

Despite COVID restrictions and massive wet weather disruptions to our 2022 program, OFF made significant advances in protecting and enhancing our natural environment.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Nature photographic exhibition "TOO PRECIOUS TO LOSE" held in Hurstville Museum and Gallery in June and supported by NCC. Spread OFF's message and raised our profile in the wider Georges River area. This exhibition garnered many positive comments from up to 451 visitors to the Dragons Lair gallery over the 26 days of its showing. They enjoyed beautiful photos of our precious local flora, and fauna. OFF thanks the talented local photographers who contributed photos, the NCC and all who worked so hard to make the exhibition a success.

Book launch - OFF was a co-host of an event held in April at Hazelhurst Gallery in GyMEA, for the launch of *Georges River Blues*, award winning author and historian, Heather Goodall's new book on Swamps, Mangroves and Resident Action 1945 – 1980. It was a very interesting and successful event with over 60 people attending. The accounts of the early activists for the environment of the Georges River provide inspiration for all of us current day 'greenies'.

Revegetation of local parks and reserves with native plants in collaboration with Greater Sydney Landcare Network's Creating Canopies Program and Georges River Council; more than 150 hours of volunteer labour invested and 1,660 trees and ground cover species planted [incl. 400 plants at Carss Park; 340 plants at Claydon Reserve; 320 local native plants at Renown Park; and a further 500 plants at Claydon Reserve.]

Rotary Adopt-A-Tree Program - Adrian Polhill has been working with the Rotary Adopt-A-Tree project team to identify planting sites for 8750 native trees and shrubs. Outcomes:

- Over 2 weekends in September, OFF members and others planted **2,000 plants** at Moorlands, Vince Heffernan's biodynamic sheep property near Dalton.
- OFF members also joined Rotary, Lions, and family members and friends to plant **1,800 plants** at Severn Park near Berridale, the property of Charley Massy PhD OAM, on the weekend of 15-16 October.

This Program continues into 2023.

OFF Research grants worth \$6,000 were disbursed to three postgraduate students, who presented very interesting and well-prepared talks on their research findings to OFF meetings during the year. This continues to be a strategic and successful Program in not only providing great speakers and topics for our meetings but also advancing the science to protect, conserve and enhance our natural environment.

CAMPAIGNS:

Misuse, overuse of Oatley Park and other bushland areas in LGA - OFF made repeated requests to Council to rectify damage from unauthorised bike tracks and unregulated car parking, recommending actions to mitigate damage. GRC did some remediation and installed some traffic signage. OFF responded to Council survey on BMX and Mountain Bike Riding, supported petition to construct a dedicated BMX/Mountain Bike facility in LGA and lobbied against a subsequent site feasibility report having included OP as an option.

GRC is developing a **new Oatley Park Plan of Management and Masterplan (PoM&MP)**. The current PoM is dated 2004. Council sought public input early 2022. OFF was invited to a webinar for key organisational stakeholders in the Park and lodged a follow-up submission describing our major concerns for Park management particularly in relation to its high environmental value. **The revised PoM was expected late 2022 but to date has not emerged from GRC.**

Loss of mature native trees on private and public land – lobbied Council to create a Significant Tree Register and upload all tree removal applications on website, for transparency; Council has advised that the STR is to be delivered by June 2023. A particularly egregious example of tree destruction occurred at Peakhurst where sixteen (16) trees on the same property were poisoned. This outright vandalism was highlighted by members with a candlelight vigil on Friday 7th October.

FSPA revisited

The Foreshore Scenic Protection Area (FSPA) is still under threat from Georges River Council (GRC). Late in 2022 GRC published reports on 2 studies - *Biodiversity* and *Foreshore Scenic Character* which proposed significant and complex changes to the LEP2021 particularly for the FSPA. Council sought feedback within a very short timeframe. Following representations from OFF and others, the Council extended the deadline for feedback to 31 March 2023.

Save Glenlee (Lugarno)

Interim Heritage Order granted to temporarily protect the site from imminent destruction.

Lobbied Georges River Councillors and various members of Parliament (incl. well attended rally) to support the purchase of Glenlee by providing council, state and federal funding.

The DA for 31 residential allotments was withdrawn and the appeal in the Land and Environment Court discontinued. The NSW Heritage Council gave notice of its intention to consider listing Glenlee on the State Heritage Register in acknowledgement of its heritage significance to the people of NSW. OFF members and all residents were encouraged to lodge submissions in support.

Heritage Council of NSW has resolved not to recommend Glenlee's listing at present but will reconsider the decision after further assessment of the natural and Aboriginal cultural heritage values of the site are completed.

Renaming The Former Oatley Bowling Club Site - GRC is proposing to the Geographical Names Board to rename the former Oatley Bowling Club site to Arthur Hardiman reserve, disregarding the fact that the site already has an official name: Myles Dunphy Bushland Reserve. Myles Dunphy, also an Oatley resident, was well known for his commitment to conservation, and is often referred to as the Father of Conservation in NSW. To now rename a significant portion of the reserve that carries his name would be doing an injustice to the revered conservationist. OFF made submissions, and encouraged members to do likewise, in support of the current name. To date, the GNB has not determined the GRC's application but has apparently returned it to GRC for consideration of the objections?

Koala protection – supported funding applications by “Koala Corridor” documentary makers, Dr Georgia Wallace-Crabbe and Greg Miller who presented to our August meeting.

Steve Anyon Smith and Tom Kristensen (who presented to our July meeting) have found a number of Koalas, including mothers and young in Heathcote and Georges River NPs and Mill Creek. There is evidence that they could be changing their habitat and no longer restricted to grey gums. Progress has been made in identifying individuals especially by nose markings.

OFF members signed the e-Petition to NSW Legislative Assembly *Save the Koalas of Sydney* for the NSW government to stop approving the loss of Koala habitat and corridors in Macarthur.

OFF has become a collaborator with the Sydney Basin Koala Network (sponsored by TEC) to contribute to the koala campaign at the regional level.

Mining projects threatening water resources - Off continues to campaign against mining in the catchment area for the Sydney water supply. Despite the proposed extension of the Dendrobium longwall coal mine in the Illawarra being rejected by the Independent Planning Commission and WaterNSW in February 2021, the state government wants this disastrous project to go through! OFF made a submission (May 22) objecting to the latest modified proposal to extend the mine into the controversial Area 5 near Avon reservoir and to extend the life of the mine for another 19 years.

End Native Forest Logging After achieving the 20,000 signatures on the e-petition it was forwarded to the Minister for Agriculture and Western NSW, Dugald Saunders, for a Government response. Disappointing but unsurprisingly the Government disagreed with all the points supporting the petitioners' call for transitioning the native forest industry to 100% sustainable plantations by 2024. The petition was debated in the NSW Legislative Assembly. Eight MPs rose to speak on the issue with positions taken largely on expected party lines and the debate closed with a motion carried to 'note the contents of the petition'. We can expect to hear more on this important issue in the near future.

Post Script: OFF committee makes submissions on behalf of the Society, but **numbers always matter**. We always urge members to make personal submissions as well.

REGULAR MAINTENANCE AND MONITORING

Bushcare – Oatley Park monthly (140 hours);

Plantings maintenance – Boorea Reserve & Lower Gannons Park

Streamwatch team continued to monitor water quality in Dairy Creek and Myles Dunphy Reserve but recently has had to cancel some monitoring days.

Clean Up Australia Day Sun 6 Mar - Kyle Williams Reserve joined by Kyle Bay Scouts, Sun 13 Mar – LKB Joined by Oatley Lions and 2nd Mortdale Scouts. 31st year that OFF had participated in the event.

We continued to **monitor and report environmental degradation** in our LGA - damage to bushland reserves from unauthorised bike riding, loss of trees, and sewage overflows.

We continued the focus on **pollution caused by microplastics** and run-off from synthetic turf playing fields at Poulton, Peakhurst and Peshurst Parks. OFF developed a local monitoring program and made submissions to NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer for inclusion in his report on the subject. At the June 27 council meeting Georges River Councillors resolved to request a comprehensive investigation into the impacts arising from synthetic playing fields.

COMMUNICATION AND ACTIVITIES

Eleven issues of **OFF News** published and posted on OFF website. Zoom-recorded monthly presentations are also published on OFF website.

OFF's **Facebook page** publicised OFF activities to a possibly wider and younger(?) audience.

Ten **general meetings** held in 2022; seven held in Oatley Uniting Church Hall and broadcast simultaneously via Zoom; three on Zoom only where the max audience was 38. Average audience was 35, largest was 42 shared by March and June talks by Dr Scott Wilson and Joey Clarke respectively. Three post-graduate students who had received OFF research grants gave very interesting and well-prepared talks. Up to 14 **visitors** logged into the Zoom broadcasts. Most presentations have been uploaded to OFF's YouTube channel where we again widen our audience reach

Field activities were greatly curtailed by Covid and constant wet weather - of the 10 planned outings three had to be cancelled due to the poor condition of some of the tracks. The remaining seven had an average attendance of 10 participants.

Co-operation with allied organisations –

- Nature Conservation Council NSW (working group on mountain biking in natural areas, nature photography exhibition);
- Wollie Creek Preservation Society (support completion of Regional Park - sign Open Letter to leaders NSW Parliament);
- Environmental Defenders Office (donated proceeds from sale of goods at stalls);
- Oatley Lions (stall at Community Market Days in April & October; sold Oatley calendars);
- Oatley Heritage and Historical Society (selling Oatley 2023 calendars, joined OHHS perimeter walk to illustrate the 1833 Oatley Grant; hosted a presentation on OFF's history);
- Sutherland Shire Environment Centre and NPA Southern Sydney Branch (Goodall book launch, cross-promotion of events, sharing material for submissions).
- Citizens Climate Lobby (promoted CCL events to OFF members)
- Kogarah Bay Progress Association (Members Julian Sheen and Graham Lalchere addressed this group on the history and work of OFF - KBPA members were very interested in OFF's activities such as the recent microplastic sampling)
- Menai Wildflower Group - Members assisted in propagating food plants for endangered cockatoos, and trees and shrubs to revegetate rural properties on the Upper Lachlan Valley.
- St George Men's Shed and The Fix-it Sisters (contributed to several planting projects)

National Tree Day Events July

Lugarno PS planting– OFF supported LPS, engaged with students and parents emphasising the importance of protecting existing trees as well as planting new ones, and raised OFF's profile in the community.

GRC event at Beverly Hills Park – OFF had a stall, engaged with participants and assisted Council with supervising planting of 1000 native species and the plant giveaways.

OFF produced the **2023 Oatley calendar** (750) which has been selling quite well and we are confident it will show a profit. This is a key tool in our communication and marketing activities.

Pre-Christmas street stalls held alongside OHHS and Oatley Lions in Oatley (2) and Mortdale (1) to promote OFF and sell native plants and jams and the 2023 Oatley calendar.

20 members gathered for our **Annual Picnic in Oatley Park**, held last December in The Castle.

Membership

During the year OFF membership rose to a high of 310 however we finished the year with 294 registered/financial members.