

Berry Corridor: Biodiversity Stepping Stones Field day, November 2013

It can sometimes be hard to see how local efforts fit into the overall big picture of things. To address this, Berry Landcare Group recently hosted a field day to demonstrate how local biodiversity conservation efforts support an ambitious but realistic project extending over 3,600 kilometres along the east coast of Australia, from Victoria to north Queensland. This project, the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative, is based on regional partnerships, one of which covers the Illawarra to Shoalhaven area.

More than 50 people attended the field day, which visited three different sites that form part of a conservation corridor between the escarpment and the coast. The first of these was “Glenvale,” a 70 hectare property owned by Phil and Carolyn Bragg. Phil’s been there all his life and remembers it being almost entirely cleared for dairying with a previous owner who routinely chipped out regrowth saplings. Since the 1970s regrowth has been encouraged over around 40 percent of the property. “When we fenced some of it off to keep cattle out some of the neighbours thought we were letting the place go to ruin, but we like it,” Phil said. Although it’s mostly of a similar age the regrowth has now formed a fine forest which has been recognised by NSW Roads and Maritime Services as the largest section of bush on the Princes Highway between Nowra and Wollongong. RMS have also recognised the importance of the area for wildlife movement and are providing both a wildlife overpass and an underpass near Tindalls Lane.



At “Glenvale”



Carolyn & Phil Bragg

Harvey Blue, one of the key organisers of the field day, sees the site as quite exceptional. “It demonstrates both the potential for conservation and the problems with weeds, and it’s accessible. A lot of people will go past this regularly and not realise it’s here,” he said.

Standing on a ridge on the Bragg’s property the concept of “connectivity conservation” becomes clearer. This is about creating stepping stones between existing areas of native vegetation to allow for easier movement of wildlife. From the Bragg’s ridge the outlook, from the escarpment to the coast, is one of areas of native vegetation interspersed with areas cleared for grazing and other rural uses. The importance and the practicality of connecting and protecting those areas of native vegetation is obvious. “The first priority is to ensure the good areas survive,” local botanist Les Mitchell said. “Preserving and maintaining them, and if possible, linking them according to priorities.”



Stepping stones to the coast



Stepping stones to the escarpment

An area of sub-tropical rainforest at the David Berry Hospital is the second site visited. Only very small areas of this rainforest type are protected in formal conservation reserves. This important patch has more than 50 species of trees and some are quite significant. While there, ecologist Garry Daly noted the call of the sacred kingfisher, indicating the presence of very old hollow bearing trees that provide nest sites. Following the initial removal of a major privet infestation some years ago, follow-up regeneration work has been carried out by Berry Landcare group members. “The amount of natural regeneration of rainforest species has been quite amazing since we’ve been working on it,” said Bill Pigott of Berry Landcare, “and it’s been surprisingly quick.”



Illawarra sub-tropical rainforest at David Berry Hospital

The third and final site is the Berry Sport and Recreation Centre where extensive riparian restoration has been carried out on Broughton Creek over the last 10 years. This is also the setting for a BBQ lunch, thankfully under a generous tarpaulin thoughtfully put up by the Sport and Rec people, as the rain had well and truly set in.

No-one's enthusiasm was dampened, however, as David Rush, the GER Illawarra to Shoalhaven Regional Partnerships Facilitator outlined the project which so far has 11 landowners committed to supporting it. Most people are keen to know about wildlife in a particular area and Geeta Ortac, from NSW National Parks Association, spoke of a project she manages, "Who's living on my land?" This aims to identify animal species in specific areas through, among other things, the use of motion cameras.

Bill Pigott said how pleased the Landcare Group were with the response to the field day. "This hasn't just been about connectivity conservation, it's been great to see people finding others with similar interests. Landcare is not just about the environment, it's about people and the field day has been about connectivity *conversation*," he said.



Field day participants at Berry Sport & Recreation Centre

More information about any aspect of the **Berry Corridor: Biodiversity Stepping Stones** project is available from:

- Bill Pigott; phone 4464 3241; email wpigott@bigpond.net.au
- Greg Thompson; phone 0431 133 000; email thompson@shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au