve between 8am and 11am. Meet at planting site near dog enclosure. Be sure to wear closed-toe shoes.

31 March 2019 – Field Trip to Wendy Whiteley's Garden

The group will leave Oatley on the 9:13 am train (9:15 am from Mortdale), meeting in the third carriage from the front. After catching the ferry from Barangaroo wharf, the group will alight at McMahon's Point and walk around Lavender Bay to the garden. This is a short walk with steps, both up and down. After the visit in the garden, the group will continue around the boardwalk, past Luna Park and up to Milsons Point. People can choose to catch the train home at this point or continue the walk across the Harbour Bridge (there is a lift at both the north and south ends of the bridge).

Leaders: Peter and Sue de Beuzeville (H) 8068 6149 (M) 0419 625 373.

Advance Notice – OFF Annual Dinner, 11 July 2019

Members and friends are invited to attend our Annual Dinner. The dinner will be held on Thursday 11 July, 2019, in the Macquarie Room at Mortdale RSL, 6.30 pm for a 7 pm start. The cost is \$38 per person. Dinner includes bread rolls, entree, mains, cupcakes, tea and coffee. Guests may purchase their own drinks at the bar. Donations for our annual raffle are most welcome. Contact: Sue Howard 9579 1718 or Vicki Bolling 9580 3107.

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MYLES DUNPHY STREAMWATCH details Heather Stolle 0425 291 879. This activity usually takes place on the Tuesday morning (9.00 am) after OFF General Meetings.

CITIZENS CLIMATE LOBBY meetings at Oatley RSL, held on the second Sunday of every month. All welcome.

BANKS PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION 2019 To enter the competition, take a photo of any location in the Banks electorate, and email your submission with your name and the name of your piece, by March 25, 2019 to: <mailto:david.coleman.mp@aph.gov.au>

OFF GREENING OF MOORE RESERVE Georges River Council has put out a fact sheet on OFF's greening of Moore Reserve. It notes that OFF used a \$750 grant to purchase native plants for the initiative. Councillor Grekas, who allocated the money from the Councillor's Discretionary Ward Fund, volunteered on the day and admired the commitment of community members to their local environment.

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT GRANT AWARDED The Society has received a Commonwealth grant from local MP David Coleman for \$5,000 from the Stronger Communities Fund which will be used for the purchase and planting of native plants in Gannons Park.

STATE GOVERNMENT GRANT AWARDED The Society has also received a \$3,000 grant from the NSW Minister for the Environment's Conservation Fund, presented by local member Mark Coure. This grant will be used for planting at a local park.

OFF JOINS NEW ALLIANCES The society recently joined two alliances to protect sites with great environmental significance:

Reclaim Kosci <https://reclaimkosci.org.au/>

Give a Dam <https://www.giveadam.org.au>

FIRST MAINTENANCE DAY NEAR OATLEY RAILWAY STATION On 28 February, 2019 the first maintenance day was held at the area that OFF planted out near Oatley railway station. 8 members were joined by councillor Sandy Grekas, and they removed weeds and planted another 110 plants, provided by Georges River Council. Thanks to GRC officer Jason Cockayne and OFF member Matt Allison for their supervision, equipment and knowledge. It is intended to continue these maintenance days every fourth Thursday of the month.

JUVENILE PACIFIC BAZA IN MYLES DUNPHY RESERVE

An uncommon bird was spotted in trees between Myles Dunphy Reserve and Oatley Station. OFF member David Waterhouse reports seeing and hearing a juvenile Pacific Baza (*Crested Hawk*) in late February.

It was being fed by an adult. The adults probably nested in the Reserve, highlighting the importance of such suburban bushland patches.



To view video footage:

<https://www.facebook.com/896960500437558/videos/318622562332867/>

Our Deepest Condolences It is with sadness that we report the death of Lesley Winters. She, with her husband John, was a member of OFF since 1990 and served on the committee for 6 years. She will be missed by her friends in the Society.

OFF Secretary: Liz Cameron, PO BOX 52, Mortdale 2223 Tel: 9580 6621 Email: off@oatleypark.com

Website: off.oatleypark.com

OFF Newsletter Editor: Adelina Cubelic



GRC ALERTED TO NON-COMPLIANT DEVELOPMENTS

OFF has alerted the Georges River Council to the apparent increase in breaches of development approvals. It has given 16 examples of such breaches, which include no sediment controls, no street tree protection, damage to footpaths, killing of trees and non-compliance with landscape plans. OFF has requested that Council reinforces its compliance role by increasing inspections of development sites, and considers the retention of completion certificates, until the requirements of landscape plans have been satisfied.

STREAMWATCH UPDATE

In case you missed it, James Deli - an OFF Committee member, had a recent letter published in *The Leader* on "Funding for Streamwatch". It stated that Streamwatch volunteers test the water quality at 120 sites across Sydney, including Oatley. The program has been running for almost 30 years. Despite Sydney Water making a net profit after tax of \$572 million in 2017-18, it has refused to fund the program after July 30, 2019.

Now that the elections are over, we genuinely hope that Mark Coure, MP for Oatley, can assist with securing state government funding for this essential program.

GEORGES RIVER COUNCIL TREE MANAGEMENT

As you know trees play an important role in providing healthy urban communities. Following a recent public exhibition, Georges River Council has endorsed the schedule of fees, including a street tree deposit to ensure the protection of trees on public land when a site is under construction.

The replacement cost of a tree has been set at \$2,250. This fee will apply to trees on private property which are removed following extensive assessment. Where a street tree is removed as a result of development works, the applicant will be responsible for funding the removal of street trees, as well as the cost of planting and maintaining replacement trees. This should encourage the retention of mature trees on development sites. The aim is to increase canopy cover to 40% by 2038. Fees will directly fund the aims of the Urban Forest Strategy. For more information, visit the GRC website.

THE GREAT KOALA NATIONAL PARK

The Nature Conservation Council is campaigning for the establishment of a Great Koala National Park on the NSW North Coast. This would protect 175,000 hectares of koala habitat from logging and deforestation as well as protect around 4,550 koalas - representing between 20% - 30% of all koalas left in NSW. Koala numbers on the North Coast have plummeted by up to 50% since 1990 with as few as 15,000 left in the wild.

THE ROYAL BOTANIC GARDEN VISIT

On 5 March 2019, eight OFF members left by train from Oatley station to Martin Place, and we walked through the Domain to the Information Centre of The Royal Botanic Garden. We joined the scheduled 10.30 guided tour for the public, however the group of 24 was too large for one guide. The Co-ordinator of the Garden Volunteer Program and a very experienced horticulturist, Paul Nicholson stepped in to take our OFF group and a few others on our own very entertaining tour.

Some highlights included seeing the oldest bridge in Australia - its antiquity was discovered when repairs were done early this century and confirmed by the convict marks on the handmade bricks. The bridge crosses a stream that flows into Farm Cove. Another highlight, the Swamp Oaks (*Casuarina glauca*) are more than 250 years old, growing on a hill near the Maiden Pavilion - marking the original high-water level. The land below has been reclaimed from swamp. For more on this trip, including photos visit:

<http://off.oatleypark.com/2019/03/15/royal-botanic-gardens-2/>

FIELD TRIP TO WENDY WHITELEY GARDEN

The chosen date for this excursion 31 March 2019, turned out to be a beautiful day in the middle of some very unsettled weather. After a pick me up coffee, our group of seven members caught the ferry from Barangaroo Wharf, crossing over the harbour to McMahons Point wharf. From there we made our way around Lavender Bay and under the railway viaduct into the garden.



Wendy and her renowned artist husband, Brett Whiteley set up their family home in Lavender Bay and lived there together for two decades. The garden is set at the foot of the house, on what was once a landfilled valley of rubbish and overgrown weeds on unused railway land. As Wendy began to clear the site, she created the garden. While not large in area, there are many interconnecting, meandering pathways as well as interesting art installations and sculptures.

After the group's individual wanderings, we set off together along the boardwalk below the garden to settle at a table inside Luna Park for lunch. Our last "challenge" for the day was to walk uphill to the lift and onto the Harbour Bridge. We slowly made our way across, back to Circular Quay enjoying some spectacular views on the way.

OFF BUSHCARE PROGRAM GREENING MOORE RESERVE AND GANNONS PARK

On 28 March 2019, a group of five OFF members and one Bushcare volunteer, joined Jason from Georges River Council (GRC) at the dog enclosure, for planting in the middle of Moore Reserve, as part of the regular monthly OFF Bushcare program. Over three hours, the group planted 300 indigenous native plants. This has complemented the original planting and will help to bolster the density and therefore the habitat value of the area. The group finished up weeding through the older planting to help the regenerating native grasses get a go.



Due to the holidays there will not be an April work day. On **29 May 2019**, the OFF Bushcare program will help GRC launch a new Bushcare volunteer site at the bottom of Gannons Park along with planting. The 2,500 tubestock have been purchased from Sutherland Shire Council Nursery with a Community Grant from local Federal member, David Coleman. It would be a great gesture of goodwill to Council if we could have as many members as possible attend on the day.

Matt Allison

Coming OFF Events in April/May 2019
OFF Full Year Events Calendar at: off.oatleypark.com/program

29 April 2019 – Update on Endangered Regent Honeyeater Research – Ross Crates

Ross Crates was one of the first recipients of an OFF Research Grant. He has undertaken some outstanding research on the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater. At this meeting, Ross will update the Society on the results of his research and how we might be able to save the Regent Honeyeater from extinction in the wild.

5 May 2019 – Field Trip Bargo River and Gorge Walk

Meet at 9.00 am, in the car park at the corner of Charles Point Rd and Rockford Rd, Bargo. Allow one hour and 15 minutes to drive and be advised that the 'best' route is via the M5 Expressway. We can car pool and if you need more information contact Sharyn Cullis on 0421 714 391 or 9579 1262 . Alternatively, you can also speak to one of the organisers at the next meeting. Be aware that there a few mobile phone blackspots once you get close, so plan your car journey in advance!

The Bargo River and Gorge Walk is spectacular and will be broken into two alternate levels on the same day; a vigorous/harder walk and an easy-medium alternative for others. This is a chance to explore an area relatively new to most of us, and which is part of a visionary Four Rivers National Park proposal. The proposal would provide connectivity through the landscape at Sydney's south-west edge. The four rivers refer to the upper Georges, Cataract, the Bargo and Nepean Rivers. Koalas are present in this landscape. There is a swimming opportunity too.

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- Moore Reserve, Hurstville Grove – off leash dog enclosure planting. Date for 2019: 27 June and 26 September.
- Gannons Park – location to be confirmed. Dates for 2019: 25 July and 24 October.

NOTE FROM MARK COURE OATLEY MP

Mark Coure, Member for Oatley reports that he has secured \$900,000 for the Georges River Council to decontaminate the Myles Dunphy Bowling Club site (mostly asbestos fill) and transform it into an open green space for community use.

The full article, as reported in *The Leader* can be found at:
<https://www.theleader.com.au/story/5951837/oatley-mp-mark-coure-commits-900000-to-former-oatley-bowling-club-site/>

NOTE FROM LINDA GROOM OF SAVE KOSCI INC

Thank you to all the amazing petition-signature collectors. We have passed the 10,000 signature mark. This guarantees us a debate in the new NSW Parliament. But we will keep on collecting for a few weeks more, since Parliament will not resume for a while after the election. The higher the eventual number, the more impressive the media release will be. In 2016, Mr Barilaro presented a petition 'requesting legislation to prohibit aerial shooting of wild horses on New South Wales public lands'. It had 10,135 signatures. It took the petition organisers 3 years to reach that total. We are going to pass that in just 5 months. Cheers and thanks hugely!

<https://reclaimkosci.org.au/about/>

Linda Groom

OFF 40 YEARS AGO

The March 1979 issue of *OFF News* gives details of the Society's conservation activities both locally and nationally. There is a report of attempts to establish a Water Activities Centre in Oatley Park, with the Society objecting the proposal at a special meeting, stating that such a development would lead to the alienation of bushland and degradation of a section of the waterfront.

This was also the time of the struggle to retain the Franklin River as wilderness and to prevent the river being dammed. OFF was contributing to this effort by having members contribute to a 100,000-signature petition. Fortunately, both these threats to the environment were defeated.

Old OFF Newsletters may be viewed on the OFF website at:
<http://off.oatleypark.com/newsletters-2/old-newsletters/>

OFF WEBSITE OFFICER NEEDED

OFF is looking for a website officer. If you are interested in the position, or would like more information on the role, please contact Graham Lalchere at <mailto:glalch@gmail.com>

OFF Secretary: Liz Cameron, PO BOX 52, Mortdale 2223 Tel: 9580 6621 Email: off@oatleypark.com

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OFF ACTIVITIES DURING THE FEDERAL ELECTION

By now, readers would feel inundated with news regarding the Federal Election and the Coalition's win. However, it is worth noting that the OFF Committee agreed on 5 issues that it believed were important for voters to consider when they cast their votes (as was done for the recent NSW State Election).

The 5 issues included:

1. declare a climate change emergency;
2. fast-track the transition to clean energy away from coal;
3. acknowledge the Murray-Darling crisis;
4. develop a national waste strategy;
5. enforce Federal environmental protection laws.

OFF members were informed of these issues by email and a leaflet was developed and distributed at Oatley and Mortdale shopping centres. We found this to be a good opportunity to also promote OFF through the hand-out of brochures. Thank you to all those who volunteered their time for this cause.



OFF MEETING WITH GRC COUNCIL OFFICERS

In mid-April of this year, three OFF Committee members met with Georges River Council Mayor, Kevin Greene and Director, Assets and Infrastructure, Laurie O'Connor to discuss matters of mutual interest

Topics discussed during the meeting included the Urban Forest Strategy (tree management, green corridors, effects of development, continuance and funding of Bushcare), the future of the Oatley Bowling Club site and matters relating to compliance of developments such as sediment run-off, safety, asbestos and stormwater. OFF received a sympathetic hearing and it was agreed to have similar meetings on a regular basis.

UPCOMING PLANTING AND MAINTENANCE DAYS

A reminder that on **Wednesday, 29 May 2019** Georges River Council Bushcare has organised a promotional planting in Gannons Park (access via Vale Lane, Peakhurst South) from 9.00 am. OFF are supplying the plants which were purchased using a Federal government grant.

Also, Bushcare will be undertaking planting and maintenance on Thursday, **30 May 2019** at Boorea Reserve (River Rd near railway underpass) from 8.00 am – 11.00 am. Please wear closed in shoes and bring gloves and a hat.

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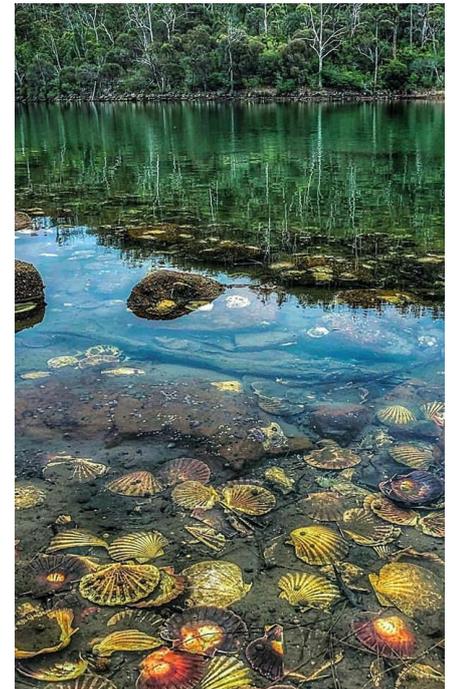
OFF TRIP TO TARKINE

From 26 March to 1 April 2019, 23 OFF members enjoyed the natural delights of the Tarkine Forest Reserve and its surrounds in northwest Tasmania, whilst staying at the "Wilderness Experience" in the historic former mining town of Corinna.

The Tarkine Forest Reserve is a huge area of temperate rainforest, sand dunes and coastal heathland with strong links to the Tasmanian Aboriginal people. The Tarkine is roughly bounded by the west coast, the Arthur River to the north, the Pieman River to the south and the Murchison Highway to the east. It is considered one of the world's great wild places and contains remarkable natural and cultural highlights.

Some trip highlights included a cruise down the Pieman River to the coast on the 1939-built "Arcadia 11", with most members enjoying a walk along the beach at the heads. Also, nine intrepid travellers kayaked down the Savage River and discovered the "SS Croydon" and Lovers' Falls. Others took a similar route by boat.

All were taken by the natural beauty of the region and the wide range of flora and fauna present on numerous bushwalks such as Philosophers Falls, Whyte River, Middleton Creek, Montezuma Falls, Telegraph Hill and Mount Donaldson (with its breathtaking views).



The group was amazed by the abundance of tree ferns, mosses, lichens, ancient Huon Pines and myrtle beeches. Wildlife was abundant, including boobooks, yellow-tailed cockatoos, pink robins, green rosellas, eagles, quolls and wallabies. Pademelons and chocolate brushtails were common around the cabins each night.

There were no formal activities scheduled so everyone was free to be active, relax or socialise, which was made easy by the lack of radio, TV and internet. There was a great sense of camaraderie amongst the group, with many enjoying 'happy hour' drinks and barbecues. A memorable highlight was everyone attending a lovely dinner on the final night.

Everyone took advantage of the trip to see other parts of Tasmania, with some going to Mount Field, Cradle Mountain and the south-west national parks. The group sincerely thanks Tony and Kate Porritt for organising an epic and truly memorable trip!

More information on the Tarkine Forest Reserve can be found at: <https://www.discovertasmania.com.au/about/national-parks-and-wilderness/tarkine-forest-reserve>

Tarkine trekkers are welcome to post their photos on the OFF Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/OatleyFloraandFauna> or email them to off@oatleypark.com for posting on the website.

27 May 2019 – Wildlife Wonders of the Burratorang Valley, with Deb Andrew

Former Office of Environment and Heritage Scientist, Deb Andrew knows the restricted Burratorang Valley better than anyone. Her forays into the water catchment area of Warragamba Dam – one of the most intact grassy box woodlands in south-east Australia, have revealed rare and threatened woodland birds (like the critically endangered regent honeyeater that breeds there). Platypus and rakali inhabit the streams and rivers of the Wollondilly, Nattai and Kowmung. Populations of kangaroos, wallabies (including the endangered brush-tailed rock wallaby) and emu live in a natural equilibrium with their predators the wedge-tailed eagle, dingo and spotted-tailed quoll. It is an area of outstanding biodiversity, but the grassy woodlands of Burratorang are now threatened by the proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall and flood more of the valley. Following Deb's talk, OFF will be screening the film 'Give a Dam', which investigates the NSW State government's controversial proposal to raise the dam wall by 14 metres.

2 June 2019 – Field Trip to Glenbrook's Red Hands Cave

A day in the World Heritage Blue Mountains National Park is always difficult to beat. Red Hands Cave in Blue Mountains National Park is one of the best showcases of Indigenous rock art in the area. It's reached via Red Hands Cave loop walking track. The walking track is 9 km return in distance, and rated medium grade. It features some of Sydney's finest Indigenous hand stencils and axe-grinding grooves. It is proposed that carpooling is the easiest travel option, with a plan to arrive at the NPWS visitor centre at the bottom of Bruce Road, Glenbrook by 9.15 am. People who wish to make the journey by train could be collected by car from the station at 9.06 am. For further information call field trip leader Matt Allison on 0408 605 923.

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TAMMOOR GORGE FIELD TRIP

On Sunday 5 May 2019, 20 OFF members and their friends travelled just over an hour to the south-west edge of Sydney to visit the Tahmoor Gorge, an area that felt wild and remote, and was virtually unknown to almost all in the group. It is about 7 km south of Picton and is sandwiched between the M5 motorway and the old Hume Highway.

The carpark entry point for the walk showed evidence of disrespect, with litter and graffiti. Yet the further the group ventured into the canyon-like rim and into the deep gorge, the more surprising and beautiful it was. The Bargo River in its base forms a series of pools, waterfalls and cascades.

The steep sandstone canyon walls are pitted with caves and overhangs that expose rich coloured ochres in the layered and twisted rock strata. The group didn't make it all the way to where the Bargo River meets the Nepean, but many wished for another day, and an earlier start, to complete what would be a wilder and more challenging day.

The group covered a little more than 10km at a leisurely pace; with their maximum altitude reached at 303 metres above sea level (masl). However, when taking into account all the ups and downs the total climb was 598 masl.



Much of this amazing landscape is not protected; it really does deserve to be a national park for its scenic and conservation values. One of the more spectacular views is that of Mermaids Pool, known as a Dharawal women's site, and for its danger. There have been many swimmer deaths and injuries at the location.

OFF has sent letters to NSW Ministers Stokes and Kean urging them to protect Tahmoor Gorge as a national park and to Wollondilly Shire Council asking to limit urban development in the area.



LET THE PEOPLE SPEAK – GRC RE-THINK PUBLIC FORUMS

Recently, the Georges River Council had proposed that public forums should be held prior to council meetings, ending the long-standing practice of residents being able to directly address councillors. OFF and others within the community voiced their concerns, as it was felt this would disenfranchise the community and diminish the democratic process.

Three OFF members – Anne Wagstaff, Peter Maloney and James Deli - attended a council meeting on 27 May 2019 when this matter was to be discussed. Anne spoke on behalf of OFF during the meeting, stating that public forums should be held during the meetings and not prior to - so that councillors and the public are fully aware of the contents of each address. She noted that of 30 councils in the Greater Metropolitan area, all but three allow members of the public to speak at council meetings and those three allow speakers at Committee meetings.

Councillors accepted the arguments made by OFF and others present at the meeting and moved that not only all existing arrangements in relation to public participation remain, but also now include Council Extraordinary Meetings. As Councillor Landsberry said, "We need to have that interaction with the public. It is a democratic right." This was an important result for our community - congratulations to all involved.

To view the full article in *The Leader*, visit:
<https://www.theleader.com.au/story/6186957/the-people-speak-and-georges-river-council-listens/>

GREENING OUR COMMUNITY

On May 29, 2019 forty-four people volunteered to help plant 650 native shrubs in Gannons Park. It was a great start, given that the plan is to plant 2,500 shrubs in the area.

A smaller group of volunteers also helped with the planting of 220 plants in River Road Reserve on May 30, 2019 - which will assist in boosting the shrub layer. One of the intentions of the planting is also to improve the Sydney Turpentine and Ironbark Forest with species endemic to the area. Twelve Black She-oak (*Allocasuarina littoralis*) and 50 tube stock plants were also planted on the corner of Oatley Parade and Neville Street.

Our thanks to Matt Allison - who organised the collection of the plants and coordination of the planting days, along with all the volunteers. Ensuring we protect, enhance and maintain our green spaces is paramount, for our health and that of our planet.



STREAMWATCH SAVED – THE NEXT CHAPTER

As previously reported by OFF News, last year the Australian Museum announced that it would not continue the Streamwatch program beyond June 2019. Initiated and funded by Sydney Water the citizen science water monitoring program has been running for 29 years. As just one of the groups which participates in this program, OFF was disappointed by the news and wrote to the NSW Government asking for guaranteed funding for this program.

We have recently been advised that from July 2019, management of Streamwatch and the activities of its volunteers will transfer to the Greater Sydney Landcare Network. In addition, the Australian Museum will support the program by providing the digital portal for the ongoing collection and storage of the water monitoring data. The existing data collected over the last 28 years will be publicly available.



For more information on this announcement, visit:
<https://landcare.nsw.gov.au/groups/greater-sydney-landcare-network-inc/welcoming-the-next-chapter-of-streamwatch-with-gsln/>

RED HANDS CAVE FIELD TRIP

OFF's field trip to Red Hands Cave near Glenbrook village in the Lower Blue Mountains on Sunday 2 June 2019 was eagerly attended by 12 members and guests. The 9km round trip walking track follows Campfire Creek through tall sclerophyll forest. On the walk the group were treated to visits from a rose robin, golden whistler and rufous fantail attracted by the bird calls played back on Deb Andrew's mobile phone.

On the water's edge there is evidence of the old axe-grinding grooves and unfortunately, some recently enhanced grooves which seemed rather disrespectful. The path then rose to a ridge of dry woodland dotted with banksia blooms before reaching the cave. The cave contains 45 Aboriginal hand stencils and the faint lines of depicted ancestral spirits across the cave wall.

The site is a ceremonial cave which was used for the initiation of young warriors and was only discovered by whites approximately 100 years ago. However, it is believed the art was produced between 500 and 1,600 years ago. It is well fortified these days to prevent any vandalism especially given its significance.



Source: NSW National Parks

To stand in a place with so much cultural heritage was a real treat and quite a humbling experience. The group returned to the start down a dry creek bed full of *Backhousia myrtifolia* trees which was particularly interesting as GRC have included this species in their street tree planting program. They are well suited to a range of conditions and are quite an elegant small tree, well suited to narrow nature strips. They are naturally present in such local bush reserves as Oatley Pleasure Grounds, Evatt Park Lugarno and Oatley Park (Douglas Haig entrance).

24 June 2019 – Solar Energy and Reducing Power Bills

Anna Moltchanski from Georges River Council and Our Energy Future will speak on Solar energy and reducing power bills. Anna Moltchanski is the engagement officer for Positive Charge in Victoria and NSW under the Our Energy Future initiative. In this role, she works closely with the teams to help local households save energy and money.

30 June 2019 – Field Trip to Mt Whaite near Wentworth Falls

A challenging but worthwhile traverse to Mt Whaite in the Blue Labyrinth forest south of Wentworth Falls. Mt Whaite honours our own member the late Harry Whaite. To walk there though the trackless forest is to experience something of the grandeur and effort of Harry and other Warrigal explorers in the 1930s. The shorter off-track section of the walk is quite strenuous but there is no haste. Meet at 9.30 am on the roadside of Tableland Road just after the turnoff to the left from the Great Western Highway approaching Wentworth Falls (near the corner pottery shop). It is an all-day walk of about 10 -12km so bring provisions and water. Group Leader: Julian Sheen contact on 0415 428 744.

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NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION – FREE TALK **Global Pollution, Global Solution**. 26 June 2019 at 8.00 pm. Venue: Sutherland Multi-Purpose Centre, 123 Flora St Sutherland (near Belmont St). Marine Scientist Sarah-Jo Lobwein with discuss simple solutions to avoid single use plastic pollution to stop the sea drowning in plastic.

GIVE A DAM

During the May OFF meeting, members viewed a short film on the threat to the environment from the government plan to raise the Warragamba Dam wall by 14 metres. If you missed it, the film is available to view online at <https://www.giveadam.org.au/film>

At our April meeting, we heard Ross Crates express concern about the impact of flooding on the habitat of the endangered Regent Honeyeater. Our May speaker, Deb Andrew, alerted us to the fact that raising the dam wall will negatively impact the rare and valuable Burragarang woodlands.

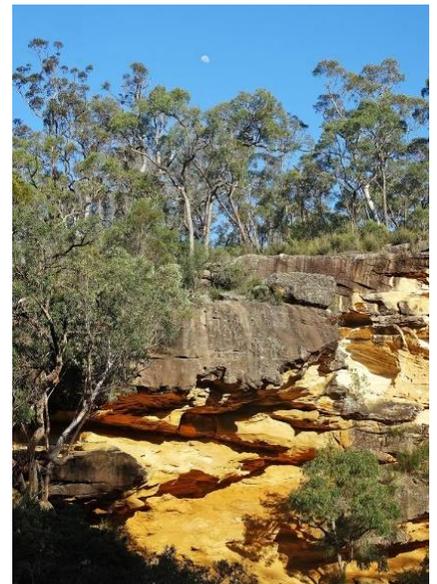
Now another threatened species has been found in the area – the Painted Honeyeater, a bird rarely seen so close to Sydney, which suggests that it may be seeking refuge from the drought. The NSW government believes the Warragamba proposal will reduce and manage flood risk in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley, but it is more likely to give a green light to developers who wish to extend urbanisation to the current flood-plain below the dam.

Visit https://www.giveadam.org.au/take_action for more information, including petitions to stop the governments plan.

TAHMOOR GORGE CONSERVATION UPDATE

Following OFF's walk to Tahmoor Gorge in May 2019, the Society wrote to Wollondilly Shire Council and others praising its natural values and advocating its protection, possibly as a national park.

The Council has replied, stating that it supports the local National Parks Association in advocating it to be created a national park, but it is a complex matter because of the existing Aboriginal land claims and mining rights. Also much of the land along the Bargo River is privately owned. The Council is using its powers to protect koala habitats and to promote the protection of biodiversity.



NEW OFF MEMBERSHIP BROCHURE has been revised and reprinted. It is available for collection at our monthly meetings.



WILD DEER PROBLEM IN NSW ON THE RISE: DEER SURVEY LAUNCHED

Feral deer have become a continued and persistent threat to the Australian environment. As an introduced species during European settlement, wild deer populations are increasing rapidly across New South Wales, despite shooting. Rusa Deer have long been a pest in Royal National Park. We know that these animals damage reserves and parks in the following ways;

- Destroy native plants through trampling, grazing, and ringbarking young trees – which has resulted in the loss of some plant species.
- Foul waterholes.
- Cause erosion and soil compaction due to their hard hooves.
- Spread weeds.

According to the University of Sydney, deer currently cover 17% of NSW, and this area has more than doubled since 2009. Unfortunately, public perception is mixed, with some local residents believing they are sweet harmless creatures which need protection and actively encourage them through feeding. Others who have their gardens denuded night after night are not so fond of them.

Without an effective control, deer populations will continue to flourish and spread further through NSW. Recently, the NSW government announced plans to ease shooting restrictions, which would give all gun licence holders in the state the right to shoot wild deer on private properties. Currently, authorities have a major problem as shooting is an expensive solution. Special weapons and ammunition are required, most shooting is done at night and at overtime rates, where a vet and safety officer are required, which adds to the cost. Interestingly, no shooting is allowed at Christmas because of the association with Rudolph!



Source: Australian Museum

While Rusa Deer in Royal National Park and in other parts of NSW are a big enough problem, other states are also facing similar issues. Sambar Deer are reported to be in plague proportions in South Australia and Victoria and have made their way over the Snowy Mountains and are heading towards the Blue Mountains. These deer are twice the size of a Rusa Deer and eat proportionately more and cause far more damage to vehicles and people if they collide.

FeralScan (www.feralscan.org.au/deerscan) is a free, community website and Smartphone App that allows you to map sightings of pest animals and record the problems they are causing in your local area. Data entered into FeralScan can help coordinate on ground controls to address the problem. Recently, the website introduced DeerScan, which will assist in building a detailed picture of deer populations and the problems posed by deer, and therefore provide a scientific basis to enact urgent control measures.

Please consider reporting sightings or evidence of deer tracks, scats or damage caused. (*Information from The Friends of Royal National Park*). NOTE: Last year, OFF made a submission to the Federal parliamentary enquiry into feral animals concerning the impact of deer in Royal National Park and Dharawal national parks. Since then, the issue of deer culling has become newsworthy, with reports in the daily newspapers, evening news and St George and Sutherland Shire Leader.

FIELD TRIP REPORT: MT WHAITE BUSH SCRAMBLE

Mt Whaite is a rocky rise in what is known as the Blue Labyrinth in the Blue Mountains, south of Wentworth Falls. The area is a tangle of low mountains and deep ravines. Some 550 meters above sea level, it is named after our own Harry Whaite who explored and mapped the area as part of the Warrigal Bushwalking Club in the late 1930s. A total of 16 walkers met at the rendezvous south of Wentworth Falls on a beautiful Sunday morning, on 30 June 2019. The group drove on sealed road then dirt before taking the turnoff from Tableland Road. The locked gate came up too quickly.

A 3.75 km walk along the fire trail took the trekkers deep into the bush, dense and implacable on either side. At the mark of the ribbon, placed weeks earlier, the group exited the road and clambered into the bush looking for the rocky bluff. Two walkers decided to return to the cars. Having found the outcrop looming ahead the remaining group turned left and struggled along the cliff line. Eventually it was time to steer further left looking for the rock platform and the cairn. From there Mt Whaite was ahead but lost in the bush, so dense it meant that the line of sight was often limited.



The group scrambled down through the meadow and steeply sloped scrub, pushing on to the saddle then up the other side finally reaching the foothills of the mount. From there it was up again through rock platforms till they found the chute and the way onto the ledge. From the ledge, with great views of the Blue Labyrinth, the plaque honouring Harry and Olive Whaite was found. Retracing the way back was done carefully though the trackless bush finding each landmark till at last the road emerged, a sign of civilization that Harry in the early days of bushwalking would have done without.

Well done to all who took part and thank you to Ian Pitt who in our reconnoitre re-established the way. *Julian Sheen*

NSW LAND CLEARING CRISIS

The Nature Conservation Council (NCC) has expressed its concern about the extent of land clearing across NSW. It declares that a State Government report shows that tree clearing has tripled in NSW in five years and that bushland the size of the Australian Capital Territory has been approved for bulldozing. Landholders who clear illegally are rarely held to account. "This is disaster," NCC CEO Kate Smolski said. "Hundreds of thousands of hectares of wildlife habitat are being bulldozed under these laws with virtually no oversight, accountability or enforcement of environmental protections."

NCC is appealing for donations to help stop this unchecked deforestation that could drive koalas and other species to extinction. Contact NCC at hello@nature.org.au

22 July 2019 – Natural Wonders of Western Australia

Kim Wagstaff and Alan Fairley showcase the natural wonders of Western Australia - the flora and the landscapes.

27 July 2019 – Field Trip to Yeramba Lagoon at Picnic Point along the Georges River

Meet at 10.00 am at Yeramba Lagoon, Henry Lawson Drive, Picnic Point. Parking is only available on the road. Take care crossing Henry Lawson Drive. A relatively short walk approximately 1.5 to 2 hours. May be wet underfoot so wear appropriate shoes. Note there are no toilets available near the lagoon. The group will view the work done at the lagoon to remove the weeds, then continue a circuit walk to view the surrounding bushland. The group then has the option to drive to Lambeth Reserve approx. 2 km along Henry Lawson Dr for a picnic lunch (tables and toilets available). For those keen for another walk there is an easy stroll along the boardwalk to Georges River National Park along the waterfront. Wear suitable clothing, footwear and bring food and water.

Leader: Vicki Bolling contact on 0427 870 240.

Meetings of the Society are held at the Oatley RSL Club, 23 Letitia St, Oatley (lower level sports room) from 7.30 pm to 9.30 pm, usually on the fourth Monday of the month. Visitors and accompanied children are welcome at meetings and field days.

BRIEFLY SPEAKING

OATLEY PARK BUSHCARE group is on the second Saturday of each month starting at 12.00 pm. Meet at the entrance on Oatley Park Avenue.

MYLES DUNPHY STREAMWATCH details Heather Stolle 0425 291 879. This activity usually takes place on the Tuesday morning (9.00 am) after OFF General Meetings.

CITIZENS CLIMATE LOBBY meetings at Oatley RSL, held on the second Sunday of every month. All welcome.

LOCAL BUSHCARE: Next Maintenance day will be at Gannons Park 8 am to 11 am on 25 July 2019.

NATIONAL TREE DAY **28 July 2019** Planting event will be between 9 am - 11 am at Beverly Hills Park, Beverly Hills (opp. 133 Tallawalla Street). Plant giveaway will at Olds Park, Forest Road, Penshurst (next to Penshurst Library) from 8 am - 2 pm; bring rate notice and you can volunteer to assist.

SOLAR ENERGY AND REDUCING POWER BILLS TALK

Last month's speaker, Anna Moltchanski from Our Energy Future, gave an excellent talk on energy saving ideas for your home. Topics included insulation, blocking draughts, what to do with windows, heating and cooling, hot water, solar power, battery storage and LED lights. For further information visit: www.ourenergyfuture.org.au

FOX SIGHTINGS

Predation by the red fox is listed as a Key Threatening Process both nationally and in NSW. Local Councils are undertaking a joint control program and as part of this program you can report fox sightings across the region. By reporting a fox, you can play a part in the control effort and help protect native species. To record fox observations, go to www.foxscan.org.au or www.feralscan.org.au/foxscan/ or download the FeralScan Mobile App.

LIME KILN BAY WETLANDS

There was another sewer overflow into Dairy Creek recently. The committee will continue to raise this ongoing problem with the relevant authorities. To view an article published in St George and Sutherland Shire Leader regarding the overflow visit:

<https://www.theleader.com.au/story/6257125/photos-owls-death-points-to-dirty-deeds-in-dairy-creek/>

ANNUAL OFF CELEBRATION DINNER

The annual OFF Celebration Dinner was held on Thursday, 11 July 2019. The very successful event was attended by 41 guests. Everyone enjoyed a lovely meal, followed by the annual raffle. Thanks to all members for their generous donations to our raffle. The cupcakes provided by Sue Howard again proved very popular and were a delicious end to the meal. Mortdale RSL turned out to be a great venue, with plenty of room to socialise. Sincere thanks again to Sue for such brilliant organisation.



WINTER FLOWERING IN OATLEY PARK

Winter is the time when many Australian natives shine! A welcome burst of colour that will bring a smile to the coldest face. Take a walk around the Headland Track and enjoy the many plants which flower in winter.

Most conspicuous are the wattles, with three species putting on a show – *Acacia myrtifolia* (pictured), *Acacia ulicifolia* and *Acacia longifolia*.



Also outstanding are the orange flower-cones of *Banksia spinulosa*, a small shrub with narrow toothed leaves.

Keep an eye open for delicate ground orchids which grow on the edge of the track, like the Finger Orchid, *Petalochilus pictus* (pictured). It is a ground orchid which grows to 30cm tall with white to pink flowers. It can be found on plateaus and slopes. Winter doesn't have to mean staying indoors, so enjoy the crisp air and wonderful natives in bloom at this time of year.





CONSERVATION VALUE OF REMNANT BUSHLAND

Recent studies have highlighted the value of small patches of bushland, once considered nearly worthless. They have shown that the remaining small isolated patches of habitat are disproportionately important for the survival of many species compared to the size of the remnants. A paper by William Laurance, Research Professor at James Cook University, gives several reasons why these small patches of native vegetation can be critically important to;

- save unique biodiversity;
- restore ecosystems which are a source of native plants seeds, seed-dispersing animals and native pollinators;
- to provide steppingstones for mobile wildlife, such as birds and bats;
- help purify water supplies, filtering out pollutants and reducing silt from soil erosion;
- provide opportunities for recreation and nature education.

Read more at: <https://ensia.com/voices/ecosystem-remnants-biodiversity-nature/>

OFF FIELD TRIP TO YERAMBA LAGOON

Last month's walk saw a change of pace with a relaxed 1.8 km walk around Yeramba Lagoon by a group of 13 OFF members. The remediation work on the lagoon seems successful so far, as the waters were mostly clear of any choking weeds. More work will be done in the future to enable flushing by the saltwater of the Georges River, to prevent the return of the weeds.



Walking clockwise, the first section is more protected from the sun and less frequently burnt. The group passed some beautiful small sandstone cliffs and rock outcrops. Members were surprised by the extent of the reserve (335 ha) and the very good condition of the bushland, albeit surrounded by suburbia.

After the walk the members continued to Lambeth Reserve for a quick lunch and then walked along the boardwalk beside the Georges River, downstream to the National Park. There is some lovely bushland on one side and pretty views of the river on the other. Most of the group had not visited these areas before and were pleased to find some new bushland sites close to home.

To view the photos visit: <http://off.oatleypark.com/2019/07/29/yeramba-lagoon/>

Vicki Bolling

KOALA HABITAT TO BE LOST

The Georges River Koala Network (comprised of several environmental groups such as OFF, National Parks Association and Total Environment Centre) has been campaigning to save the koala habitat at Mt Gilead (between Rosemeadow and Appin). On 24 July 2019, Campbelltown Council approved Lendlease's D.A. to clear trees, de-water dams and carry out earthworks at Mt Gilead, to allow for 1700 home sites. More information at:

<https://www.macarthuradvertiser.com.au/story/6295783/developer-wins-fight-to-clear-mount-gilead-of-trees-and-dams/?cs=1437>

WATTLE DAY AUGUST OR SEPTEMBER?

Anyone who went to Primary School in NSW in the 1950s or 1960s will remember Wattle Day. It was held on August 1st and students were encouraged to research wattles or native plants, wear sprigs of wattle, play wattle games, write poems or stories with wattle as a theme, and so on. August 1, 2019 was a perfect day for such activities given most wattles in the Sydney area were in flower. So, why is Wattle Day now celebrated on September 1st when most of Sydney's wattles have finished flowering?

Recognition of the many wattle species (750+) as a distinctive feature of the Australian flora and an inspiring focus for spring festivals was evident in the Australian colonies well before Federation. In 1899 the Wattle Club began in Victoria; its founder, Archibald James Campbell would lead a trip on the first day of September into the countryside to look for wattle. He suggested a national Wattle Day in a speech in September 1908. Not to be outdone by Melbourne, botanists such as J. H. Maiden of Sydney's Botanic Gardens called a public meeting in August 1909 to support a Wattle Day and to set aside a day on which Australia's national flower might be worn and displayed. By 1910, branches of a Wattle Day League were active in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. Festivities were held each year on 1st September, marked by bunches of wattle and planting of wattle trees in schools and parks. 1913 saw the incorporation of wattle into the design of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms.

Wattle Day festivities intensified during World War 1 when wattle sprigs were widely used as a symbol of national patriotism. Sales of wattle badges and blossoms by organisations like Red Cross were a way of helping soldiers on the war front. In Sydney, demand for bunches of wattle were so great that demand could not be met on 1st September, so in 1916 Wattle Day celebrations were put forward to 1st August.



Acacia longifolia

Thus, began the divide which continued until 1992. Interest in Wattle Day gradually declined in NSW, but in Victoria the Wattle Day League lasted until the 1960s, continuing its push for celebrations on 1st September, which happily coincided with the first day of Spring. In the 1980s there was a renewal of interest in Wattle Day in NSW, when Maria Hitchcock and the Australian Plants Society campaigned for a national wattle. The issue was resolved on 23 June 1992, when the Governor-General Bill Hayden declared that 1st September should be observed as National Wattle Day in all Australian States. Prior to this, as part of Australia's Bicentennial Celebrations in August 1988, the then Governor-General, Sir Ninian Stephen, proclaimed *Acacia pycnantha* (Golden Wattle) to be Australia's national floral symbol.

These two proclamations from Canberra were a double blow to NSW (as well as QLD and NT). Not only was Wattle Day to be celebrated on a day when few wattles were in flower, but the chosen national wattle does not even occur around Sydney or further north, being distributed only in southern NSW, VIC, TAS, and around Adelaide and Perth. So, we have a national flower which is not nationally distributed and are asked to accept a national celebration in the wrong month of the year. Fortunately, the genus *Acacia* (wattle) is found nation-wide and the many species are truly iconic Australian flora which can be celebrated at any time of the year.

Alan Fairley (Extract from article first published in *Doryanthes*)

26 August 2019 – Reptiles and Frogs of the Sydney Basin

Jayden Walsh shares his extensive knowledge of reptiles and frogs of the Sydney Basin.

31 August 2019 – Field Trip from Waterfall to Heathcote, Via Uloola Pools - Royal National Park

This is an 11 km walk along medium grade tracks and trails taking about 5 hours to complete. A pleasant walk, catching scenic views over the valleys and bushland, spotting wildflowers, and crossing Uloola Brook and Kangaroo Creek (Karoo Pool). Bring your swimmers if you fancy a dip! Catch the 8.38 am (Mortdale) or 8.40 am (Oatley) train arriving at Waterfall at 9.06 am. For those travelling by car we will meet at 9.15 am in the carpark just on the eastern side of Waterfall station for the start of the walk. The walk will finish at Heathcote Station where the trains back to Mortdale/Oatley run every half hour. Bring plenty of water, snacks, lunch and appropriate clothing and footwear. Walk Leader Kim Wagstaff (M) 0437 791 988

Meetings of the Society are held at the Oatley RSL Club, 23 Letitia St, Oatley (lower level sports room) from 7.30 pm to 9.30 pm, usually on the fourth Monday of the month. Visitors and accompanied children are welcome at meetings and field days.

BRIEFLY SPEAKING

OATLEY PARK BUSHCARE group is on the second Saturday of each month starting at 12.00 pm. Meet at the entrance on Oatley Park Avenue.

MYLES DUNPHY STREAMWATCH details Heather Stolle 0425 291 879. This activity usually takes place on the Tuesday morning (9.00 am) after OFF General Meetings.

- ❖ The Georges River Council Mayor has pledged \$1000 to Georges River Streamwatch from his discretionary fund for this financial year.

CITIZENS CLIMATE LOBBY meetings at Oatley RSL, held on the second Sunday of every month. All welcome.

LOCAL BUSHCARE: Next Maintenance day will be at River Road Reserve Oatley from 8 am to 11 am on 29 August 2019.

OATLEY BOWLING CLUB SITE: Tenders are to be called soon for the site's remediation plan and for an overall master plan for the site. There will be public consultation for the master plan.

MOOREBANK INTERMODAL: OFF recently made a submission to the Independent Planning Commission concerning the adverse effects which this huge industrial development will have on the Georges River. Details at RAID Moorebank <http://www.moorebank.org/about>

GANNONS PARK: Approximately 2480 plants have now been planted. More will be planted before September in the Oatley electorate under the NSW Minister's Conservation Fund.

POWER OF COUNTRY EVENT

This event will be held on **5 September 2019, at 6.00 pm** in Sydney Town Hall (lower Town Hall) You are invited to join Traditional Owners and community members facing the worst of fracking gas fields in the Northern Territory. The meeting is your chance to hear directly from people on the front line of fracking in NT. There will be live music, a panel discussion, short film and action stations.



MUOGAMARRA NATURE RESEARVE NEAR COWAN OPEN

The reserve is now open for 6 weekends this Spring from 10 August to 15 September 2019. Get there as early as you can. There are paid guided tours, or you can do a self-guided tour. Park access fee: adult \$15, child/concession \$10, family \$40 (2 adults, 2 children). National Park annual passes not valid.

GEORGES RIVER FLORA - EAST HILLS GROUP ACTIVITIES

The Australian Plants Society invites you to a talk by Karlo Taliana on the flora of the Georges River National Park. **Wednesday 4 September 2019, at 7.30 pm** in Lugarno-Peakhurst Uniting Church - Forest Road, Lugarno (opposite Chivers Hill shopping centre).

On **Sunday 8 September 2019, from 10 am** the East Hills Group will be hosting a visit to Sylvan Grove Native Garden, 7 Sylvan Grove, Picnic Point. Bankstown Council horticulturist, Jim Mackay will be leading a guided walk through the garden, always full of flowering native plants at this time of year. For more information, phone Liz Cameron 9580 6621.

WAR ON WASTE AND PLASTIC BOTTLE TOPS

Victorian charity Envision uses 3D printing software to turn plastic bottle lids into mobility aids. The Little Achievers Kindergarten in Penshurst supports this cause and is collecting them. They also collect bread tags and have collection bins in their entry foyer. The bread tags are sold to a plastic moulding company and the money is used to buy wheelchairs.

OFF encourages members to save these items which are otherwise added to the waste stream and donate them to this worthy cause. The address is **20 Austral St, 2222 Penshurst.**

***Note from Envision:**

We can only use bottle caps with a grade 2 or 4 plastic. So, any with a '2' or '4' on the actual cap (not the bottle) will be fine. The number must be stand alone, not within a code. This will generally include soft drink, water and milk bottle caps. To see if the cap is usable, you can look at the numbers located on the underside of the cap. Any caps without numbers will be unusable as we have no way of knowing what grade plastic they are. We also ask that the caps are please rinsed before they are donated and that no extra plastic, metal or other material is attached. We also cannot accept any larger lids, such as those found on Vegemite or peanut butter jars as they are too difficult to process.

GEORGES RIVER COUNCIL AND DUMPED RUBBISH

Our Secretary, Liz Cameron, recently thanked Council for their prompt removal of rubbish from Poulton Park. A Council employee collected the rubbish within 24 hours of the notification. Fiona Stock, Co-ordinator Environment Sustainability and Waste GRC, welcomed the feedback - noting that their employees do not receive many positive comments from the public. With regards to dumped rubbish, the best way to report to Council is through a phone call, 9330 6400 or email mail@georgesriver.nsw.gov.au with photos and as much detail as possible.



DON'T FRACK THE NT

Origin Energy is planning to extract coal seam gas in the Northern Territory (NT) using fracking - threatening land, water, country and our climate. NT residents, particularly Traditional Owners, are opposed to this potentially damaging proposal. There will be a rally outside the Origin Energy Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 16 October 2019 to demonstrate against their plans. You can show your support by joining the rally which will be held at Martin Place from 8.00 am – 10.00 am. For more information, visit:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/932640450404558/>

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO KOALAS

It has recently been reported that the NSW Parliament is currently holding an inquiry into the many threats facing koala populations and their habitat around the state. "Koala populations are facing increased threats across NSW with even the healthiest colonies at risk as critical habitat is destroyed, and the climate grows hotter and drier", the parliamentary inquiry heard. For the full story visit: <https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/nsw-s-koalas-in-crisis-as-threats-rise-on-many-fronts-inquiry-told-20190816-p52hvw.html>
OFF is a member of the Georges River Koala Network.

OFF FIELD TRIP WATERFALL TO HEATHCOTE

On Saturday 31 August 2019, 11 OFF members enjoyed a spectacular and scenic wildflower walk from Waterfall to Heathcote along the Uloola track via Karloo Pools (11 km). Uloola walking track meanders through the picturesque highlands of Royal National Park.



Photo: James Deli

There was a huge variety of wildflowers in many different colours, including a splendid showing of Darwinia and Red Spider Flowers - *Grevillea oleoides*. Walking conditions were perfect and thanks to the recent rainfall, the waterfalls and pools were at their best with plenty of aquatic fauna.

A thoroughly enjoyable day - thanks to Kim Wagstaff for organising and leading the walk.

Photos from the walk can be found on the OFF Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/OatleyFloraandFauna/photos/pcb.2911816018893087/2911811732226849/?type=3&theater>

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS OF THE SYDNEY BASIN

Jayden Walsh gave an entertaining and informative talk during the last monthly OFF meeting on Monday 26 August 2019. His presentation was highlighted with photos from his impressive collection. During the talk, he defined reptiles and amphibians, and shared examples of unusual characteristics of the Australian fauna – such as that some Australian frogs don't have a typical tadpole stage – for example, the gastric-brooding frogs and the Red-crowned Toadlet.



©Jayden Walsh

Red-crowned Toadlet

Jayden also gave advice on attracting frogs and lizards to our gardens through the use of ponds in partial or full sun (tree frog tadpoles like warm water). He also suggested some plants that attract insects and provide sheltering bark such as paperbarks, eucalypts as well as the use of rocks, logs, roof-tiles, corrugated iron and pipes for more shelter. Apartment-dwellers don't have to miss out – simply adding a lily pad pot on the balcony can be attractive to Peron's Tree Frogs.

It was emphasised bush rock should not be brought into a garden as its removal from sandstone outcrops has led to a serious decline in the rare Broad-headed Snake that shelters under it in winter. Jayden spends a lot of time looking for reptiles and frogs in the Sydney Basin and has located some rare species through perseverance and familiarity with their habits.

OFF RESEARCH GRANTS 2019

This year, we received 11 applications for an OFF-Research Grant. They were all very good and the OFF committee agreed to increase the grant allocation from \$4000 to \$6000, allowing us to distribute \$2000 to each of the three successful researchers. The grant recipients for 2019 are:

- **Dympna Cullen** - Studying the ecological refuges for the Crest-tailed Mulgara following a prolonged period of drought.
- **Simon Gorta** – Researching micro and macro-habitat use by arid birds under land management and drought-related stressors.
- **Gracie Liu** - Investigating the causes and effects of disease caused by the Chytrid Fungus on amphibians.

A condition of the grants is that recipients make a presentation on their project during an OFF meeting. We look forward to hearing how these research projects have increased the knowledge bank of natural history. The committee would like to thank our members for their generous donations which have enabled us to make these significant contributions to the research projects.

20 September 2019 – Visit to historic property ‘Glenlee’ in Lugarno

OFF members are invited to visit ‘Glenlee’, 50 Boronia Parade, Lugarno, next to Heinrichs Reserve at 10.00 am. This 2.5 ha property has been in the Matthei family since the early 1900s but the Matthei brothers passed away last year and the property is likely to be sold. The family would like OFF members to have the opportunity to see what a beautiful, undeveloped spot it is.

‘Glenlee’ is a mix of vegetable/fruit garden and bushland with a great view of Oatley Park. There is a steep slope with quite a few stairs, from the house down to the river and the bushland has some uneven ground but it is fairly easy to get around the property. Some older members of the Matthei family should be available to talk about the history of Glenlee. It is possible to make tea and coffee in the house, so please bring a mug if you would like a cuppa.

23 September 2019 – Myles Dunphy - the man.

At our monthly meeting President Graham Lalchere will outline the history of a famous and former long-term resident of Oatley, Myles Dunphy. Myles championed the cause of national parks in Australia for most of his life and he is commonly referred to as the NSW Father of Conservation.

27-29 September 2019 – Weekend at Capertee National Park

Accommodation in the homestead and cottage is fully booked for the weekend. If others wish to join this activity, campsites are available. Please notify OFF, and book your campsite through the NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service:

<https://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/camping-and-accommodation/campgrounds/capertee-campground/local-alerts> Leader: Deb Andrew.

ADVANCE NOTICE – EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

Sunday 3 November - Hawkesbury River cruise

This 2.5-hour morning cruise will start from Brooklyn and travel downstream, passing Dangar Island. Commentary by an on-board historian will focus on the wartime history of the river. Cost of the ferry trip is \$45 (\$40 concession) and includes morning tea. If you are interested, please contact Graham Fry on 9580 6621 or fryg45@gmail.com for more information and to reserve your place.

January 2020 – Snowy Mountains in summer

OFF members have a long tradition of spending up to a week in the Snowy Mountains in summer to escape Sydney’s heat and humidity and to experience the wonderful display of mountain wildflowers. We need to book soon to reserve accommodation in the lodge at Charlotte Pass where we now usually stay. It will probably be for the 2nd or 3rd week of January. If you are interested, please contact Graham Fry on 9580 6621 or fryg45@gmail.com with preferred dates and how long you intend to stay. Cost is approximately \$120 per room per night.

Meetings of the Society are held at the Oatley RSL Club, 23 Letitia St, Oatley (lower level sports room) from 7.30 pm to 9.30 pm, usually on the fourth Monday of the month. Visitors and accompanied children are welcome at meetings and field days.

BRIEFLY SPEAKING

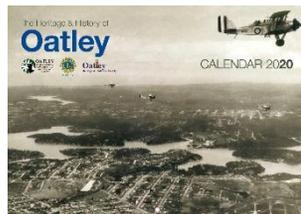
OATLEY PARK BUSHCARE group is on the second Saturday of each month starting at 12.00 pm. Meet at the entrance on Oatley Park Avenue. New participants welcome, please contact John Kensett, GRC Bushcare Officer, m: 0435 963 643

MYLES DUNPHY STREAMWATCH details Heather Stolle 0425 291 879. This activity usually takes place on the Tuesday morning (9.00 am) after OFF General Meetings.

OATLEY LIONS VILLAGE FESTIVAL SATURDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2019

A reminder that OFF will have a stall at the Oatley Lions Village Festival. Members are invited to spend an hour or two helping on the stall, or to just drop by and have a chat.

The 2020 Oatley calendar - The Heritage and History of Oatley - will be available for sale, discounted to OFF members.



CITIZENS CLIMATE LOBBY meetings at Oatley RSL, held at 2.30 pm on the second Sunday of every month. All welcome.

OFF BUSHCARE MAINTENANCE PROGRAM: Next Maintenance Day will be at Gannons Park where the plantings took place in May and June – opposite Vale Lane, from 8 am to 11 am on Thursday 26 September 2019.

BUSHCARE'S BIG DAY OUT 1 SEPTEMBER 2019

OFF members joined other Georges River Bushcarers at Oatley Point Reserve on the morning of Father’s Day to spend several hours tackling an infestation of the exotic succulent, Mother of Millions. The 26 participants from different Bushcare groups then enjoyed socialising over a splendid morning tea provided by Georges River Council.

FEDERAL GOVT STRONGER COMMUNITIES PROGRAMME

OFF has completed a regeneration project in the Banks electorate, funded by the Federal Government through the Stronger Communities Programme (Round 4). 2,500 tubestock of native species were planted and a new Georges River Council Bushcare group has been established at the site in Gannons Park.

MY COMMUNITY PROJECT

Thanks to members and others who voted in My Community Project. The RSL Youth Club has been successful in winning a grant for the installation of air-conditioning in both Youth Club venues. This includes the hall adjacent to the RSL where OFF may be able to hold its meetings in future if we cannot use our current venue due to renovations.





RODENTICIDES A THREAT TO OWLS AND WILDLIFE

Anticoagulant rodenticides are rat and mouse poisons which act as blood thinners and are one of the most common methods of controlling unwanted rodents. Unfortunately, studies in other parts of the world have shown that these poisons – especially the longer-lasting “second generation” rodenticides – can harm wildlife when they eat poisoned rats and mice.

Second generation anticoagulant rodenticides take a long time to break down, so an animal can take multiple baits before it dies. There have been numerous studies in America and England about the devastating impact of these rodenticides on wildlife. Wildlife that have been particularly affected are owls, but other birds and animals, including pets that have picked up a dead rodent have also been impacted.



An Oatley Bushland Resident: Southern Boobook Owl

If you do decide to use rodenticides, then it's important to know which ones you are using. Warfarin and coumatetralyl are “first generation” anticoagulant rodenticides which break down much faster than other rodenticides and are less likely to cause poisoning in native wildlife that eat poisoned rodents. Most rat and mouse poison packaging doesn't make it obvious which rodenticides are used in the product. The actual rodenticide contained in the baits will be after the words “Active Constituent”.

The second-generation rodenticides that have been identified as causing owl deaths contain either Bromadiolone or Brodifacoum. If you do choose to use these products, be sure to follow the directions on the label to help reduce the risk of unintentionally poisoning wildlife.

At present, these powerful rat poisons are available at most supermarkets and hardware stores. The Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority is now reviewing how these are regulated because of concerns to human health and impacts on wildlife populations.

Other countries like the United States and Canada have already restricted the stronger poisons to licensed pest controllers. They have banned outdoor use and require lockable bait boxes to keep children and pets away from baits. These steps might not be enough to overcome Australia's unique risks but allowing the current situation to continue is guaranteed to result in more poisoning of wildlife and our pets.

Graham Fry

LIONS OATLEY VILLAGE FESTIVAL

OFF ran a successful stall at the festival, promoting a range of activities. Enthusiastic members sold local plants and the 2020 calendar, and provided literature and advice. We also had displays on the 'Redcycle' scheme (recycling plastic bags through supermarkets) and our local stormwater system, and ran a children's art demonstration. 'Plastic Man' also did the rounds. Thanks also to Oatley Lions for running a great festival.

CULLING NOISY MINERS FAILS IN NSW TRIAL

Over the past 20 years there has been a large increase in numbers of noisy miners in eastern Australia. Due to their aggressive behaviour they are very effective in driving out other birds from their territories. Their impact is now so severe that they have become a “key threatening process”, therefore making it possible to take measures to control their numbers.

At the recent Australasian Ornithologists Conference in Darwin, there were several papers presented on this problem. Studies have shown that these birds are edge specialists, they like tall eucalypts and grassy areas and are not found in the middle of forests or where there is a thick understorey.

Over-clearing of bushland and injudicious planting have created perfect conditions for the noisy miners to thrive. Recently, a research project in western NSW carried out surveys of several sites where miners were present and recorded the number of birds before and after the culling of the miners. The sad result was that notwithstanding the culling of over 600 miners in these sites, within days there were just as many miners back in these same areas. Thus, culling in this habitat is not an effective strategy for controlling noisy miners.

Unfortunately, none of the research presentations had any answers on how to control these birds other than re-establishing ground cover and establishing large contiguous forested areas rather than narrow strips.

Graham Fry

VISIT TO HISTORIC 'GLENLEE' LUGARNO

On September 20, 2019 a small number of OFF members and others accepted an invitation to visit Glenlee, an historic property at 50 Boronia Parade, next to Heinrichs Reserve. This 2.5-hectare property has been in the Matthei family since the early 1900s. The Matthei brothers passed away last year and the property is likely to be sold. Members of the family wanted OFF members to have the opportunity to see what a remarkable and unique spot it is before possible development takes place.

'Glenlee' is a mix of vegetable/fruit garden, stables, workshops, sheds and bushland with a great view of Oatley Park. The waterfront jetty and boat sheds are accessed by an impressive set of steep hand-hewn sandstone steps, quarried on site.

The property also contains significant bushland and possible aboriginal sites, e.g. rock grooves and a midden. It is hoped that any future owner does not over-develop the property and preserves the natural and historic attributes of the area.

The visit was not without incident, as part of the jetty collapsed when some visitors were walking out to the pontoon at its end, leaving some stranded on the pontoon and in the river. It took some time to rescue everybody unscathed and secure the pontoon to stop it drifting down the river. An eventful day highlighted by the wonderful hospitality of the Matthei family



28 October 2019 – 2019 OFF Research Grant Results Presentation

Our two recipients of the 2019 OFF Research Grants will be outlining the results of their separate PhD studies at our October general meeting. Justin Collette has been researching seed dormancy and germination of Rutaceae species. Claudia Santori spent her time and efforts on investigating Murray River turtles through tracking devices. Come along and show your support for these two wonderful graduates who are striving to improve knowledge and the survival of our vulnerable species of flora and fauna respectively.

3 November 2019 – Hawkesbury River Cruise

Some years ago, OFF joined the River Postman cruise for a delightful cruise on the Hawkesbury river which covered the area upstream from Brooklyn. This cruise will cover the downstream area around Dangar Island. We will have an historian on board to provide a commentary on the history of the area including the little known but fascinating war history of the river. The ferry will leave from Brooklyn wharf at 10.00 am, returning at 12:30 pm. The most convenient travel method is by train. Catch the 7:43 am Oatley, 7:45 am Mortdale train to Central and then change to the 8:48 am Newcastle train arriving at Hawkesbury River station (Brooklyn) at 9:49 am. This allows for 10 minutes to get to the wharf. We will have around 30 minutes at Central to get a coffee if desired. Bring your own lunch or buy it at the wharf after we return to Brooklyn. Unfortunately, the ferry to Dangar Island doesn't leave until 1:30 pm and therefore will be too late for lunch on the island. The trip is easy except for the two flights of stairs at Hawkesbury River station which are steep and there is no lift. Return trains leave hourly from Hawkesbury River and it takes approximately 2 hours to get back to Oatley, so depending on your luncheon arrangements you can get back home from 3.00 pm onwards. The cost of the ferry trip is \$45 or \$40 for concession ticket, and the cruise includes morning tea. The train trip is covered by the Opal fare system. If you are interested contact Graham Fry on 9580 6621 or fryg45@gmail.com to reserve your place.

January 2020 – Snowy Mountains in Summer (ADVANCE NOTICE – EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST)

For many years, OFF members have had a tradition of spending up to a week in the Snowy Mountains during summer to escape the Sydney heat and humidity and experience the wonderful display of mountain wildflowers. We are again exploring the possibility of going to the Snowy in January 2020. If we are to go this summer, we need to start making bookings now to reserve space in the lodge at Charlottes Pass where we normally stay. If you are interested, please contact Graham Fry on 9580 6621 or fryg45@gmail.com and advise on how long you would be staying and if you have any preferred dates. Dates are yet to be finalised but will probably be in the 2nd or 3rd week of January. Costs generally work out to be around \$120 a night per room.

Meetings of the Society are held at the Oatley RSL Club, 23 Letitia St, Oatley (lower level sports room) from 7.30 pm to 9.30 pm, usually on the fourth Monday of the month. Visitors and accompanied children are welcome at meetings and field days.

BRIEFLY SPEAKING

OATLEY PARK BUSHCARE group is on the second Saturday of each month starting at 12.00 pm. Meet at the entrance on Oatley Park Avenue. New participants welcome, please contact John Kensett, GRC Bushcare Officer, m: 0435 963 643

MYLES DUNPHY STREAMWATCH details Heather Stolle 0425 291 879. This activity usually takes place on the Tuesday morning (9.00 am) after OFF General Meetings. New volunteers always welcome.

CITIZENS CLIMATE LOBBY meetings at Oatley RSL, held at 2.30 pm on the second Sunday of every month. All welcome.

LOCAL BUSHCARE Members can assist by volunteering to maintain OFF planting sites, usually on the fourth Thursday of each month (except December) at 8.00 am. This month we will be working on the fifth Thursday, the 31st, at Boorea Reserve near Oatley Station.

AUSSIE BACKYARD BIRD COUNT will be held during 21-27 October 2019. For information on how to register and submit a count, visit: <https://aussiebirdcount.org.au/>

RECENT CONTACT WITH GRC

OFF has sent letters to the Georges River Council regarding several matters including the removal of dead timber from council reserves, the issues associated with BMX riding in reserves, and the problems arising from the new adventure playground in Oatley Park (including graffiti and parking). Personal contact with the Mayor and Council staff by OFF committee members have highlighted these problems.

CRUISE SHIP TERMINAL AT YARRA BAY

Historic and environmentally sensitive Botany Bay is already under significant pressure from the effects of local industry, container ships, the airport and pollution. However, the NSW government proposes to build a "Mega" cruise ship terminal at Yarra Bay, La Perouse. It will involve the construction of wharves, breakwaters and dredging of the seabed. The Kamay Botany Bay National Park, including the historic Bare Island and Kurnell foreshores, as well as Towra Point Nature Reserve will also be adversely affected. For more details visit <https://saveyarrabay.com/the-threat-to-yarra-bay>

TRIP TO CAPERTEE NATIONAL PARK

Over the last weekend in September, OFF members booked out the Homestead and Cottage in Capertee National Park in what is becoming an annual event. Deb Andrew led the group on several walks in the hope of spotting the elusive regent honeyeater. Sadly, it was not to be although there was plenty of wildlife – scarlet honeyeaters, little lorikeets, woodswallows, wombats, wallaroos, eastern greys, red-bellied black snakes and lace monitors.

The group also had the opportunity to view firsthand the woeful tree planting carried out by National Parks and see how the weeds had neatly colonised the furrows ripped into the hillsides. A short video of the weekend can be found at

<https://vimeo.com/366174401>





OFF PARTICIPATES IN GRAFFITI REMOVAL DAY

OFF members and friends tackled two local graffiti sites on Sunday, 27 October 2019, as part of Graffiti Removal Day. The Oatley side of Como Bridge and the Myles Dunphy Reserve sewer viaduct received a fresh coat of paint and were finished with anti-graffiti compound.



The volunteers received lots of positive support and appreciation for the work from passers-by, all saying they would like to see murals at both locations. A sincere thanks to those who participated in the project, which took over 50 manhours to complete. Special credit goes to those who came from outside Oatley:

- Cameron from Botany
- Emily and Thomas from Como
- Joanne from Jannali
- Catherine from Hurstville Grove

Also, thanks to OFF members Vicki and Graham, Sonia and Greg, Sharyn and Phil, Geoff Francis and James and Peter, as well as Melissa who provided essential transport for the supplies from Myra Place to the bridge. For more information visit: <https://www.facebook.com/OatleyFloraandFauna> or <https://www.theleader.com.au/story/6463574/anti-graffiti-crusaders-attack-draw-bridge/>

WIN FOR BLUE MOUNTAINS

The NSW Government has purchased the last undeveloped peninsula plateau in the Blue Mountains - the Radiata Plateau - to protect it in the national parks system. The Plateau is near the Explorers tree west of Katoomba. This is the result of decades of campaigning by the community led by the Blue Mountains Conservation Society. Radiata Plateau is home to endangered species like the spotted-tail quoll and greater glider and is culturally significant to the Aboriginal community. Now it will be protected forever.

OFF MEMBER CHARGED DURING XR PROTEST

Former Hurstville councillor Anne Wagstaff was one of 30 people arrested at the Extinction Rebellion (XR) protest on 7 October 2019. XR, which uses non-violent direct action - believes the government should declare a "climate and ecological emergency, halt biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025 and create and be led by the decisions of a Citizen's Assembly".

Even though she did not resist arrest, Anne received injuries to her feet, upper arms and shoulder when the police used excessive force to remove her from the road, causing her to scream in pain. She was charged with "not comply with police direction regarding road closure". Anne is due to appear in court on 21 November 2019. For more information visit: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-10-07/sydney-protests-extinction-rebellion-marred-by-arrests/11580058>

2018 OFF RESEARCH GRANTS

At the October meeting, the recipients of the 2018 OFF Research Grants gave presentations on their research. The talks were interesting and rewarding to our members, who through their donations have helped fund these scientifically significant research projects, which will positively impact Australian flora and fauna. Below are summaries of the research, provided by the grant recipients. If any OFF member would like to see the full reports, contact Graham Fry on fryg45@gmail.com.

Report from Claudia Santori: *Influence of captivity on habitat choice of head-started juvenile Murray River Turtles (Emydura macquarii)*

The Murray River turtle (*Emydura macquarii*) was once very abundant in the Australian Murray-Darling Basin, but it has suffered a 69% decline in the last 40 years. Loss of recruitment is thought to be a major driver of this decline. Incubating eggs in captivity and releasing hatchlings might be a valid conservation solution.

Identifying whether captivity influences hatchlings behaviour, and what habitats they select upon hatching, is important to guide the management of this species. We conducted a radio-tracking experiment to assess whether aquatic vegetation is a preferred habitat for hatchling *E. macquarii*, and if captivity affects this choice.

We fitted 36 hatchling *E. macquarii* with radio-transmitters, 18 upon hatching ("fresh hatchlings") and 18 after one month in captivity ("captive hatchlings"). We tracked their movements daily for two weeks. After a similar initial dispersion and exploration time, the fresh hatchlings settled in protected, vegetated areas near the banks of the wetland or near large patches of aquatic vegetation, whereas captive hatchlings selected locations further from vegetation. As a result of this research we now recommend that hatchlings should be released immediately after they hatch into areas where aquatic plants are abundant. This knowledge will be key to design a large-scale conservation programme for Murray River turtles.

Report from Justin Collette: *Seed dormancy of difficult to germinate Rutaceae*

Australian species from the Rutaceae family are very difficult to germinate. I aimed to learn the germination cues required for germination of these species, by carrying out germination experiments. Additionally, I looked at how seasonal preferences for germination interact with rainfall seasonality of the species' location.

I obtained over 10,000 seeds which I used in germination experiments that were designed to test the seasonal requirements of germination, as well as the roll of smoke cues, light and heat. To draw broader conclusions about the seasonal preference for germination, I included a literature search which yielded seven extra species.

Of the 18 species tested in this experiment, 9 showed germination, 6 showed limited germination and 3 showed no germination at all. Overall, smoke had a positive effect on germination. Dark treatments and heat-shock treatments didn't significantly affect germination. After adding species from the literature, I looked at the seasonal preferences for germination. For species from seasonal rainfall areas, there was a slight preference for warmer temperatures, for species from Mediterranean rainfall areas (winter rainfall) there was a slight preference for cooler temperatures and for species from sub-tropical rainfall (summer rainfall), there was a strong preference for warmer temperatures.

These germination results are crucial for the conservation of these species, setting up germination protocols for seed banks to follow, allowing for the propagation of these species.

Coming OFF Events in November/December 2019

OFF Full Year Events Calendar at: off.oatleypark.com/program

25 November 2019 – Chris Lloyd Presentation on The Five Islands of Wollongong Bird Refuges

Chris Lloyd takes you off the coast of Wollongong to the 5 Islands where he has been instrumental in the conservation strategies of these important seabird refuges. This will be the final meeting for 2019, and a social supper will be held. Please bring a plate of food to share. Tea, coffee and other drinks can be purchased upstairs.

2 December 2019 – Christmas in Oatley Park: All OFF Members Welcome!

This year, for our annual Christmas get-together, we will gather at the Castle (not the Children's Playground). Meet at 5.30 pm. BYO meal and Christmas cheer, as well as chairs and tables for a relaxed social evening. Note that the Park closes at 8pm.

7, 14 and 21 December 2019 – OFF Pop-Up Christmas Street Stalls

POP-UP STREET STALLS will be run in Oatley and Mortdale on Saturday mornings in December (7, 14 and 21) between 8.30 am - 12.00pm. We will be selling Oatley 2020 Calendars, greetings cards, and promoting OFF, alongside Oatley Lions (who will be selling their Christmas cakes) and Oatley Heritage and Historical Society. If you can spare some time on any of those days to assist, please email Liz Cameron at elsmere02@gmail.com.

5 – 12 January 2020 – Snowy Mountains in Summer: Pygmy Possum Ski Lodge, Charlotte Pass

OFF has again booked accommodation at the Pygmy Possum Ski Lodge at Charlotte Pass for our summer Snowy trip. The lodge has been booked from Sunday 5 – 12 January. People can stay for as long as they like within the week but note that if you intend to stay for more than 4 days, it is cheaper to use the weekly rate. The rates are \$69 per person, per night or \$276 per person, for the week. To make a booking go to the Elouera Club website, <https://eloueraskiclub.asn.au/bookings/> and fill in the booking form. In the box labelled "booking ID number" add 2704. Contact Graham Fry on 95806621 or fryg45@gmail.com if you require any further information.

3 February 2020 – OFF Annual General Meeting

Next year's first Monday meeting will be the Annual general Meeting. A reminder that this is the time when we are calling for members to form a new Committee for 2020. You are invited to nominate at the AGM. **The Society is looking for someone to manage the OFF Website and a new OFF News Editor.**

Meetings of the Society are held at the Oatley RSL Club, 23 Letitia St, Oatley (lower level sports room) from 7.30 pm to 9.30 pm. Visitors welcome.

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CITIZENS CLIMATE LOBBY meetings at Oatley RSL, held at 2.30 pm on the second Sunday of every month. All welcome.

LOCAL BUSHCARE LOCAL BUSHCARE Members can assist by volunteering this month to help planting at Dairy Creek near the recently constructed culvert under Glen Road on Thursday 28 December 2019, from 8.00 am to 11.00 am. Ring Matt to confirm on 0408 605 923.

OFF DONATIONS SUMMARY

In 2016 OFF reviewed its practice of donating annually to conservation organisations and since 2017, has funnelled annual donations totalling \$15,000 from OFF members into our Research Grant Fund. These donations have been part of other grants to students thereby leveraging our money into research funding of over \$100,000 which certainly makes a difference in our preferred areas of research.

To date, seven postgraduate students have benefited, and the quality of their research demonstrated, through presentations at our meetings, that it is money well-spent. Already this year, before donations start coming in with membership renewals, members have contributed more than \$300 to the Fund. OFF members have continued to support conservation organisations on an irregular basis, through the sale of produce and bird cards at meetings and on stalls. The major providers have been Jan Douglas, and Bev Watters, with

further contributions from Melina Amerasinghe and Graham Fry. Income from these sources resulted in the following donations this year: EDO \$506.50; TEC Save Koalas \$111; Birdlife Australia Threatened Species Program \$77. Thank you to all members for their continued generosity.

FUN ON THE HAWKESBURY RIVER

On November 3, 2019 the day started with an early train from Oatley, the weather cloudy with the hopeful hint of rain. We arrived at Hawkesbury River station and formed a group of 33, an excellent turnout. The ferry - a catamaran, arrived at the nearby dock and we were all soon aboard. We first headed across the river to the site of a sunken historic Australian warship, HMAS Swan and then voyaged up the river toward West Head, passing Juno Point. The commentary provided by Peter Rea was excellent focusing on the wartime importance of the Hawkesbury rail crossing and the extensive military installations set up to protect it.

As we approached West Head the ocean swell became decidedly choppy but the evidence of war time construction on the peninsular was very impressive and the lively water added to the drama. There were vertical and horizontal rail lines as well as several gun installations. We then turned back into the river, leaving Broken Bay and Lion Island behind us. We sailed successfully over the site of a WWII minefield and returned briefly to our port at Brooklyn. After that we went west under the old railway bridge where our commentator enriched the journey with tales of engineering success and incompetence. It was interesting to hear that the rail link north was paramount to Australia's wartime security.

The ferry continued further upriver as far as the wreck of the first HMAS Parramatta, and then returned us to our starting point, during which we heard stories along the way of the 160-tonne paddle steamer - General Gordon, which led an adventurous life as a ferry and tourist boat in the 1800s. After a pleasant lunch, we made the trip back home. Many thanks to Graham Fry for putting the tour together.

Julian Sheen