



Kooragang Tidings

Occasional newsletter of the
Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project
Hunter- Central Rivers CMA
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June, 2005

Over the past month or so, enough rain has fallen on Kooragang Wetlands to leave no doubt in peoples' minds that it is indeed a wetland. Some of the roads have been continuously under water for over two weeks. Trees that were planted last year are growing well and there are enough sightings of groups of wading birds in new places to excite those interested in the comings and goings of our feathered friends. But the biggest news of this half year is our winning of the top award in the Community Division of the Newcastle and Hunter Region Environmental Achievement Awards announced in April.

Kooragang – Environmental Achievers:

The Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project (KWRP) applied for an award in the Landcare category of the NHREAA, highlighting work done by Kooragang Landcare Volunteers. The judging panel thought our achievements extended beyond that and also cited KWRP's policy and planning attributes, research and community education role in contributing to overall excellence. As overall winners of the Community Division we are now proud holders of a perpetual trophy which features a beautiful bronze sculpture of gum blossom (affectionately dubbed by us 'The Twig'). When accepting the award Project Manager Peggy Svoboda paid tribute both to the many organizations, group & individuals that make things happen at Kooragang Wetlands and to the resilience of the Hunter River estuary.



'The Twig' sits happily on the marble mantelpiece in the display room of Kooragang Wetlands Information Centre.

The award came with a \$1000 cheque which we intend using to purchase outdoor furniture to be placed in the grounds of the Kooragang Wetlands Information Centre. Thanks to all for your contribution large or small to the ongoing success of the KWRP.



KWRP Project Manager, Peggy Svoboda, volunteers and other Kooragang staff welcome 'The Twig' to Kooragang Wetlands.

Many organizations, groups & individuals make things happen at Kooragang Wetlands:

The Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project is only possible due to the help of our sponsors: Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority, NSW Dept. Planning, Infrastructure and Natural Resources, Newcastle City Council, Port Stephens Council, NSW Dept. Primary Industry Fisheries, NSW Dept. Environment & Conservation, Port Waratah Coal Services, Newcastle Port Corporation, GHD Pty Ltd, NSW Waterways Authority and Energy Australia.

Contributions by other organizations & community groups such as Hunter Bird Observers Club and Society of Frogs and Reptiles as well as tertiary students and individual volunteers have also been of tremendous help. Thank you one and all!

Bush Regeneration – it's habitat forming!

Paul and his merry band of volunteers have been seen climbing trees, scraping knees, installing some 65 of 8 different types of nesting boxes plus lengths of rope totalling 400 metres. The theory is that the birds will use some of the rope for nesting material and perch on the longer lengths between trees until the inevitable happens and out pops a seed complete with its own fertilizer pack.



Nesting box for rent

All this activity is to finish the non-planting component of our Envirofund grant: *Habitat in a Hurry*. The GPS co-ordinates of each box have been noted for monitoring purposes and we eagerly await the first signs of native birds taking up residence. We'll keep you posted.

Restitching the Quilt: Koora Gang volunteers have completed the plantings of patches of paperbark, casuarina, swamp mahogany and bottlebrush in the area south of Milham's Road with the planting of 3360 trees and shrubs in the past four months. The second half of this Envirofund grant is for construction and planting out of frog (hopefully Bell Frog) ponds at Scotts Point. We await Council approval to start construction. The irony is that now, even with approval, we would still be waitingthis time for the ground to dry out sufficiently to allow the earthworks. Ah, the vagaries of working on a wetland rehabilitation project.



Restitching the quilt, February, 2005

Banrock Station Landcare funding for Kooragang: Great news is that KWRP has received \$15,000 from the winery, Banrock Station, to support our efforts to achieve a balance for 'Feathers, Frogs and Fins' at Kooragang Wetlands. An EIS and water monitoring in the Dead Mangrove Creek catchment will be the next steps as we strive to protect Bell Frog habitat while incrementally increasing tidal flows in this area to improve fisheries and wading bird habitat.

New bird sighting for the island: Emails have been exchanged back and forth over the recent sightings of a group of Black-tailed Native-Hens along Wagtail Way.

Works to welcome waders: Approval has been given for the removal of small mangroves from saltmarsh areas in the southern sections of Ash Island to begin soon. This work is being funded by Newcastle City Council plus an Envirofund grant received by the Hunter Bird Observers Club. It will help ensure migratory and non-migratory wading birds continue to use the southern ponds in large numbers. A recent HBOC survey shows that even in winter the area supports more than 2000 wading birds.



Stilts and avocets on the wing at Kooragang



Jenny Spencer, Australian Catholic University, checks mud samples for benthics

Also aiming to enhance wader habitat in the Hunter River estuary are two current Ph.D studies that are researching links between hydraulics, sediment, benthic invertebrates, vegetation and migratory wading birds.



Alice Howe and helper, Newcastle University, test water levels and quality on Kooragang.

'Put Wings to Your Heart'
an International Exhibition to celebrate the return of the migratory birds to Newcastle

at The Wetlands Centre,
10th-11th September 2005

Enquiries to: Joan McCarthy Ph 49710 945
for details of how to be part of this exciting exhibition.

Volunteer Matters (nay, volunteers matter!)

Notes from a volunteer co-ordinator's diary:

I'm sitting at Paul Melehan's desk (amid seed pods, maps, dismantled mobile phones, cards, books on fungi, magnetic pen mobiles etc etc) looking out the window at the magnificent Ash Island landscape thinking about the past six months since I was lucky enough to join the Kooragang team. The time has flown. I've participated in five Sundays, including a morning of 'mangrove plucking', submitted several successful grant applications for both The Wetland Centre and the Kooragang Wetland Rehabilitation Project. As a result KWRP has received funds for a new self-propelled lawn mower (Small Equipment Grant) and for developing an international flavour in our Community Garden. (Hunter Water Corporation). I also assisted in preparation of KWRP's application for the Newcastle & Hunter Environmental Achievement Awards and feel very proud to have contributed to its success. Congratulations must go to the Kooragang Project team: Peggy, Rob, Sue, Terry & Paul and to all the volunteers who together with sponsors and other organizations have contributed so much to make Kooragang Wetlands the wonderful place for flora and fauna it is today.

The Hunter Volunteer Centre recently hosted a Volunteer of the Year luncheon and Bea Brooks was KWRP's nominated volunteer for 2005. Bea works in our library cataloguing books, research reports, brochures, grant submissions and performs other admin tasks. She also works weekly in the nursery and attends our Sunday tree plantings. Thank you Bea for all your great work.



Bea Brooks

Induction and OH&S & RMP training: In coming months we will be organising induction training for new volunteers. This will include: site orientation and history, a bush regeneration 'snap shot', Occupational Health & Safety and Risk Management Procedures. If any volunteers are interested in refreshing their CPR & EAR (Expressed Air Resuscitation) First Aid skills, please let Lyn know. Mannequins are available Sunday (19th June) for skills practice. If there is enough interest, other First Aid Training may be run later in the year.

It all adds up: The total of all our volunteers work exceeds 3836 hours for this financial year. This magnificent in-kind contribution enables KWRP to access \$76,000 of matching State funding to assist in making Kooragang Wetlands a better place for wildlife and people alike. A big thank you to all our volunteers!



Lyn enlists some young helpers

City Farm Matters:

The rain gauge shows: It's been a crazy year for rain on the island, making working conditions a challenge. With January, February and April giving less than 50% of the expected rainfall, interspersed by drenching rain in March and May we have really experienced the variations of nature. In fact we've experienced so much rain that our four-legged 'volunteers' have submitted demands for two sets of gum boots each if they are to continue their lawn mowing services. Strike action could follow. We are hoping to negotiate a happy outcome for all, with a celebratory BBQ to finish the deal.



Volunteers on break from lawn mowing services

Community Gardens: Our regular gardeners, particularly Ern and Jim, have kept the gardens going well as winter closes in. Toogoolawa School and Warners Bay Care have also been regular contributors to the garden landscape as have a new work for dole team.

New gardeners are always encouraged and we are pleased to welcome a group of international students and/or partners from the University of Newcastle. They commenced a Friday morning garden session on June 3rd and will continue to the end of the university year.

With financial support from Hunter Water Corp and elbow grease from the uni group, we hope to produce a very multi-cultural range of veggies this season.



Now, that's a zucchini!



Adding an international flavour

The group certainly lives up to its international tag with members from China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, India, Malaysia and South Africa.

It's a boy: Congratulations to Terry and Carlu on the birth of Jade Sidney on June 8th. Jade has now officially taken up residence in the caretaker's house and is already giving strong vocal support to



the Kooragang Project. It shouldn't be too long before he is out turning sausages with his Dad on the third Sunday of the month.

A new team starts: Our new 'Work for the Dole' (WFD) team was initially lead by Shane Bailey and hosted by Hunter Workways. Unfortunately broken ribs sustained off site, have necessitated a change of leader and from next week the team will be assisting us on Tuesdays and Wednesdays for the next six months. One WFD team task our Sunday tree planters might appreciate is a project to clear Riverside Park ready for future Sunday tree planting events.

City Farm Jetty: This structure is continuing to be enjoyed by an increasing number of fishermen and newcomers to the island. A 60ft boat was reported to have been moored there as well. The pathway linking the jetty to the car park has been completed and our 'Work for the Dole' crew is trying to tame the thistles and other weeds that have taken hold of various parts of Riverside Park.



Trial Weed Bait Tank: Some of you may have noticed a bright green concrete water tank on the corner of Schoolhouse and Cabbage Tree Lane as you drive on Ash Island. Funded from Recreational Fishing Licence Fees, the purpose of the tank is to try to maintain a supply of Green Weed for anglers to use for bait when catching Luderick (or Blackfish). It is hoped this will limit the disturbance to wading birds (particularly migratory ones) caused by anglers collecting green weed from high tide roosting sites for these birds. Large amounts of disturbance can severely effect the survival chances of birds as the latter waste fat reserves on frequent short flights, rather than building it up for the long journey north.

DAs approved: Approval has been received to protect the South Arm riverbanks and riparian vegetation by better managing vehicular access at the popular fishing spot there. Approval has also been received to link the city farm cycleway with a cycleway and wading bird habitat that is proposed for the north-western section of Kooragang Nature Reserve as partial compensation for the loss of habitat within the industrial area of Kooragang Island.

International Holistic Managers Visit City Farm: The Project was thrilled to be the first stop for a group of international holistic managers which included Alan Savory, the guru of all things holistic, on their way to a conference in Armidale in April. The group, mainly from the US was very interested to see how things are done here.

Alan was so impressed with our volunteers, he tried to convince John and Frank to do their volunteering in South Africa.



Shedding light on Working with Wetlands: In conjunction with Newcastle City Council, KWRP held a 'Working with Wetlands' workshop in early June. It was aimed at utilities and contractors that come into contact with wetlands for either planned or emergency works. The facilitated workshop was held appropriately enough in our SHED. It was a great success.



Bush Regeneration Days

Wednesdays – any time between 8am and 2pm (tools and ice cold water supplied, BYO lunch)

Community Garden on City Farm days

Tuesdays and Fridays – any time between 8am and 2pm (tools & ice cold water supplied, BYO lunch)

Sunday Volunteer Days – Venue changes

Due to various factors mentioned elsewhere in this Newsletter, we will not be able to work at the Scotts Point ponds before at least August.

For July and August, follow signs to alternative location. For September, October and November, we should be at Scotts Point (still weather permitting).

Kooragang Project: part of the Hunter-Central Rivers CMA
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