

PNIHA NEWS



Pittwater Natural Heritage Association – thinking locally, acting locally

Land Swap

Pittwater Council and the Uniting Church of Australia have agreed on a proposal which will allow the council to add valuable bushland in the catchment of Mullet Creek to the existing Warriewood/ Ingleside Escarpment Reserve.

The land which is proposed to be added is bounded to the north by the recently acquired Heydon estate, the southern boundary is the rear of properties on Wesley Street Elanora, and the Uniting Church's Elanora Conference Centre is to the east. In exchange for just under three hectares of land a small part of the escarpment reserve is to be transferred to the Uniting Church to assist with bushfire hazard management. Of the three hectares to be transferred to the council about one hectare will be leased back to the Uniting Church to be used for low impact outdoor activities.

This land is heavily vegetated except for the site of an old scout hall, which burned down in the 1994 bushfires. Unfortunately the southern arm of Mullet Creek where it flows through the land is infested with a number of weed species including Coral trees (*Erythrina cristagalli*), however Pittwater Council is undertaking bush regeneration works in the area funded by the \$1.9M Narrabeen Lagoon – Creating a Sustainable Catchment grant.

This current proposal is a continuation of the land acquisition process that resulted from the Ingleside Residents Association and Pittwater Natural Heritage Association campaign in opposition to a 1994 application to develop the northern part of the Warriewood Ingleside escarpment lands. Pittwater Council and the owners whose land was acquired deserve praise for successfully negotiating over a long period to enable such a wonderful outcome for the community. The land swap proposal will go to Pittwater Council in the near future.

David Palmer

Inside:

PittwatershipDown; AFOD; Hawkmoths; Antechinus; Flying Foxes; Update; Activities; Mona Vale Dunes; Insect Night

Mona Vale Dunes

Behind the Mona Vale Beach dunes, from the eastern end of Golf Avenue to the unleashed dog park at Narrabeen Park Parade (near Coronation Street and the Hospital) is a well worn track. Originally reserved as a proposed local road linking Narrabeen Park Parade with Surfview Road, the dunes, track and Golf Course are now zoned public open space, including the Mona Vale Golf Course.

The dunes are covered by the Mona Vale Beach Plan of Management, adopted by Council on 14 February 2005, which identifies that dune regeneration works include removal of weed species and supplementary planting eg Spinifex (*Spinifex sericeus*) and Pigface (*Carpobrotus glaucescens*), and to provide a pathway along the eastern boundary of the Golf Course.

The northern end of the path starts near the 17th tee as a gravelled path for the golfers for a few metres, then is simply a track worn through the turf, running on the western side of the dunes for a few hundred metres, turning east through the dunes a short distance into the grassed dog park. An alternative exit into the dog park is behind the 17th hole.

Rabbits enjoy the early morning and evenings, casually hopping back into the lantana as people walk or ride bicycles. The path always has walkers, many with their dogs.

The northern part of the dunes east of the Golf Course is being revegetated by the volunteer group and Pittwater Council, but the western side of the southern part is overrun with lantana (now very prettily in flower and probably about to set seed), blackberry, asparagus fern, and buffalo grass. The path here is soft sand and getting narrower as the weeds crowd in.

The dunes are important for many reasons. They are a natural buffer, protecting the land and Golf Course from storm tides, waves and wind, and are valuable for their own intrinsic biodiversity. A formed path would provide an edge to help contain the Golf Course turf and other exotics, and revegetation of the dunes, combined with rabbit eradication would restore this fine backdrop to the Golf Course and to the beach.

The Golf Club hopes to get a grant to fund a walkway between the dunes and the golf course to enable walkers to use the track with less risk of injury from golf balls.

Caroline Kades



Eastern Whipbirds breed in the dunes vegetation
Photo: Neil Fifer

Pittwatership Down

Rabbits now cost the Pittwater community about \$15,000 dollars each year for the biannual rabbit control program.

In addition and to enhance this work, Pittwater Council received a Federal Government *Caring for our Country* grant of nearly \$46,000 finishing in September 2010. Rabbits are costly pests.

Lavinia Schofield, Pittwater Council officer in charge of the program, said apparently the biannual program has been effective in reducing rabbit density in the sites treated. However evidence shows that rabbit distribution is changing and rabbits are appearing in new areas. They try to coordinate with schools and adjacent landholders such as Sydney Water, so that all rabbits are treated at the same time. Golf courses, the golf driving range and some other places in the area do it in addition at other times.

Do rabbits matter?

As well as being a pest in gardens, in bushland they selectively nibble regenerating shoots and seedlings, destroying the species balance of a plant community. This is particularly damaging in sites where regeneration is occurring as a result of weed control or fire, as many native plant species only appear after disturbance. To be eaten as seedlings by rabbits may mean extinction of certain species of plants in that site. Rabbits love newly planted tubestock.

Why do we still keep rabbits as pets?

It's strange that rabbits are regarded as vermin by the Department of Primary Industries, yet their sale is still permitted. It doesn't make sense to allow them to be kept as pets capable of breeding when their cost to the community is so high.

While baby rabbits in pet shops are very cute, they can become rather disappointing pets as they mature, as often they don't much like to be handled. Children lose interest in them as their novelty wears off. They are escape artists and once out of the cage, adept at dodging capture. Then two escapees find each other and the result is dozens of babies. Perhaps the success of the fox baiting program since 2001 has removed their main predator.

What can be done about rabbits?

PNHA will lobby the State Government to confront the problem of urban rabbits. Some suggestions could be that rabbits for sale must be desexed and vets should immunise only desexed pet rabbits against Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD) also known as Calici Virus.

Research is being undertaken by the Invasive Animals CRC (a collaboration of government departments and

private industry). Have a look at <http://www.invasiveanimals.com/invasive-animals/rabbits/index.html> It lists three main projects, one of which is about enhancing the effectiveness of Calici Virus. Currently Australia has only one strain of RHD which was released in 1995 and has kept rabbit numbers low. However, rabbits have developed genetic resistance to the virus and it is not as effective in cooler regions.

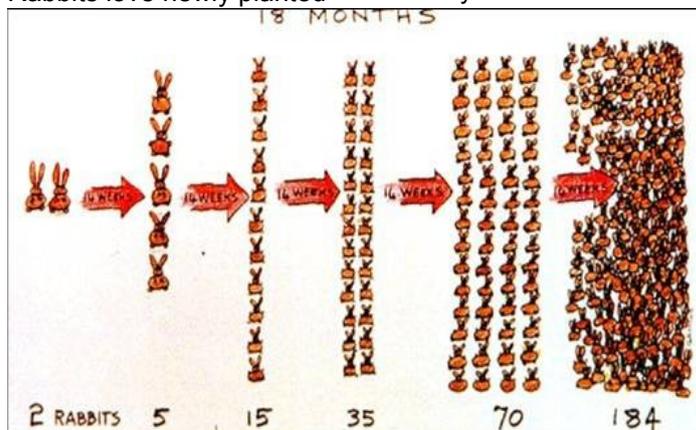


Rabbit at warren. Photo: www.abc.net.au

To help locate rabbits all over Australia the RabbitScan website has been set up. Go to: www.rabbitscan.net.au. Information gathered will be used to better control them.

What can you do about Rabbits?

- Don't keep undesexed pet rabbits.
- If you see wild rabbits tell Pittwater Council Ph: 9970



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- Borrow a trap from the Council. You will have to take rabbits to vet for euthanasia

- Check your property for warrens. Rabbits typically live under sheds or the house or just under dense bushes. If found combine trapping with fumigation by a licensed pest controller who will also destroy the burrow. **Check first that bandicoots aren't living in the burrows.**

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Vegetable gardens can be fenced. Google *rabbit-proof fencing* for guidelines. This may be the cheapest long-lasting fix for maintaining garden plants.

If your land is more than 1000 square metres you may use Pindone bait. Contact Pittwater Council for guidance on this. It's not just bandicoots that will eat it but native rodents and possibly birds, anything that likes oats.

Rabbit Control in Pittwater

Pindone Baiting—Lavinia told PNHA the method follows the Sydney North Urban Feral Animal Action Group

(Continued on page 3)

Pittwatership Down

(Continued from page 2)

Management Plan for rabbits. This includes 3 days of free baiting (usually with carrots). This is to establish how much poison bait is required and to encourage the rabbits to feed on the bait. The free baiting is followed the next week by two evenings of poison bait laying (carrots dyed green to make it less palatable to birds). The idea is that the rabbits will feed on the bait early in the evening leaving minimal to no bait for other animals such as bandicoots that come out later in the night to feed. The next morning, sites are checked and any excess bait picked up.

The effectiveness of the program is limited by the fact that rabbits also live in private properties and because bait can't be put out in open grass areas where the rabbits are feeding due to concerns for public safety and injury to dogs. Lack of funds limits the program to treating about 20 reserves (check list on Council website for last program) and this costs approximately \$15,000 per program. The aim of the program is to reduce rabbit numbers to a point where damage caused is at a minimum, not eradication.

Calici Virus—Pittwater also released Calici virus recently, as some rabbits are thought not to have ever been infected. The virus works on adults but doesn't affect juveniles. An early indication is that it may have reduced adult population in some areas (Jonah's reported definite reduction in numbers). More results are still to come.

Rabbits – How did they come here?

Christmas Day 2009 marked the 150th anniversary of rabbits, the wild pest kind, being released in Australia. This first 'successful' release (others tried but failed) came from just two dozen wild European rabbits imported to Barwon Park, Winchelsea near Geelong, Victoria, on Christmas Day 1859. They were picked up off the Brig 'Lightning' after surviving their journey from Britain to Melbourne, taken to Barwon Park, to live in pens and fed on lettuce, specially grown for them, and farmed there, to be later released by Thomas Austin, a respected landholder of the time. Those first rabbits, when released were so successful in adapting to Australia's diverse habitats from south to north and east to west, that they became a serious pest and immense plague by the 1880's.



Double Headed Hawkmoth caterpillar, *Coequosa triangularis*, with an eye like spot on its anal clasper

A Caterpillar with 2 Heads

Hawkmoths are a group of mostly large, delta-wing shaped moths that belong to the Sphingioidea superfamily. Fast flying, many are nectar feeders, hovering and moving between flowers like a massive bee. Their caterpillars are often large and fleshy with local species feeding on a variety of native plants including *Morinda jasminoides*, *Banksia*, *Persoonia*, and Eucalypt species, but also very commonly on our native grape, *Cayratia clematidea*. Several also feed on exotic plants such as Impatiens Balsam and Privet.

Late last year some observant wildlife watchers noticed a beautifully marked caterpillar feeding openly during the day on *Banksia oblongifolia* at an Ingleside property. Bright green with yellow streaks across its abdomen, the Double Headed Hawkmoth larva (*Coequosa triangularis*) has a relatively small head compared to its body and is cryptically camouflaged with a pair of black eyespots on its tail. The abdomen is also covered in short orange spines which make it a formidable looking caterpillar. Perhaps they have evolved these markings to confuse predators into attacking the wrong end.

The *Coequosa triangularis* larva seen was 120mm in length and noticeably different from most other Hawkmoth caterpillars in that it lacked the dorsal horn on the end of the body. The presence or absence of this appendage can be helpful when attempting to identify moth larvae.

These caterpillars after feeding and pupation emerge into adult life as some of the largest moths in Australia, with a wingspan of around 135mm. A moth of the only other *Coequosa* species, (*Coequosa australasiae*) was seen at our recent insect night. Hawkmoths are an interesting and attractive group of moths that are sometimes attracted to light, so it's worth keeping an eye out for them on your back deck during the warmer months.

Gary Harris

References:

Moths of Australia. I.F.B.Common Melbourne University Press

The Insects of Australia. C.S.I.RO Melbourne University Press



Caterpillars of the Hawkmoth *Theretra latreillei* vary in colour. Young ones are lettuce-green with no markings. On Native Grape, *Cayratia clematidea*

HELP! There's a (marsupial) mouse in the house!

After over thirty five years living next to a national park in Ingleside one gets used to living in close proximity to native animals, but I had a recent experience with marsupial mice (*Antechinus*) which was quite out of the ordinary.

Early one morning in November last year as I was walking around the house I heard a "peeping" noise coming from the lounge room. When I investigated I saw a tiny baby *Antechinus* lying flat on its stomach spread-eagled in the middle of the lounge room floor. It was too young to walk so its mother must have dropped it there. I quickly put some torn up newspaper into a cardboard box, into which I placed the *Antechinus*. As I continued through the house I heard more "peeping" noises and found two more babies, one in a bedroom and one in a hallway. After I put these into the box all was silent so assuming that I had them all I took them down to the Vet in Mona Vale who arranged for a carer from Sydney Wildlife to pick them up. I returned home feeling that the job was done, but had not

been in the house long when I found another baby *Antechinus* in another room. When I again contacted Sydney Wildlife they advised me to take it to the carer of the original three as the litter should not be split up. This time when I returned home the silence lasted so I thought that was the last I would see of my little guests.

However, just over a month later I got a call from a carer with Sydney Wildlife who informed me that the little animals were mature enough to be released into the wild, which we did with great pleasure in the bush close to our property. In the time they were under the expert care of Joan Reid from Sydney Wildlife the *antechinus* babies had grown from 2 grams to 13 grams and I guess they are now happily running around chasing insects and spiders in the Ingleside bush.

David Palmer

More info: [this link shows mother and babies.](#)

www.washington.edu/burkemuseum/collections/mammalogy/images/mtm_slideshows/antechinus8.jpg



Brown Antechinus (Wikipedia)

Grey Headed Flying Foxes

Pittwater has its very own colony of about 200 of these Flying Foxes on Cannes Reserve near Therry Street, Avalon.

Numbers have varied in the last few years from perhaps 3000 to 25 and was first observed in May 2008. Most of the Flying Foxes here now are males.

Recent flowering of Broad-leafed Paperbark (*Melaleuca quiquenervia*) has provided them with an autumn treat. Other local foods would be figs and palm fruit.

They are pollinators of flowers and spreaders of seeds of the fruit they eat, important in rainforest ecosystems. Loss of habitat is one problem for them. The NSW Scientific Committee has listed it a vulnerable species. See: www.environment.nsw.gov.au/determinations/GreyheadedFlyingFoxVulSpListing.htm. The colony is being monitored by the NSW Dept of Environment, Climate Change and Water.

On June 26th Pittwater Council will hold a community field day to combat weeds including vines growing into canopy trees—an opportunity to provide further information on Flying Foxes.

Another endangered species, the Powerful Owl nests just up the hill from the bat colony. This Powerful Owl has a Flying Fox in its talons. The Powerful Owl often roosts with its prey from the previous night.



PNHA Bird Book Helps Fund Warriewood Wetland work

PNHA has donated another \$ 3631 to Pittwater Council for care of Warriewood Wetland and Irawong Reserve. This is in addition to our original donation of \$14 500 in December 2005. The money comes from sales of our book *Introductory Field Guide to Birds of Warriewood Wetland and Irawong Reserve*. We are committing book profits to conservation of the wetland areas.

ASPARAGUS FERN OUT DAYS

These events are an outstanding cooperative event where the community, industry (DATS Environmental Services), and Government (NPWS, Pittwater Council) work together to help combat this most invasive weed.

The recent **Asparagus Fern Out Day** at Narrabeen Headland on 20th March was a resounding success.

Some 30 souls turned up and did battle, braving the best, or worst, that the ticks, ants etc could turn on against us. We really made a difference!

We now take a "Backyard Blitz" philosophy that is a winner where we have a committed bushcare group already in place. The Northern Beaches Asparagus Fern Steering Committee, aided and abetted by PNHA, run these events.

Take a bow, workers, and also sponsors - DATS Environmental Services and Pittwater Council - the lunch was fab!

The next AFOD is 5th June 2010, 8.30 to 3pm or part thereof, at Plateau Park, Bilgola Plateau. The usual gourmet lunch will be provided.

We have already really made a difference at this site and one more effort in June might see the end of Asparagus Fern here.

Ken Hughes

PNHA Activities

Asparagus Fern Out Day, Plateau Park, Bilgola Plateau, Saturday June 5th 8.30am to 3.00pm

The war against Pittwater's worst weed continues and we've nearly won it here. Help Plateau Park bushcare volunteers tackle Asparagus Fern in this reserve where the rare bushland type Duffys Forest Endangered Ecological Community occurs. The Waratah is a special plant here. Tools, morning tea and delicious lunch provided.

Wear: gloves, long trousers and sleeves, enclosed footwear.

Sponsors: DATS Environmental Services and Pittwater Council.

Cost: Free

RSVP: Ken Hughes. kchughes@swiftdsl.com.au or phone 9918 9170 or 0417 287 320

Weeds of Pittwater Saturday April 10th 12.30-4pm.

Learn to identify weeds, and see demonstrations of what to do about them in the garden and the bush. Afternoon Tea and notes provided.

Where: Angophora Room, Nelson Heather Centre, Jacksons Road, Warriewood for Theory/Indoor session, then field work at Ingleside Riders land on McLean St, Ingleside.

Wear: gloves, long trousers and sleeves, and enclosed footwear.

Bring weed specimens you'd like identified.

Cost: Free

To Book: Marita 9918 3368 or 0439 409 202 Email: pnhainfo@gmail.com



Lunch at Narrabeen Headland Asparagus Fern Out day. Photo: John Illingsworth.

Asparagus Fern – how to get rid of it

Asparagus Fern is the worst weed in Pittwater. An excellent short demonstration video on how to remove it has been made by PNHA members John & Lyn Illingsworth.

To see this follow the link on the PNHA website www.pnha.org.au or through Pittwater Council's website, or by Googling *Asparagus Fern Pittwater* to see it on Youtube.

Planting Day on Mona Vale Dunes

Mona Vale Dunes bushcare group invite you to their Planting Day on April 10. The group received a Caring for Country grant of over \$44,000 in 2008-9 year or so ago to conserve biodiversity. Pittwater Council is managing it on behalf of the group.

Most of the money pays extensive work by bush regeneration contractors to control weeds. The day is part of the group's volunteer commitment under the grant. Some areas need revegetation as regeneration is too slow in providing a variety of native plant species and sand stabilisation. We are trying to avoid a Coastal Wattle monoculture.

Planting starts at 8.30am and will end about noon. Meet at the end of Golf Ave. Follow signs to the planting site. Wear a hat, long trousers and long sleeves, gloves and bring a water bottle. Tools and morning tea provided. Ring 0439 409 202 if you need to find us there.

Do come and do your bit to help regenerate our valuable coastline.

If you can't come, please drop a line to the Mayor or to your local Councillors asking for the dunes to be regenerated as a matter of the highest priority. It's only by showing we care that we will achieve a better environment. Our grant will not provide enough money to complete the work needed as the dunes cover over 8 ha..

The planting day is on our regular Mona Vale Dunes volunteer work morning (every second Saturday of the month.) We will need help maintaining the plants for a few months so consider coming along to see how they are going.



Gazania, a hardy garden plant from South Africa, is one of the worst weeds of dunes. It produces lots of seeds that blow far & wide and form a dense ground cover preventing native plants from establishing.

PNHA Insect Night

The first Pittwater Natural Heritage Association activity for 2010 turned out to be an interesting and very informative evening thanks to Martyn Robinson from the Australian Museum, and the enthusiastic group that attended.

We met in the middle of Plateau Park on Bilgola Plateau just as the light faded but in time for Martyn to lead the group around the perimeter track searching for insects, spiders and other wildlife. On the walk he identified several spider species, including the Garden spider (*Eriophora sp*), Golden Orb spider (*Nephila sp*) and the Leaf-curling spider (*Phonognatha sp*) and described some of their courting and web-building behaviour.

Later, back at the light-sheets in the centre of the reserve, Martyn was able to point out a Mantispid, an insect related to Lacewings (Neuroptera) but superficially resembling a Praying Mantis with similar grasping forelegs. He was able to explain how the female mantispid lays her own eggs in the egg sacs of some spider species, providing food for the emerging mantispid young.

Numerous species of moths, beetles, flies and spiders were attracted to the light and Martyn was able to answer the many questions asked about these invertebrates. Towards the end of the night a stunning brown and orange Hawkmoth flew to the light and was quickly identified by Martyn. This was *Coequosa australasiae* one of Australia's largest moths whose larvae feed on Eucalypt foliage. It was quite a thrill to see this handsome delta winged moth at close hand.

It was an enjoyable night and a chance for everyone to see a little of the diversity of insect life from our local area, with an enthusiastic and knowledgeable expert like Martyn to foster our interest.

Gary Harris



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