

BANDICOOTtimes

Autumn 2021 | No 80



hobartcity.com.au/bushcare



A PROGRAM OF



City of **HOBART**

Bushcare Roundup



Talia Sawers
Program Officer Bushcare

We're so excited about the year ahead for Bushcare, and to have our volunteers return to the field after a well-deserved break.

We've heard some great stories of our Bushcarers embarking on different adventures over the holiday period, including our team leader Bec, who joined a group of extreme weeders out on Tasmania's southwest coast (you can read her story in this edition).

Bushcare activities resumed in early February, so the program is off to a great start. The Bushcare tools are sharpened and ready for another year of action!

The Waterworks Valley Landcare group kicked off the new year by giving an area on Waterworks Road they planted in 2017 a bit of tender loving care. 'The Verge' is looking great and now features some established native grasses and shrubs.

Ridgeway Bushcare had a very productive session removing Spanish heath and helping to restore the beautiful white peppermint woodlands of Ridgeway Park. A big thanks to the volunteers from UTAS for helping out at February's working bee and for their enthusiastic company on the day.

We've got some great activities planned for autumn, including a clean-up event on the mountain and kickstarting our grant-funded project to control *Daphne laurel*



The enthusiastic volunteers from Ridgeway Bushcare remove highly invasive gorse weed from beautiful white peppermint woodland in Ridgeway Park. Photos: Jesse Benjamin



Bushcare team leader Bec points out some of the natural features in Ridgeway Park to a volunteer.

in Fern Tree. Late autumn also sees the start of our tree planting season.

We're putting in the final steps for removing 12 radiata and macrocarpa pine trees from McAulay Reserve as part of a Communities Environment Program grant. The Friends of McAulay Reserve will work closely with Waimea Heights Primary School to replant the site and create an accessible outdoor learning area for the students.

This restoration work will protect and support the threatened grass species adjacent to the site.

We've also been busy working with the Friends of Knocklofty and McAulay Reserve groups to create Bushcare site plans for Salvator Rosa Glen in West Hobart and Edith Ave Reserve in Sandy Bay.

Our Trackcare crews are back in action and have already made great progress in continuing to formalise the Troglodyte track. We also hope to have the first Trackcare crew leaders set up and supervising their own teams soon.

We'll be celebrating the important work of our volunteers once again this autumn as part of National Volunteer Week (May 17-23).

We're extremely grateful to our volunteers, not only for their dedication and efforts in restoring Hobart's diverse and precious bushland, but also for being wonderful people to work with and helping to make our community a better place. Thank you Bushcarers!

Contact Us

16 Elizabeth Street
GPO Box 503,
Hobart 7001, TAS

P 03 6238 2884
E bushcare@hobartcity.com.au
W hobartcity.com.au/bushcare
f facebook.com/cityofhobartbushcare

Cover photo: Wallaby grass,
John Sampson.

Back page photo: Ridgeway
Bushcare volunteers,
Jesse Benjamin.



Dirty but happy, the female half of the City of Hobart's firefighting crew complete a fuel reduction burn at Porter Hill.

Ladies of fire smash glass ceiling

The City of Hobart's firefighting crew ended 2020 on a high note when a team made up of 50% women and a female leader in command carried out a successful fuel reduction burn.

That's quite an achievement in one of the toughest jobs in the world and one traditionally seen as a male profession.

It's also a significant achievement given that just two weeks before the fuel reduction burn a report was released demonstrating the case for gender balance in the fire and emergency sector.

Stuart Ellis AM, Chief Executive Officer, Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council, says the sector needs to recruit and develop diverse talent to meet future demands.

"The increasing demands on fire and emergency service personnel and the shifting nature of their work requires a broader talent pool," he said.

"We firmly believe that attracting more women and tapping into new and different skills will be fundamental to meeting Australia's fire and emergency prevention,

preparedness, incident response and recovery needs into the future."

Our 'Ladies of Fire' carried out the fuel reduction burn at Porter Hill, making the most of the in-house firefighting training and support they receive from the City.

And while on the day they were all firefighters they also hold down some pretty incredible day jobs at the City. Among the team is an environmental scientist, a senior research and policy advisor, a fire and biodiversity program leader, and our own Bushcare team.

Friends of Knocklofty set the bar high

Bushcare stalwarts the Friends of Knocklofty are continuing their dedication to protecting and restoring Knocklofty Reserve by securing another five years of funding from TasNetworks for their on-ground efforts.

The City of Hobart, on behalf of the group, renewed a 5-year agreement with TasNetworks that will see volunteers maintain vegetation in the wide corridors

of native heathlands that sit beneath transmission lines.

As an open heathland, free of weeds, the corridors add ecological diversity to Knocklofty's landscape. Birds can swoop for insects, marsupials can graze safe from traffic, and the quality of understorey has improved.

The Friends of Knocklofty first began maintaining the corridors in 2006 and have generated

thousands of dollars for the restoration of Knocklofty Reserve since.

Funds from these works are reinvested into the reserve and, in the past, have helped pay for contractor weed control, the purchase of native seedlings and signage.

Officers from TasNetworks have commended the group for its high standard of work.

GRASSLAND BEAUTIES

Pip Jones
Team Leader Bushcare

Imagine exploring a landscape more biodiverse than a rainforest, but with a canopy that only just reaches your knees... lucky for us in Hobart, these incredible and critically endangered ecosystems are right on our doorstep.

Grasslands were formerly widespread across the lowlands of Tasmania, but today just a fraction remain in fragmented pockets across the state. This ecosystem's age-old reliance on careful fire management and its sensitivity to invasive weeds, feral animals and development means we only have a few small patches left to take care of in Hobart – in fact, we're only just starting to find out what we don't yet know about the city's grasslands!

Earlier this year we made the second formal observation of a rare grassland flax lily (*Dianella amoena*) at Queens Domain. Nationally endangered and notoriously fussy about reproducing by seed, this species is a significant find in Hobart's bushland reserves.

Its favoured habitat is the lowland native grasslands persisting in the Midlands, where biomass is kept low with burning and grazing regimes. This species is also very particular about who comes to visit: the flower's anthers are so small and delicate, it can only be pollinated using a special method of 'buzz pollination' known to just a handful of insects, making it a handy bio-indicator of the presence of native pollinators and the health of a grassland ecosystem.

As a clump-forming rhizomatous



plant, it can persist for decades without flowering – in fact, we only learned about the grassland flax lily growing in the Queens Domain when the City of Hobart put a tentative pause on the area's annual slashing regime in preparation for a fuel reduction burn. Having spent time with *Dianella amoena* in Merri Creek's remnant grasslands, I went on a lunchtime walk in the Domain wondering if I'd be lucky enough to spot one – unbelievably, I didn't have to walk more than 20 metres before I saw its distinctive purple flower.

The presence of the grassland flax lily in the Domain is yet more evidence that this biodiversity hotspot needs careful protection. This challenge is taken very seriously by Bushcarers working in these special places.

Cornelian Bay Bushcare has been on the frontline of this work, weeding introduced grasses around the lilies, orchids, daisies, pea flowers and heaths growing among kangaroo grass, wallaby grass and speargrass on the Queens Domain.

The importance of these grasslands cannot be

underestimated – the presence of endangered species in unlikely places is just another reason to protect what we can. What might look like a dry and dull patch of unruly lawn might actually accommodate an enormous diversity of plants, some wildly different, some so similar you'd need a hand lens and tiny ruler to tell them apart.

Over in Sandy Bay, a threatened species of speargrass, *Austrostipa blackii*, was discovered in the grassland patch at McAulay Reserve by ecologist Andy Welling on his site visit with the Friends of McAulay Reserve Bushcare group in February last year.

Looking suspiciously like its neighbour *Austrostipa stuposa*, the main diagnostic feature of *Austrostipa blackii* is the length of the hairs on its lemma apex – that is, the tiny bristles where the seed is attached to the awn.

This might not seem like a huge difference, but it's enough to set this species apart.

Through cooperation with the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, the Tasmanian Herbarium and the City of Hobart's own nursery, the Bushcare team has collected a small sample of seed from this special colony and will propagate it for revegetation projects that will enhance the reserve's grassland patch.

It's our shared responsibility to look after this threatened ecosystem – after all, grasslands are shaped by human activity. Where human intervention stops, grasslands will slowly lose their unique structure to encroaching shrubs and trees.



Tasmania's beautiful, wild and dramatic west coast.

Weed warriors take bushland weeding to whole new level



Bec Johnson
Team Leader Bushcare

I think I've discovered a sport that will really appeal to Bushcarers. You've probably heard of ice climbing, and maybe base jumping, but what about extreme weeding?

Teams of intrepid volunteers have been removing sea spurge and marram grass from Tasmania's wild west coast since 2007. Every January up to seven teams depart Macquarie Harbour in Strahan for extended trips to Port Davey and as far south as Cackle Creek.

I was lucky enough to join one of the teams in January this year.

Supported by Tasmania's Parks and Wildlife Service and operating under the umbrella of Wildcare Tasmania, SPRATS stands for Sea sPurge Remote Area TeamS. Led by Jon Marsden-Smedley these intrepid volunteers have achieved a remarkable reduction of both weed species, as well as blackberry.

Why is this work so important?

Sea spurge (*Euphorbia paralias*) and marram grass (*Ammophila*



The roots of this marram grass reached down 1m into the dune.

arenaria) are not the only invasive plants to have made it into this incredible stretch of wilderness – there is also spear thistle. But these two can alter entire landscapes. Both can stabilise dunes that should be naturally shifting and mobile.

Marram grass, for example, is cultivated in Europe to protect coastlines, but here we have a truly wild coastline where dunes are constantly shifting, Aboriginal middens being uncovered and re-covered, coastal forests buried and re-emerging, and creeks shifting

their courses through the dunes.

These weeds also create dense fields of vegetation that our vulnerable shore birds such as hooded plovers and terns don't like to nest in – they require open spaces to build their little nests, called scrapes, in the sand.

Our team was lucky enough to witness a number of dunes starting to shift for the first time in about 20 years, as the binding roots of marram grass disintegrate after spraying.

We saw beautiful sand-blasted driftwood and shells, huge Aboriginal middens containing seal bones and abalone almost the size of my foot, ancient wind-sculpted banksias, and dynamic, shifting sand dunes.

We warded off scurvy with local berries, we whittled, we practised knots with the vast amount of fishing rope littering the coast, we told riddles, played games and killed sea spurge. Great teamwork!

Perhaps the most humbling part was camping near freshwater where generations have lived before us, leaving footprints on lonely beaches that once would have seen children playing, and swimming where skilled women dived for abalone and crayfish to feed their families for thousands of generations.



Aboriginal Heritage Officer Caleb Pedder conducting a site visit at Cornelian Bay. Photos: John Sampson

A CONTINUING CONNECTION

Cornelian Bay has never hidden its age well – in fact, the New Town foreshore’s long history lies in plain sight.

Shell middens comprised of mud oysters, mussels, pipis and the charcoal from countless cook-ups scatter the foreshore, marking the continuation of a millennia-long Aboriginal connection with the bay. European heritage is also imprinted on the landscape. Brightly-coloured boatsheds and the former site of the old Cornelian Bay Baths point to a long-held tradition of boating, fishing and swimming.

The foreshore’s long history hasn’t gone unnoticed – Cornelian Bay is the most archaeologically surveyed site on the Derwent



Pip Jones
Team Leader Bushcare

estuary’s foreshores, and is one of the most heavily surveyed sites in the state. As part of the ancestral lands of the Muwinina people and under the continuing custodianship of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, Cornelian Bay is a cultural landscape alive with the lifeways of lutruwita’s first people.

The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre’s Land and Heritage Project Officer, Andry Sculthorpe, says Cornelian Bay is a significant story-telling landscape.

“Middens tell the story of people’s connections with timtumil minanya/Derwent River and the country around the river,” he says. “For the Aboriginal community, these places provide a direct connection with the ancestors, they tell a story and remind us of the families that lived here and their achievements and struggles.”

Last year, Cornelian Bay Bushcare decided to down tools in their cherished bushland bay and hone their grassland identification skills on the Queens Domain while the City of Hobart worked out the best way to sensitively and sustainably manage Cornelian Bay’s remarkable heritage values. I’ve been working under



Shell middens can be found throughout the Derwent estuary foreshore.

Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania's guidelines to plan future Bushcare works in the area. It's a privilege to be a part of caring for such a special place. As Andry Sculthorpe puts it, "these middens are precious and damage to them is irreparable. When we look after the environment, we need to also look after the connection people have with it and ensure these places are understood and protected."

When Cornelian Bay Bushcarers return to the bay this year they will first take part in an induction with Aboriginal Heritage Officer Caleb Pedder, who will show them how to identify and respond if they discover Aboriginal heritage.

With a detailed management plan guided by Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania, and site inspections with Caleb Pedder, we will all gain a greater awareness of Cornelian Bay's past, present and future significance.

Cornelian Bay Bushcare will put this knowledge into practice, leaving heritage items undisturbed and mitigating the erosion of sand and soil on the foreshore by cutting and painting instead of hand-pulling weeds.

Alongside planting tubestock where appropriate, we'll make space for the natural regeneration of coastal plant species and opt for a slow and steady ecological restoration.

Congratulations to Cornelian Bay Bushcare for committing to the protection of the ecological and cultural values of this special place.

// ... these middens are precious and damage to them is irreparable.
– Andry Sculthorpe

Crack go the willows

We are all familiar with the romantic English notion of drooping willow branches overhanging a chattering creek, but in Australia willows are a different story. They are not just a weed – they can transform entire waterways.

Willows spread their roots throughout creekbeds, reducing natural turbulence, eddies and deep pools. The result is less oxygen and habitat for fish and invertebrates. The dense root mass they create lines creeks, making it hard for platypus to forage for food and create burrows. Such a solid root mass also reduces organic layers in the creek bed, important habitat for native invertebrates (just like the leaf litter in your garden.)

Willows also compete for light and root space, pushing out native vegetation, yet they provide little to no tree habitat such as tree hollows. When willows drop leaves in autumn, oxygen is sucked out of the water in the process of breaking down millions of leaves. This



Bec Johnson
Team Leader Bushcare

harms aquatic plants, fish and invertebrates and can result in fish kills. Unsurprisingly, willows are a declared weed in Tasmania, as well as a Weed of National Significance.

The most common species of willow in the Hobart area is crack willow (*Salix fragilis*), which can drop entire branches without warning and spread rapidly along creeks by dropping live twigs that easily take root. The thickets created by crack willows cause flooding and bank erosion.

Cricket fans will be pleased to know though that the “cricket-bat” willow, believed to be a variant of the white willow, has not become invasive in Australia.

Treating willows

One good method is to pull out live (green) willow twigs on creek banks, especially after heavy

rainfall. Willow twigs can go in FOGO (green waste) bins, or left somewhere secure to dry out for a few months.

Felling willows

If there are no walking tracks or structures under a willow that could be damaged by falling branches, a willow can be drilled with herbicide and left to die standing, which is ideal because any twigs dropped are not green. Otherwise the tree has to be felled live, dropping thousands of twigs that could take root.

Willow removal ideally starts with upstream plants, working down the catchment to avoid re-introduction when the twigs drop. Willow removal is usually coupled with replanting of replacement native vegetation to stabilise banks.

The City of Hobart recently received \$10,000 from the Tasmanian Weeds Action Fund to remove willows from a section of the Hobart Rivulet. Work will begin in autumn.



What's in your backyard?

Alan Hill
Program Officer Fire & Biodiversity

Have you ever walked out of your back door in the morning and found small holes dug into your lawn or fresh scats on the ground and wondered how they got there?

Clearly there were animals coming quietly into your yard at night. I really wanted to know what animals were in my yard so needed a way of observing them throughout the night, but apart from staying up all night what are my options?

A wildlife monitoring camera is a clear choice and can be set

up to automatically take photos throughout the night, allowing you to sit back with a cup of tea the next morning as you sift through the night's activities.

I purchased a couple and set them up around my property in South Hobart.

What a surprise I had the next day when I looked at the photos. In the first night I found that I had at least six or more Bennett's wallabies, at least two, if not three brush-tailed possums and quite sadly someone's cat, which they were not keeping at home.

It only got better over subsequent nights. At least two, and possibly

three Tasmanian devils showed their faces and most wonderful of all I had a couple of eastern barred bandicoots snuffling across my lawn. After about four nights I even had a fairly blurred photo of an eastern quoll.

If this excites you then consider doing something similar. Suitable cameras are becoming cheaper all the time. Download the iNaturalist app, open an account and record your observations. Records such as this are so valuable for researchers, helping them to understand the current and changing distributions and abundance or otherwise of all of the amazing creatures we have here in our favourite places.



Love Hobart's wildlife? Why not take the pledge and become a Bandicoot Buddy! By doing so you and your family will be helping to protect and provide food and shelter for Hobart's endangered eastern barred bandicoots and other wildlife!

Sign up at hobartcity.com.au/bandicoots

Fire trail works boost mountain safety

The 4km firefighting and evacuation route along Big Bend fire trail on kunanyi / Mount Wellington has received a major upgrade, boosting safety for visitors and residents.

The \$250,000 upgrade was jointly funded by the City of Hobart, the City of Glenorchy and TasWater

as an important safety project that will also benefit recreational visitors to Wellington Park.

A small section of the Lenah Valley Fire Trail has been closed while the City of Hobart fixes serious erosion issues along the trail, which leads into the Old Hobartians Track. You can take a 1km detour while this

section of fire trail is closed.

The work will stabilise an eroding embankment and take up to three months to complete. Once finished it will help the creek crossing area cope with increased water flows from storm events and ensure safe access for firefighting vehicles.



A Trackcare crew hard at work on the Yellow Hippo.

Riders hungry for new-look Hippo

A new mountain bike track has been added to the City of Hobart's recreational track network, thanks to the hard work of Trackcare volunteers.

Yellow Hippo was an old, informal track on the western side of Knocklofty Reserve. After purchasing the block of land on which the track was built several years ago, the City decided the track formed a valuable link in the wider mountain bike network, and should be given a spruce up before being formalised.

Keen members of the local mountain bike community got involved through our Trackcare program, and over several months last year took to it with mattocks, rake-hoes, shovels and rock hammers.

The volunteer team built new features and alternate lines down the length of the track, fixing drainage along the way and resurfacing the entire bottom section of track. Corners were given a make-over, rocks were hauled around to armour the track surface, and a few big rollers were thrown in for good measure (and air-time).

The result is a challenging ride that meets Mountain Bike Australia black diamond track standards.

The newly-opened track has been designated as a downhill trail, for



Manoeuvring heavy, unwieldy rocks into place is a fine art for our Trackcare volunteers.

mountain bike use only. The rough and rocky top half of the track gives riders a great challenge, and will test technical riding skills. A series of tight switchbacks is a chance to test balance and composure. Further down the track flattens out, providing a fast descent towards the exit point.

Trackcare continues this year with the start of improvements to the track network on Mount Nelson. Troglodyte Track will be a new connection across the northern side of Bicentennial Park, making it far easier and more enjoyable to get around the area on bike and foot. If you're a mountain biker, or

keen outdoors person, and want to get involved, head to the City of Hobart website and sign up!

Around the tracks

Planning approvals for the new "Rocky Wheel'n" mountain bike track is progressing well. To be built in Wellington Park, Rocky Wheel'n is part of the Riding the Mountain plan and will give riders an easy ascent from O'Grady's Fire Trail to Shoobridge Bend.

The new track will make it safer for riders to reach the North-South Track from Fern Tree by avoiding busy Pinnacle Road.

Mountain gateway reborn

A tiny park in Fern Tree that once hosted summer strawberry festivals and has been a gateway for visitors wishing to explore Wellington Park for more than a century has been celebrated after a \$2 million makeover.

Rejuvenating the park provided considerable design challenges and restraints. The park is on steep, forested terrain on the edge of Huon Road and includes parts of the heritage-listed Pipeline Track, which carries a quarter of Hobart's water supply.

Tourists were first drawn to the natural beauty of the area in the early 1860s, when they would visit Silver Falls and the rainforest glade at Fern Tree Bower.

In the early 1890s, summer strawberry feasts were held on the lawns to raise funds for nearby St Raphael's Church, which was built in 1893. Stalls were set up serving berries and cream and afternoon tea, and the feasts soon became a local attraction with many people making the trip from Hobart to Fern Tree for the occasion.

The church has survived two major bushfires, including the 1967 Black Tuesday bushfires, and still stands today.

The location is steeped in



Andrew Evans created the beautiful carvings at Fern Tree Park.

natural and cultural heritage, which the City sought to protect and celebrate through the improvement project.

Lord Mayor Anna Reynolds was at the celebration with federal Senator Eric Abetz and Andrew Wilkie MP to inspect the improvements to the playground, carpark and amenities.

"Fern Tree Park has been given a makeover with a fun natural playground featuring Tasmanian animal engravings," Cr Reynolds said.

"Ratepayers have contributed the bulk of the funding but the

assistance of an \$800,000 grant from the federal government is very welcome.

"It's a beautiful natural gateway for people to explore kunanyi / Mount Wellington."

Parks and Recreation Committee Chair Jeff Briscoe invited everyone to rediscover the Fern Tree area.

"If you haven't been up here since the park upgrade, it might be time to visit and rediscover this little mountain park, along with the many walking tracks and other features that the City has invested in improving in recent years," he said.





BUSHCARE

PEOPLE CARING FOR NATURE



A PROGRAM OF



City of **HOBART**