

BANDICOOTtimes

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Bushcare Roundup



Talia Sawers
Program Officer Bushcare

Bushcare is a huge part of my life and has been for many years – and not just because it's my job. I was introduced to the world of Bushcare (or Dune Care to be exact) in 1998 and it was love at first working bee.

Being an environmental cause, I naturally gravitated towards the activity, although it was a combination of other factors that gave me an incredible sense of satisfaction – hard work, dirt-encrusted hands, immersion in nature, exposure to the elements and spending time with other like-minded individuals. I'm also a big fan of morning tea!

It has been incredibly gratifying to be involved in something with such tangible environmental outcomes. We're literally removing tonnes of environmental weeds from the landscape!

And the longer we are involved in Bushcare the more we are rewarded. Over time we get to see the diverse array of life that is given the space and opportunity it needs to rejuvenate and restore the health of our bushland and waterways – the native trees, shrubs and grasses, delicate scramblers, threatened herbs, endemic orchids, and all the amazing, beautiful and sometimes



weird creatures that hop, fly, crawl, slither and buzz around us while we work.

Bushcare is an accepting place, a melting pot of cultures, professions, ages and political persuasions. It provides an escape from life's challenges and a cure for anxiety, disease and loneliness. It's a place where everyone's skills and knowledge enhance the program.

As a coordinator of Bushcare programs – and now coordinating Hobart's Bushcare program – I am constantly inspired by the level of passion, dedication and expertise of the volunteers I have worked with. Active members of the community, they form connections and long-term partnerships with residents, other community groups, local schools, universities, corporations and all levels of government.

The actions undertaken by Bushcare volunteers can mean the

difference between local extinction and survival for many species.

Bushcare volunteers are a special breed who are selfless with their time and caring with their actions. They help raise community awareness about bushland reserves and their environmental values, mentor new volunteers, champion environmental stewardship and make wonderful friends.

Not only do they contribute hundreds of thousands of hours towards bushland management across Australia – worth tens of millions of dollars annually – but perhaps more importantly they create a healthier, more robust natural environment.

Bushcare is so much bigger than the bushland areas volunteers are restoring. It's about community, learning, mentoring, friendships and making a difference in this world, one weed at a time.



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COVER PHOTO: Masked owl, Michael Roberts.



Bushcare volunteers Bryan Ly, Pei Fern and Robert Rands scope out Fantail Quarry with our Bushcare staff Bec Johnson and Talia Sawers.
Photo: Sam Adams

Bushcare is back in action!

Our Bushcare and Trackcare volunteers are set to return to the field this month to once again tackle environmental weeds, restore important wildlife habitat and create and maintain bushland tracks.

Our 25-year-old Bushcare program was forced to suspend all working bees on March 18 as part of a nationwide clampdown on gatherings of people to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Since then our volunteers have been chomping at the bit to return to their bushcare sites and tracks!

Sandra Poth is a volunteer convenor with the Bushcare group Waterworks Valley Landcare.

"We are so looking forward to meeting up again and planning our next Bushcare project," she said.

"We are all so proud to be part of one of Hobart's oldest Bushcare groups and can't wait to get back to it!"

Volunteers will have to follow

Bushcare's physical distancing rules

- Visit our Bushcare events page at hobartcity.com.au/bushcare to register for each working bee so we don't exceed permitted gathering numbers.
- BYO morning tea – no sharing for now but we hope to provide coffee and bikkies again soon!
- Please take your gloves and safety glasses home and bring them back to each working bee.
- Follow hygiene and physical distancing tips recommended by the Tasmanian Government.

physical distancing and hygiene rules, and initial working bees will be limited to 20 people.

We're all looking forward to seeing our volunteers again when Bushcare resumes and don't expect these new distancing measures will have a significant impact on our working bees. Bushcare naturally lends itself to a healthy level of physical distancing with volunteers enjoying, and often preferring, some space in the great outdoors.

We hope to see you at a working bee soon!

While working bees have been

on hold, you might be wondering what some of our Bushcare volunteers have been up to. You may have heard of iso-baking, iso-tech, iso-exercise, even iso-fails. How about iso-Bushcare?

Friends of Knocklofty volunteer Greg Summers made a large COVID-19 sculpture out of marine debris, now on display outside his house. Some of our hardy Working Alone Volunteers have been plugging away at weeds in the interim, and the Wakefield boys up at Ridgeway have been out and about identifying native fungi and studying leaves through a magnifying glass.



Boobook owls are often heard calling in Hobart. Photo: © Eric Woehler, BirdLife Tasmania

Who gives a hoot for Hobart's owls?

Not all Hobart residents embrace the light. Some only make their way out at night.

Owls belong to this secret nocturnal society, flitting silently through our forests, striking fear into the hearts of small furry animals while the rest of us are snuggled up under our doonas.

Hobart is home to two true owls – the Tasmanian masked owl (*Tyto novaehollandiae castanops*) and the Tasmanian boobook (*Ninox leucopsis*).

The Tasmanian masked owl is an endangered species – there are thought to be as few as 1000 in the entire world. Rarely seen, you may sometimes hear them in the bush, cackling like kookaburras on helium, or screeching like avian banshees.

Their heart-shaped faces act



Nicole Gill
Team Leader Bushcare

as feathery satellite dishes, channelling even the faintest whisper of a bandicoot's sneeze into their offset ears.

Masked owls eat birds and insects, but can also take quite large prey, including rabbits and pademelons. Their astonishing hearing allows them to catch moving prey even in complete darkness.

Most sightings of masked owls come from our bushland reserves – they're known at Knocklofty, Wellington Park, Waterworks and Mount Nelson – but in 2014 an inexperienced young masked

owl was seen perching in a tree out the front of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

Boobook, mo-poke or ru-ru?

The more common Tasmanian boobooks are often heard calling in Hobart – their distinctive two-note has given rise to a number of onomatopoeic common names: *boo-book! mo-poke! ru-ru! more-pork!*

A small owl with piercing yellow eyes and mottled cream and brown plumage, boobooks prey largely on smaller creatures – mammals, birds and invertebrates – and like the masked owl, they move silently through the night on delicately fringed wings.

Scientists looking for owls in forest

environments sometimes use call playback, playing owl calls through a speaker to lure them within sight, or at least hearing distance. Unfortunately, this method is often unsuccessful – the owls may be out foraging in a different area, or simply wary and unwilling to be drawn out of the darkness. It can also be intrusive – call playback can cause unnecessary stress for owls, who may believe their territory is under threat – so should only be done by qualified ecologists.

Fortunately, owl habitat can be identified another way – by locating the pellets, or castings, that owls throw up after digesting their meals.

While owls sometimes eat their prey by tearing chunks out of it, they can swallow smaller animals whole, relying on powerful enzymes in their proventriculus (first stomach bag), and the might of their gizzard (second stomach) to grind and crush their prey's body into easily digestible mush.

Once they've extracted the juicy bits out of their meal, they spew up the remains in a pellet – essentially a giant, bone-enhanced fur-ball. These pellets often pile up around areas of important owl habitat, like nesting hollows or roost sites. By finding piles of pellets, you can be fairly confident you've found an area important to owls!

Threats to Hobart's owls

Both species of owls are obligate hollow breeders – this means they need hollows to successfully raise chicks. The old, sometimes dead or dying trees in our reserves are critically important for owls and other hollow breeders – without them, they have nowhere to raise their feathery families.

The loss of hollows at a landscape scale has been identified as one of the major threats to the Tasmanian masked owl. The City



Forest Practices Authority Raptor Specialist Jason Wiersma examines a Tasmanian masked owl with ANU PhD candidate Adam Cisterne.

of Hobart manages its bushland reserves to protect these old trees and other areas of conservation significance.

Closer to home, and perhaps an even more serious threat to owls, is the use of rat poisons.

Adam Cisterne, who's studying Tasmanian masked owls for his PhD, recently analysed the corpses of 20 owls found by members of the public. He discovered traces of rat poison in all but one of them.

Although no rat poisons are good for owls, the worst are the "single dose" poisons that kill rodents with only one feed. When owls

catch and eat these poisoned rodents, they experience secondary poisoning, which can either kill them outright, or make them sick enough to impact their ability to hunt or fly successfully.

What can you do for Hobart's owls?

Avoid using single dose rat poisons

Sometimes called second generation poisons, it's best to avoid them if you want to help keep our owls safe. Instead use multiple dose baits, or better still,

continued next page ...

A sniffer dog called Zorro

Zorro is a border collie cross springer spaniel who belongs to Bushcare team leader Nicole Gill. He's been training since he was a puppy to sniff out Tasmanian masked owl pellets.

Like Adam and Nicole, Zorro's a member of the ANU Difficult Birds Research Group. His mission? To uncover Tasmanian masked owl habitat, and chase as many balls as possible while doing so.

He's already helped our bushland teams identify a boobook roost at Ridgeway – who knows what he'll sniff out next?

When is an owl not an owl?

Owlet nightjars: Australia's tiniest nocturnal bird, rarely spotted, and despite appearances, not an owl.

Tawny frogmouth: Masters of camouflage, often found hiding in plain sight. Also not an owl.



Zorro is on a mission to uncover Tasmanian masked owl habitat, and chase balls.

old-fashioned snap traps to catch your rats. Rats won't hang around if they don't have anything to eat – secure your compost bins and chook runs and you won't need to trap so many rats.

Leave the old trees standing

Lucky enough to have an old, hollow bearing tree on your property? Consider leaving it as habitat for owls and other hollow dwellers.

Slow down at night

Boobooks in particular are

vulnerable to being hit by cars when they are busy chasing insects – slow down when driving, and save them from themselves.

Seen an owl recently? Let Adam know!

Adam is doing his PhD right now on Tasmanian owls, and is always keen to hear from people who've recently encountered these mysterious birds.

Contact Adam by emailing him at: adam.cisterne@anu.edu.au



Owlet nightjar. Photo: JJ Harrison



Tawny frogmouth. Photo: Sylvia | Pixabay

Exploring the wonders of nature during lockdown

Volunteering with Bushcare is a great way to learn about Hobart's bushland reserves and how to protect the native plants and animals that call them home, but it's not the only way.

The coronavirus clampdown forced many of us to come up with ways of caring for nature from our own homes, starting in backyards.

Many of the weedy plants threatening Hobart's bushlands originally came from gardens. What seems like a harmless plant on a visit to the nursery can turn into an environmental invader if it jumps your fence and escapes into nearby bushland.

But by responsibly disposing of garden waste and removing environmental weeds from your garden you can help protect Hobart's bushland reserves.

Where to start

The Weeds of Southern Tasmania booklet can help you with the task of identifying these nasties.

If you live in Fern Tree *The Fern Tree Weed Booklet* is for you.

If you want to dig deeper into weed control methods and management strategies, take a look at the Tasmanian Government's website and NRM South's priority weed brochures.

Habitat gardens

Using plants native to your region is a great way to turn your garden into a habitat sanctuary, providing food and shelter for birds and other wildlife as well as butterflies. NRM South has created an excellent native plants of Hobart



Ridgeway Bushcare regulars Ewan and Pippin discover a crop of Armillaria fungus while exploring nearby bushland. Photo: Bronwyn Kimber

Handy websites

- Links to all of the sources listed in this story can be found at hobartcity.com.au/carefornature.
- The NRM South website is a great resource: nrmsouth.org.au

list that will help you find the right native plants for your garden. They have also created a fantastic Native Gardens guide.

Rock gardens, nest boxes, bird baths, frog ponds and native bee hotels are also great ways of attracting native wildlife into your garden, and provide natural stepping stones between our bushland reserves.

Discover how to create a wildlife garden and encourage bush birds into your garden with NRM South's wonderful Bush Birds brochure.

Citizen science

You don't need a science degree to be a citizen scientist, just a curious nature and an enthusiasm for the natural world around us.

By contributing your observations on nature to apps like iNaturalist, Fungimap and FrogID you can make a valuable contribution to our understanding of Hobart's bushland reserves and the wildlife that rely on them for survival.

Here are just a few programs you can get involved with:

- Wild Pollinator Count
- Butterflies Australia
- Fungimap
- Aussie Backyard Bird Count
- Fairywren Project
- FrogID

A more comprehensive list has been compiled by the Australian Citizen Science Association.

Bush tracks online

The City of Hobart has launched a series of interactive online maps that will help locals and visitors explore walking and mountain bike tracks throughout Hobart's bushland reserves.

The maps, which are found at hobartcity.com.au/bushlandmaps, include the City's 115 km fire trail network and use colour coding to rate tracks from very easy through to very difficult.

In releasing the maps the City also provided tips for staying safe on Hobart's tracks and trails during physical distancing.

Take the path less travelled

Some of our bushland tracks are proving more popular than ever, so now is a good time to explore routes that are a bit off the beaten track. Our online walking tracks map will help you find new tracks to explore.

Go local

If you can walk to a bushland reserve from your house why not get the exercise and explore your local bushland reserve instead of driving your car to a spot further



away? This will help avoid large groups of people gathering in more popular areas like The Springs and other main car parks.

Explore our fire trails

Fire trails have been built to allow access into our bushland reserves for firefighting crews and their vehicles. They are wider than normal walking tracks – facilitating physical distancing – and often take you through beautiful forest.

Keep your distance

Some of our bushland tracks can be quite narrow in areas, so please give each other plenty of room when passing, and abide by current government recommendations on physical distancing.

Move to the beat of your own drum

Tracks and fire trails in Hobart

come in all shapes and sizes, some are lovely little strolls, others can be steep and challenging. Make sure you pick tracks that suit your level of physical fitness. Our online map has a handy guide that rates tracks from easy to moderate and difficult.

Lead on, little doggy

If you're taking your pooch for a bushwalk please remember that dogs need to be on a lead and on track at all times, unless on-site signage allows them to be off lead and under effective control. Our new bush tracks for dogs online map marks out where dogs are permitted off lead within bushland areas.

Change your schedule

If you're finding the tracks in your local bushland reserve are hectic at certain times, try changing when you visit them.



WHAT'S YOUR NEXT BUSH ADVENTURE?

You don't have to be wild at heart to join a Bush Adventure, but it helps. From discovery walks, to nest box making and nocturnal wildlife tours, our program has something for all ages.

Book your next adventure at hobartcity.com.au/bushadventures

Sculpture sends powerful message to the world

When five-year-old Lily Neyland ventured out with the Cornelian Bay Bushcare Group a decade ago she ended the day by taking home some bunches of plastic flowers that had blown down from the nearby cemetery.

To the eyes of a little girl they must have been mesmerising, a real catch, and they ended up as a prized possession in her cubby house.

Fast forward ten years and those plastic flowers, symbols of grief, blown by the wind on to the Cornelian Bay foreshore, have proved the inspiration behind an incredible and confronting new artwork called Floral Grief.

To create the sculpture 15-year-old Lily drew inspiration from the childhood keepsake to make a statement about the growth in plastic pollution, and to call on the rest of us to think more about how we treat the Earth.

"Through this sculpture, I wanted to raise awareness about how the Earth is becoming more and more polluted as a result of plastics like these flowers," she says.

"For this reason, I decided to make a coffin, a symbol of death, and place a model of the Earth inside."

Floral Grief is part of a self-directed inquiry project at The Friends' School in Hobart. The Year 10 student used windblown artificial flowers, vases and other plastic rubbish, collected from the 2.5 km cemetery boundary, as the main materials for the sculpture. These were complemented by chicken wire, garden stakes, garden tool handles and beach washed rope.



Lily with her artwork Floral Grief. Photo: Courtesy of The Friends' School

Lily worked with Sue Gillespie, Ken Mackay, Roz Sargeant and Judy Boon from Cornelian Bay Bushcare to learn about the impacts plastic flowers blown down from the cemetery have had on the foreshore's environmental values, and the work the Bushcare group has put into cleaning them up.

Lily's connection and commitment to Bushcare can be linked to her mum, Gabrielle Balon, who has worked for a number of years as a casual Bushcare team leader. Gabrielle was able to help Lily connect with members of the Cornelian Bay Bushcare group and also staff at the City of Hobart, who arranged the permit for the sculpture.



A much younger Lily with her mother Gabrielle at a Cornelian Bay Bushcare event.

- **Lily's sculpture is on display until 15 June 2020 at the start of the dog walking track to Cornelian Bay Point.**

Why not get involved?

Cornelian Bay Bushcare protects Hobart's coastal vegetation around Cornelian Bay. The area is rich in cultural heritage and extends into the open grassy woodland of the Queens Domain and has great views

of the River Derwent and kunanyi/ Mount Wellington.

Cornelian Bay Bushcare meets on the fourth Sunday of the month, 10 am – 12.30 pm.

When is a weed a weed?

Sweet pittosporum was virtually unknown as an environmental weed in Tasmania 15 years ago, but today it is visible in almost every street in Hobart and many bushland areas. It's an unusual example of a native Australian plant with a small natural range but enormous invasive potential.

Sweet pittosporum – its scientific name is *Pittosporum undulatum* – is native to rainforests of the eastern mainland states – but not Tasmania. In its natural habitat it was kept in check by regular grassland fires, limiting it to wet areas. But it has now naturalised across much of Australia, and the globe, especially on sub-tropical islands.

It is an attractive, medium-sized shady tree with prolific marble-like fruit that are the colour of an orange and carry a sweet scent. Its spread has been aided by nurseries and gardeners, as well as a wide range of fruit-eating birds, including introduced birds.



Bec Johnson
Team Leader Bushcare

Most 'native' plant sections in nurseries include species that hail from as far away as Western Australia, including mainland grevilleas, acacias and eucalypts. Many of them, like sweet pittosporum, can turn into invasive weeds if planted in Tasmania, and can even hybridise with local species.

Because mainland native plants are similar to Tasmanian native plants, they can draw native pollinators from their important job of cross-pollinating native herbs, shrubs and trees, resulting in reduced biodiversity in our natural grasslands and woodlands in the future.

If you live in an urban area, have a peek in the corners of your garden or look around your street. There's a pretty good chance



you'll find a little (or not so little) sweet pittosporum.

If you decide to replace it, there are many lovely Tasmanian native plants to choose from. Pick up a free plant at one of our annual plant giveaways, and get some tips on gardening with Tasmanian native plants from:

hobartcity.com.au/caforenature



Pittosporum translates as 'sticky seed'. Have you ever noticed how our Tasmanian native cheesewood, *Pittosporum bicolour*, often starts life in the fork of a tree where a bird has scraped the sticky seeds off its rear end?

Photo: John Tann | Flickr | CC BY 2.0



More than 500 people have responded to the City of Hobart's draft mountain bike network plan. Photo: Flow Mountain Bike

A blueprint for better riding

The City of Hobart's blueprint for an expanded mountain bike network on kunanyi / Mount Wellington has received an overwhelming response.

Released for public comment in April the City's Draft Mountain Bike Network Plan identifies and prioritises proposed future tracks through the foothills of the mountain. It received 586 submissions – 423 from mountain bikers, 105 from walkers and 58 from runners.

"We've worked closely with leading mountain bike trail consultants Dirt Art and regular mountain users to design tracks to meet the future needs of locals, and also attract visitors to our city," said Hobart Lord Mayor Anna Reynolds.

"We expect mountain biking and other eco-tourism activities to play an enormous role in the economic recovery of our city and region."

Up to 47 km of proposed tracks have been designed to meet the needs of riders without causing

Yellow Hippo here we come!

The City of Hobart's Trackcare volunteers are about to turn their attention to the Yellow Hippo mountain bike track at the back of Knocklofty Reserve.

Volunteers will be working in small

teams to bring this descent track up to international mountain bike track standards.

This will be tight, focused work, with plenty of scope for volunteers to ramp up their track building skills.

conflict between different user groups. They would provide safe, high-quality riding, with a mix of distances, technical challenges and different styles of riding.

The design is also sensitive to the mountain's environmental, historical and cultural values and is considerate of other user groups. At least three of the 15 new tracks are proposed for shared use as they also provide key links for walkers and runners.

Council officers will now review and consider the submissions before finalising the draft plan.

Currently, kunanyi / Mount Wellington has almost 80 km of walking tracks, but just 3 km

of tracks that are specifically for mountain bike use.

A recent survey of track users revealed that 83 per cent of respondents supported the provision of new mountain bike tracks on the mountain; and 72 per cent preferred separated tracks – that is, tracks built specifically for either mountain bike riding or walking and running.

A \$387,000 grant through the Tasmanian Government's Cycle Tourism Fund has been committed toward the first stage of implementation. The timing of future works will be dependent on the City securing further external funding.



**national
tree day**

PLANET ARK  **TOYOTA**

Native plant giveaway

To celebrate National Tree Day, the Bushcare team will host another of our popular native plant giveaways and speak with the community about the importance of planting trees for our environment and health.

When

Sunday 2 August 2020
8.30 am – 1 pm

Where

Farm Gate Market, Bathurst
Street (between Murray and
Elizabeth streets), Hobart

More Information

Visit hobartcity.com.au/events

National Tree Day is organised by Planet Ark
in partnership with Toyota Australia