

BANDICOOTtimes

Summer 2023 | No 87

LARILA'S LEGACY

hobartcity.com.au/bushcare



A PROGRAM OF



City of **HOBART**

Bushcare Roundup



Sonya Stallbaum
Acting Program
Officer Bushcare

Wow, 2022 flew by! Thanks everyone for your amazing contributions to Bushcare throughout the year, it was a good year even with its usual share of challenges.

As is our practice we ended on a high note with the annual Bushcare BBQ on the Queens Domain. There was fine food and company as we took the opportunity to bring all of our Bushcare groups together to thank you for your amazing efforts by serving up gourmet delights and a glass of bubbly.

Acting Lord Mayor Helen Burnet, who is always wonderfully supportive of Bushcare, helped us celebrate by announcing our Golden Secateurs Award winner. Nominated by their Bushcare peers, the Golden Secateurs Award recognises an individual who has made a significant contribution to caring for Hobart's bushland.

We were all so proud to see the 2022 accolade go to Nigel Rogers, who has worked tirelessly with both Mt Nelson and Lambert Gully Bushcare groups for 15 years. He has stepped in as Acting Convenor for Mt Nelson on numerous occasions, attending and working overtime at unscheduled activities.

Nigel is quietly hard working, friendly and gently considerate. He is generous with his time and committed to Bushcare.



Nigel Rogers inspects his "Golden Secateurs", a handy, useable pair of secateurs and handsaw presented in a hand-crafted Huon pine box.



Sue Gillespie and Roz Sargent celebrate another successful year of Bushcare.

As hands-on conservationists we all share Nigel's passion and commitment to the natural environment. And as the Bushcare team reflects on all of the great work we achieved with our volunteers last year we are charged up for the year to come.

Here's to 2023! Get ready for another amazing year of Bushcare!

Grappling with the big wet

Many parts of eastern, central and northern Tasmania have had their highest spring rainfall on record.

For the state as a whole, total spring rainfall was 19 per cent above the 1960-90 average.

You've probably been grappling with the results in your own gardens, just as we are seeing native plants and weeds flourishing across Hobart's bushland reserves. In some places forget-me-not is carpeting entire hillsides blue with its flowers.

We are sure this is keeping many volunteers busy in bushland reserves and private gardens. Myself and Bec Johnson have done extra maintenance on some Bushcare sites, and hope to visit a few more in January.



Cover photo: Larila in distress after being rescued with twine around her neck.
Photo: Pete Walsh

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



Larila in the caring hands of staff at Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary.

Journey of hope and despair

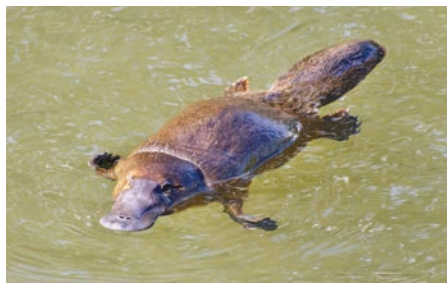
If you've ever been lucky enough to see a platypus hunting for food in the Hobart Rivulet the first thing you notice is just how well adapted its body is for zipping in and out of the watery shallows.

Its broad bill, armed with electro-receptors that help the platypus find its prey, is perfect for sifting through mud and other detritus for tiny aquatic invertebrates.

Its streamlined body is covered in a dense, waterproof fur to keep it warm, and its webbed front and back feet propel it through the water at powerful speeds while turning on a dime.

But the very attributes that make the platypus such a powerful hunter also make it vulnerable to litter in the shape of hair ties, twine or even netting.

And tragically, at the end of 2022, that vulnerability proved fatal to a platypus that lives, hunts and feeds in the Hobart Rivulet.



Adam Fry's photo of Larila, which sparked community action to save the platypus.

Devil in the detail

In November last year South Hobart photographer, Adam Fry, sounded the alarm that a rivulet platypus was in trouble.

He had taken a photo of the platypus in the Cascade Gardens boulder trap on a Saturday afternoon, and then shared it with the Hobart Rivulet Platypus Facebook page, which immediately put out a call for help from the local community. In the photo you can clearly see twine choking the platypus's neck.

The story was picked up by news outlets and shared widely on social media. Three days later the platypus had been rescued in a joint effort by the City of Hobart, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment and Pete Walsh, and taken into the caring custody of Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary.

We all thought and hoped this story would have a happy ending. But it didn't.

The platypus underwent two hours of surgery and a call was put out for earthworms to help feed the recovering animal. The community rallied and even gave the platypus a name, Larila, the palawa kani name for platypus.

Ten days later Larila died. The body, which was so incredibly adept at moving through Hobart's waterways, could not survive the deadly grip of a piece of twine.

continued next page



Bonorong vet Luke Gregory and his staff do everything in their power to save Larila. Photos: @hobartrivuletplatypus

Bonorong vet Luke Gregory, who operated on Larila, says the wildlife sanctuary receives three to four platypuses a year in need of help.

"Our rescue service often receives calls regarding platypus entanglements, but due to their elusive nature, many of these animals are unable to be caught to receive treatment," he says.

Rubbish entanglements don't just harm platypuses. Last year alone Bonorong received 30 animals suffering after being trapped in litter and the organisation's rescue phone took about 165 calls statewide seeking help for entangled wildlife.

"The problem of waste and pollution begins at the cash register, rather than waterways," says Luke.

"We need to analyse more critically what we buy, where it comes from and what its expected lifespan and impact is

in the natural world. The Hobart Rivulet platypuses have many admirers and I think the potential for positive change is huge if we all made some changes to our consumption in Larila's honour."

Caring is hard

"Caring can be heartbreaking," says Pete Walsh, who helped safely capture Larila and deliver her to Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary.

Pete says he loves all platypuses, but has a special place in his heart for those in the Hobart Rivulet.

"It's a privilege and an honour to have these majestic ancient creatures living in our urban waterways. Their presence is nothing short of a miracle."

His Hobart Rivulet Platypus Facebook page played a critical role in the rescue of the injured Larila, and is changing the way Hobartians feel and think about their role in caring for

these amazing animals.

"It takes a community to care," Pete says.

Living with platypuses

Platypuses face a range of threats in Tasmania, including habitat loss and degradation, climate change (which can reduce available habitat and lead to more severe drought and flooding events), introduced species and diseases, fishing nets and death from road traffic.

A report released in 2020 by UNSW Sydney found that the area of eastern Australia where platypuses are found has shrunk by up to 22 per cent (200,000 km²) over the past 30 years.

The most severe declines in platypus observations were in NSW. In Victoria, even though the statewide decline was around 7 per cent, there were reductions of 54-65 per cent in some urban catchments near Melbourne.



The report recommended the platypus be listed as a threatened species under national legislation. Clearly, the Hobart Rivulet and the natural waterways that surround Hobart are of national importance for the conservation of Australia's platypuses, and we can all play a role in keeping them safe.

How to help

Pick up litter – particularly anything that could get caught around a platypus's bill, neck or body – whether or not the litter is found near water.

Spread the word that plastic bracelets and elastic hair ties can be lethal for wildlife. Items dropped in the street or in playgrounds can be carried through storm water drains and into platypus habitat.

If you see a platypus in distress please avoid trying to contain or handle the platypus. Males have venomous spurs on their hind legs



The piece of twine that led to the death of Larila.

that can cause excruciating pain. Keep pets away from the platypus, try to maintain sight of the animal if possible, and **call the Bonorong Rescue Service on 0447 264 625 (0447 ANIMAL)** for further advice.

Cut through ALL metal or plastic rings or loops of any size before disposing of them – just to be on the safe side.

Avoid washing motor vehicles on impermeable surfaces such as driveways or car parks, especially if the soapy water runs off to a

concrete gutter or stormwater drain.

Avoid disposing of household chemicals (lubricants, solvents, preservatives, cleansers, paints, etc) by pouring them down a gutter, drain or toilet – instead, consult your local council's website to find out how to safely dispose of chemicals in an environmentally friendly manner.

And of course encourage your friends and family to get involved with Bushcare. The Hobart Rivulet Bushcare group is our newest and is doing great work enhancing platypus habitat along the rivulet.

The Hobart Rivulet is probably one of the easiest and most reliable places in Australia to view platypuses. This is wonderful, but also means we as residents are responsible for looking after these precious and unique monotremes.

If you want more information the Australian Platypus Conservancy website is a great place to start.

MUD AND SWEAT ON HAWAII'S OAHU

I had the opportunity to holiday in Hawaii recently with my daughter. As a small offset to the environmental cost of international travel, we found some local volunteering opportunities. It was so rewarding that I'd like to share the story!

Hawaii's environment is remarkable. Because the islands are so isolated, nearly 90 per cent of species are endemic – found nowhere else on Earth. The only native mammals are a seal and a bat, so over the centuries, native plants and birds have lost all defences against predators. Imagine a forest with no thorns, spikes or stings, and many ground-dwelling birds.

Goats, pigs, mongoose and rats introduced over the past 300 years have taken a huge toll. Introduced plants now far



Bec Johnson
Team Leader Bushcare

outnumber native plant species. Added to that are mosquito-borne diseases. Not surprisingly, Hawaii has the highest rate of extinction in the world, especially of small birds.

So I wondered if environmental programs have any hope against such enormous odds.

I worked with three groups on the island of Oahu, and it turns out they are all running really worthwhile and interesting projects. I also met some great people, and saw interesting similarities and differences with volunteering in Tasmania.

Near Honolulu, I joined a small

group of locals who over the years have created an incredible sample of original native Hawaiian forest. Manoa Cliffs is a mountain-side restoration area in a cloud-forest protected by a 6 hectare fence to keep out feral pigs.

Over 15 years of regular working bees (largely unsupported by any agency) native vegetation on the site has increased from around 20 per cent to about 90 per cent.

The forest is once again remarkable, a haven for some very rare plant and bird species, some of which occur nowhere else in the world. In this remnant we can see healthy individuals of the rare 'ohi'a tree (*Metrosideros polymorpha*), which is intrinsically linked to ancient Polynesian cultural traditions. It's one of few places you can reliably see native Hawaiian honeycreeper birds

Weed Watch: Great mullein

With a native range that stretches from Europe to North Africa and Asia, great mullein is a dab hand at spreading far and wide. It's no surprise then that it has found its weedy way to temperate areas in both the US and Australia.

As a coloniser of bare and disturbed soil as well as undisturbed bushland Tasmania has more than its fair share of this weed. It can be found along roads, on banksides, hilltops and cleared areas.

In the past five years we have started seeing it on the Hobart



Rivulet and way up kunanyi/Mt Wellington near the Chalet, a concerning trend that shows how adept it is at invading undisturbed bush, even in sub alpine areas.

You'll spot its advance along the

Southern Outlet and you can't miss it lining the road all the way to Orford.

Its large leaves usually form in year one as a large, furry rosette, growing even larger in the second year and stretching out to between 30 to 50 cm long. However, with heavy rainfall it has the capacity to grow to two metres tall and flower in just one year.

As it matures great mullein shoots out a single, pole-like 1–2 metre stem that carries a clustered spike called a raceme with flowers lining



Bec (in her Bushcare hat) astounded by the Kauai mountains clothed in non-native trees.

'apapane' and 'amakihi' feeding on the blossoms of the 'ohi'a tree.

During our working bee we pulled out cinnamon, guava, bamboo and ginger (weeds) then planted native seedlings. Unfortunately, there's very little natural regeneration of seedlings, possibly because of introduced slugs and snails. So volunteers collect seeds, grow them in a nursery, and replant them. My daughter and I found this day

so rewarding and absolutely memorable.

I joined a regular working bee at Waimea Valley (Oahu), which is a cultural and natural preserve and education centre run by a non-government organisation. Here I had the novel experience of working in the pouring rain, and not getting cold!

At Limahuli Garden (Kauai), I was privileged to visit and meet

traditional Hawaiian owners and managers who have been there for generations. Limahuli, like Waimea, has enormous cultural significance, and depends on volunteers.

Another work group was in Kawainui Marsh, home of several endangered wetland birds including the Hawaiian moorhen, similar to the Tasmanian moorhen. To protect their nesting habitat from mongooses we pulled out wetland plants that invade open still water. This was great fun as we wore waders, waded through mud and collected water hyacinth, throwing it into inflatable boats. As we worked, we caught glimpses of the endangered moorhen poking around in our wake.

All the groups I met were independent NGOs, mostly funded through grants rather than government. High school students often volunteer as part of their curriculum, and I was impressed by how many young adults I met among the volunteers.

Volunteering overseas is a wonderful way to make lasting friendships with people and lasting memories of places.

half its length and leaves reducing in size as they travel up the stem. The entire plant is thickly covered in white trichomes (hairs) that, under magnification, are star shaped, resulting in the pale silvery colour of the plant. Great mullein has distinctive furry leaves – sometimes mistakenly called Lamb's ear and jokingly cowboy's toilet paper – which can be as big as dinner plates.

The pale yellow flowers produce small capsules containing masses of tiny brown seeds. One plant can carry up to 250,000 seeds.

The winning edge comes from the way the flowers develop and open irregularly from bottom to top, each flower opening for short periods at different times and staged throughout summer. This competitive advantage allows the weed to spread on changing winds and in variable weather conditions.

Great mullein is an emerging threat to Hobart's magnificent biodiversity. Quick action against outliers is our best defence, so if you see one, don't let it spread, pluck it out!



Great mullein gets a foothold between rocks 960 metres up on kunanyi/ Mt Wellington.



Telopea truncata (waratah), kunanyi/Mt Wellington, Hobart. Photo: Sonya Stallbaum