

FACTS SHEET No. 7

Saving What's Left

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Perhaps the best aspect of a Landcare Vegetation Officer's job is visiting the numerous sites that Landcarers are working across the city, noting the environmental improvements as a result of Landcare onground activities and realizing the tremendous collective commitment that individuals are making to the preservation of the Lake's natural environment. This commitment, the "stewardship" of the Lake, goes beyond removing a mountain of weeds and planting thousands of indigenous plants but also extends to preserving the oral history of the areas in which we work, to monitoring the bushland reserves for the presence of Threatened Species (which is often missed in a fleeting visit by environmental consultants or vegetation officers), and to negotiating for better development and/or maintenance practices that impact upon the bushland, wetland, creek or lakeside in which we are working.



The Beauty of Bangalay

Working as individuals or in small groups, sometimes in relative isolation, it would be easy to lose heart and think, "What am I really achieving", particularly when confronted, as we are from time to time, by "negatives" like rubbish dumping, illegal tree removal or poisoning, poor maintenance practices which destroy our plantings, and deliberate vandalism like the torching of the Green Team bus. Fortunately, like the natural environment in which we work, Landcarers are resilient, and bounce back in the face of adversity.

So let's dwell for a while on some of the "positives" of the last couple of years. Firstly, let's look at Threatened Species. At Aberkirk Landcare site, a Satin Bowerbird was sighted by the Trees In Newcastle bush regeneration team (Anthony, Kate and Jack) at the commencement of work - Wednesday, 26th November, 2003. At Dudley Beach, a breeding pair of White-breasted Sea Eagles has a nest site at the head of the rainforest gully and the immature eagle was seen hunting with one of the adult birds off Redhead Bluff in the last week. A Regent Bowerbird was sighted in the gully rainforest. (Summer, 2003) Nine Sooty Oystercatchers were sighted on the southern rock platform in September, 2003.

Let's look at some other sites. Bangalay Reserve has significant Aboriginal heritage values and supports at least three threatened fauna species (ie Powerful Owl, Squirrel Glider, Regent Bowerbird). There is also Magenta Lillipilly (*Syzygium paniculatum*) on site. At Floraville Ridge Landcare site within the Gully Rainforest, there is *Syzygium paniculatum* Magenta Lillipilly, and *Archontophoenix cunninghamiana* Bangalow Palm and *Livistona australis* Cabbage Tree Palm growing together, which is unusual in eastern Lake Macquarie.

The brief to the TIN contract team, who worked the site in 2003, was to extend the local



Landcare group's efforts in target weeding environmental weeds along the ridgeline, to note any significant species during the course of works and to link the Floraville Ridge Landcare groups work with the NPWS project on the adjoining private property with a Voluntary Conservation Agreement in place. Terrestrial orchids (*Caladenia alba*, *Corybas aconitiflorus*, *Acianthus fornicatus*, *Pterostylis* sp., *Cryptostylis erecta*), New South Wales Christmas Bush *Ceratopetalum gummiferum*, a cycad *Macrozamia flexuosa*, and Black-eyed Susan *Tetratheca juncea* were all noted. A Regent Bowerbird was also sighted by the workers. Threatened Species on the nearby Floraville Voluntary Conservation Agreement Landcare site consist of *Tetratheca juncea*- Black-eyed Susan in the Open Forest zone and seedling *Syzygium paniculatum*- Magenta Lillipilly in the Closed Forest. A breeding pair of Powerful Owls roosted in the Closed Forest with two chicks in winter, 2003.

The Salts Bay site also contains the Threatened Species, *Syzygium paniculatum*- Magenta Lillipilly, *Elaeocarpus obovatus* Hard Quandong and *Ficus fraseri* Sandpaper Fig near their southern limit of distribution, and a variety of migratory bird and bat species utilise the site seasonally, often coinciding with the flowering or fruiting of various trees on site: e.g. Top Knot Pigeons and White-headed Fruit Pigeons on the cabbage tree palms and sandpaper figs. The diversity of estuarine zones on site accounts for a corresponding diversity of bird species at various times of the year e.g. Sooty Oystercatchers, Pied Oystercatchers, White-breasted Sea Eagle and Osprey have been sighted in the shore zone 2001-2002, Pacific Heron and Nankeen Night Heron have been sighted in the brackish zone behind the cabbage tree palm forest 2001-2002, and Spangled Drongo, Olive-backed Oriole, Figbird and the rainforest pigeons mentioned above have been sighted in the littoral rainforest zone 2001-2002.

The nearby Galgabba Point Reserve is a significant bushland remnant with an Endangered Ecological Community (Sydney Coastal Estuary Swamp Forest Complex) and a number of endangered or threatened species of flora (*Tetratheca glandulosa*) and fauna (Regent Honey Eater, Swift Parrot, Powerful Owl, Masked Owl, Sea Eagle, Osprey, Squirrel Glider have all been sighted at Galgabba Point). So when someone next asks you "What's left and is it worth saving?" you can rattle off the above list. And this representative list is only some of the Eastern side of Lake Macquarie.

What about the "positives" of Landcarers as negotiators and advocates for the natural environment? The Coastal Wetlands Park Committee's formation and promotional activities have perhaps been the most obvious example of this aspect of Landcaring lately, but there are other associated groups like URGE, GPAC, CPPA and Turtle Watch that have been fighting for the natural environment for years.

A more recent positive outcome has been the development at the old Delforce site at Warners Bay. After a lengthy campaign, and negotiations with the developer and Council, what would have been eighty metres off culvert and piped waterway remains an open, armoured creek with native grasses, reeds and young trees thanks to the efforts of a committed Warners Bay Landcare group.

So how do we save what's left? It's important that as well as being weed-killers and tree-planters that we remain active as monitors, negotiators, advocates and activists in whatever capacity our time and expertise allows.

