

PNHA NEWS

Pittwater Natural Heritage Association - thinking locally, acting locally

pnha update pnha update

Activity Report

Breakfast with the Birds

October 30 2011

Black Bittern! – by far the highlight of this morning in Warriewood Wetland. Several experienced birdwatchers with us were very excited by this juvenile bird, in the creek near Katoa Close. A spotting scope afforded great views.

Black Bitterns feed on a wide range of small animals, but mainly fish and amphibians. They stalk prey slowly or stand and wait for prey to emerge, but may sometimes plunge at it from a perch, before stabbing it with their sharp bills. They are very difficult to spot because of their excellent camouflage and retiring habits.

Eastern Whipbirds are not easily seen either but a couple were preoccupied with chasing each other in leafless bushes near the settlement ponds, ignoring our admiring party. A flock of 12 Royal Spoonbills was the final delight.

In all we saw 42 species of birds - a lovely morning.

For more information go to <http://birdsinyourbackyards.net/species/Ixobrychus-flavicollis>



A Black Bittern beside Deep Creek, December 2003. Image: Neil Fifer

Pittwater Estuary Care Project



This has two components: Asparagus Fern control, and conservation of Careel Creek and Careel Bay wetlands.

Asparagus Fern Out Day at Rocky Point

November 12 2011



Asparagus Fern Out Day, Rocky Point. The army signs on. M.Macrae

Another great attack on this pest by 51 people, but we didn't quite get it finished. Many vowed to come back and give it the coup de grace early next year. The forest site is transformed since our work here began. Thanks to the Lovett Bay bushcare folks for the splendid lunch and to all our partners and helpers: Hawkesbury Nepean CMA, Pittwater Council, NPWS, DATS Environmental Services and Church Point Ferries.

Asparagus Fern is Pittwater's worst weed. To find out how to remove Asparagus Fern go to:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYjIHxuxAHs>

Join PNHA and see our newsletters in colour through our website. Members get an email alert when each issue is published.

PNHA Update
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Membership Form

Dear PNHA Member

This year is the 17th year since the formation of Pittwater Natural Heritage Association. That is 17 years of campaigning, educating and hands on work, protecting and enhancing Pittwater's natural environment. Our on-going success is due to your support.

Each year, membership fees become due for renewal in August, after our annual General meeting. If you haven't already renewed your membership please consider renewing by sending your cheque or better still by electronic transfer.

Our bank account details are: BSB 062 208, account no. 10168467. Be sure to write your name in the deposit reference box so we can identify your payment.

You can use the membership renewal form on the PNHA website www.pnha.org.au

With your support we can continue for another 17 years – and more.

Yours sincerely

Your PNHA committee

Rabbits

A working group to consider Pittwater's rabbit problem and solutions is being organised for February 2012. PNHA will be included in that group, reports Pittwater Mayor Harvey Rose.

He said at the recent Local Government Association Conference the issue was there to be debated but time ran out.

It's disappointing not much has happened about developing a better rabbit control strategy – meanwhile they keep breeding and spreading and Council has to continue the usual controls.

A humane trap suitable for rabbits is made by Mascot Wire Works. They recommend a cat trap as more effective. It costs about \$130 delivered. To dispose of the rabbit you can take it to the vet for euthanasia.

I have one. I used carrot for bait, laying a trail that led into the trap. The first time it was set I made the mistake of not checking the trap before dawn. I caught a Brushtail Possum which had tried to escape and knocked some fur off its head, then curled up and gone to sleep. I decided to leave it in the trap under a blanket during daylight to save it from more distress and the attentions of Noisy Miners, releasing it the following evening. The lesson is to get up early to check what's been caught and release non-target animals in the dark.

To own your own trap is cheaper in the long run than hiring and you can always lend it to friends and neighbours. A novel Christmas present?

Go to this link for cat trap. www.mascotwireworks.com.au/department.asp?id=23

Mascot Wire Works Pty Ltd Unit 45/378 Parramatta Road Homebush West, NSW 2140. Phone: 02 9746 0111 Fax: 02 9746 0177 Email: sales@mascotwireworks.com.au

Marita Macrae



Baby Flying Fox

Gem, a three-week-old Grey-headed Flying Fox was rescued after her mother died on power lines. Sonja Elwood, her carer feeds her every two hours. The dummy keeps the baby happy between meals.

This species is in decline. Though once numbering millions it is now considered vulnerable to extinction. Habitat loss is the main cause. For more information go to:

www.environment.nsw.gov.au/determinations/GreyheadedFlyingFoxVul-SpListing.htm



Body guards for the Bright Copper butterfly

The handsome butterfly *Paralucia aurifera* (Bright Copper butterfly) was spotted recently at Rocky Point during the Asparagus Fern Out Day. This is a small species (approx 24mm wingspan) with wings a dark brown highlighted by bright orange patches. (Another species *Paralucia spinifera* is the well known but rare Bathurst Copper butterfly). They both belong to the Lycaenidae family that contains the groups of Blue, Copper, Hairstreak and Metalmark butterflies. The larvae of both feed on *Bursaria spinosa* (Pittosporaceae), a small understory shrub commonly seen growing on the shale soils of Rocky Point and other locations within Pittwater. The caterpillars of *Paralucia aurifera* are also recorded as feeding on *Pittosporum multiflorum* syn *Citriobatus pauciflorus* (Pittosporaceae), another shrub found in our area.

These caterpillars have an odd symbiotic relationship with several ant species in which the ants accompany the butterfly larvae out from their nests underground (usually located near the base of the foodplant) to foliage on which the larvae feed. This "attending" by the ants can often protect the caterpillars from predators such as parasitic wasps and flies and in return the ants get to feed on sugary excretions from glands on the abdomen of the larvae. This "attending" occurs only in the later stages of larval development and not all butterfly species in the Lycaenidae family have attendant ants.

The removal of asparagus and other weeds from around Rocky Point and the natural regeneration processes that go with it are likely to benefit both ant and butterfly species. And us too.

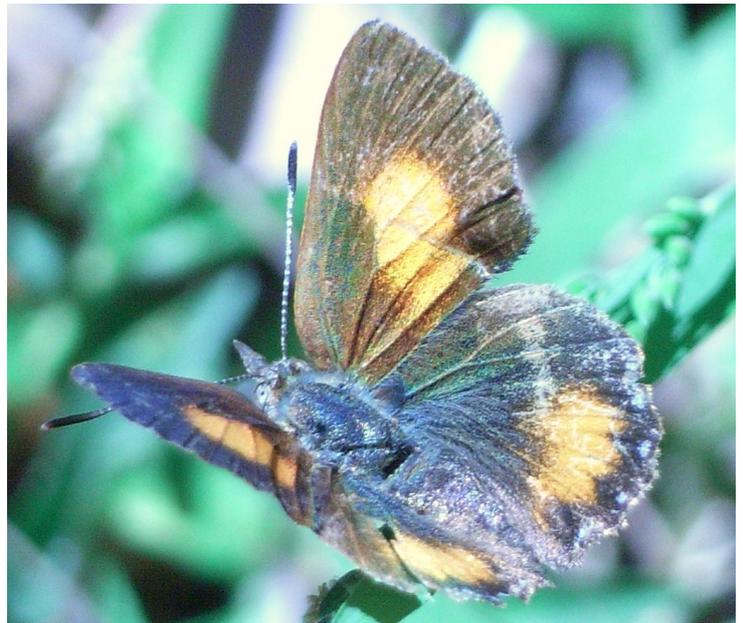
References: Butterflies of Australia M.F.Braby C.S.I.R.O Publishing 2000

Gary Harris

Above right: Butterfly *Paralucia aurifera*
Image: Gary Harris

Right: Blackthorn *Bursaria spinosa*, on road reserve, Waterview Street
Mona Vale. It flowers in May-June.
Image: Marita Macrae

Below: Bangalley Landcare morning tea.
Image: Marita Macrae



Bangalley Landcare Group

PNHA is encouraging residents whose properties adjoin Bangalley Headland Reserve to form a Landcare group and learn how to help each other manage bushland on their properties and get involved in bush regeneration in the reserve. There are no natural barriers between the private land and the reserve land, so it makes sense to think of managing the whole area as one unit of land. A Landcare group may be able to access grant-funding for work on private land and in the reserve.

Our first activity was a walk up the main Bangalley track looking at the spring flowers. We are going through the procedures of formally establishing the group and expect to get into more action next year.

The Landcare group is separate from PNHA but we'll assist and keep in touch.

Pittwater Orchids

Snake Orchid, *Cymbidium suave*, Avalon

The only native cymbidium orchid of the Sydney district, it's not easily noticed, perched in hollows of trees, generally Eucalypts. It looks rather like a *Lomandra* from a distance. This one is growing in the stump of a eucalypt that has resprouted. November is its flowering time, with many sweet-scented flowers in pendulous sprays.

Unlike the more familiar garden *Cymbidiums* it doesn't have pseudobulbs. Leaves arise from lengthy stems patterned with leaf scars, hence its common name Snake Orchid. It occurs mainly along the east coast from the Victorian border north to northern Queensland.

Tongue Orchid, Palm Beach

Dockrillia linguiformis (formerly *Dendrobium linguiforme*) has thick leathery tongue-shaped leaves about 2cm long growing from a creeping rhizome. It grows either as an epiphyte on trees or as a lithophyte on rocks. Flowering occurs in September and October. It occurs north of Ulladulla in eucalyptus forest or rainforest. However it can survive in drier fire-free areas west of the Great Dividing Range such as near Tamworth in northern New South Wales.



Above: Snake Orchid *Cymbidium suave*, Avalon. M. Macrae

Left: Tongue Orchid, *Dockrillia linguiformis*, Palm Beach. M. Macrae

Below: Crab spider on *Cymbidium* orchid, Avalon. M. Macrae



Crab Spider on *Cymbidium* orchid

Watch and wait is this spider's hunting strategy. It's a female Crab Spider, *Sidymella rubrosignata*, so named for its long grasping first two pairs of legs. Its delicate colour blends in with the pale flowers. Colours can vary to match its surrounds, but it is mostly found on green shrubs and trees. This one was in a garden in Avalon in October 2011. Marita Macrae



Seagrasses

Some time ago I drew up a list of facts significant to seagrasses. Those facts are listed below. However, recent studies have greatly increased seagrass importance.

But, first of all, what is seagrass? The term is usually applied in Pittwater to that marine plant partly exposed on the mudflats at Careel Bay and elsewhere.. It is *Zostera capricorni*. Below it in the tidal range is *Posidonia australis*, or strapweed.

Seagrasses are not true grasses, but nevertheless vascular, flowering plants functioning entirely in seawater (as distinct to marine algae such as kelp which are true, marine, non-flowering non-vascular plants) There are several families involved, all convergent in certain characteristics, but I will not go into it here.



What has recently been discovered is that seagrasses are possibly the most important marine storage of carbon, sequestering about as much as a forest. Studies at UTS and elsewhere are pursuing this. However, what we DO know is that every effort must be made to preserve what is left of our sadly diminishing seagrass meadows world-wide.

Other roles of seagrass are as follows:

Biological significance

- 1) seagrasses grow fast, with new leaves offering new substrate for other organisms while old decaying leaves add rich organic matter
- 2) Their leaf area provides a hard substrate offering 15 times more area for settlement of epiphytes (small animals and plants) than the immediately adjacent bottom.
- 3) The massive increase in epiphytes provides a major boost in

the food chain for larger predators

4) seagrass habitats, compared to other areas show much greater diversity of macrofauna (i.e. prawns, fish). One study, comparing the fauna of seagrass beds and bare sand by means of beam trawl sampling, produced 3923 individuals of 68 species in seagrasses as against 129 individuals from 19 species in a comparable area of sand

5) there are few seagrass vertebrate herbivores in Australian waters (other than dugong and turtles in the tropics) but the decaying leaves produce large amounts of organic matter which is an extremely important nutrient resource for many animals. As well, the root system of some species contains a far greater amount of biomass than the leaves and thus adds greatly, when they decay, to soil nutrients.



6) decaying seagrasses along the shoreline are extremely rich with a diverse assemblage of small to minute animals all working away at recycling nutrients back into the system. Physical removal of dead seagrass means a real loss of nutrients to the system.

Physical significance

- 1) seagrasses reduce wave action and thus help to stabilise shorelines by preventing erosion
- 2) they play a significant role in sediment trapping and substrate binding
- 3) these grasses, as well as producing nutrient matter, trap significantly more from the water column.

Phil Colman

Left:: Zostera capricorni grows in shallower water than Posidonia

Above: : Posidonia australis



Membership Application

I would like to join Pittwater Natural Heritage Association. I agree with the PNHA's aims: raising awareness of and preserving our unique Pittwater natural environment

Name:..... Signed:.....

Address:.....P/Code

Email:..... Ph:..... Date:.....

I would like a **paper copy** OR **emailed** newsletter (circle your choice). Membership fee: \$20 or \$10 pensioner/student.

Post cheque payable to **Pittwater Natural Heritage Association** to PNHA, PO Box 187, Avalon Beach NSW 2107.

Contact Details: Tel/Fax 02 9918 3368

Email: pnhainfo@gmail.com

www.pnha.org.au