



Landcare UpHunter

Autumn 2017

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Growing Natives in Merriwa

Merriwa Landcare has recently hosted a series of workshops on Native Seed Collection, Identification & Propagation. Twenty keen participants from the Merriwa greater area learnt firsthand how to identify differing native trees and shrubs, collect and store seed methods of propagation, as well as how to collect, preserve and mount these specimens.

Knowing what natives are local to the Merriwa Plateau and Upper Hunter was all part of our learning. What grows well in differing soils, landscapes and sun or shade aspects, how much water different vegetation needs and how frequently they need it was covered.

Promoting the important role that Box Gum Grassy Woodland plays in successful grazing and farming systems that are hosting a whole range of beneficial insect and bird species and providing good shade for pastures and livestock was a focus of this practical course.

Given the range of soil types and micro-climates that exist across the region plant life we looked at was diverse e.g. Lance-leafed hovea (*Hovea lanceolata*), Showy Wattle (*Acacia decora*) and Weeping myall (*Acacia pendula*). White box (*Eucalyptus albens*) may be more common on undulating, drier slopes whereas Yellow box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*) may prefer moist Grassy Woodland areas of the Merriwa Plateau in Upper Hunter Shire.

We 'potted-up' native tube stock provided during the course and took them home for planting on our properties, a great way to increase connectivity for birds and animals.

Preserving and mounting specimens involved each of us collecting samples—young and mature leaves, flowers, seeds, or our own choice of native grasses or tree specimens. We pressed them and mounted them on acid-resistant paper, whilst identifying each one.

Two field trips provided on-site learning, firstly for us to learn about various methods of seed collection and observe different plant communities and diversity of plant life. Work safety and health aspects related to seed collection and propagation were covered. On the final day we travelled east across the Shire to Cressfield Stud, based near Scone.

Native seeds are sourced within this property and propagated at their on-farm nursery for landscape improvements across some 1,400 hectares. Over 200 hectares of natural bushland at Cressfield are also fenced off from stock for conservation purposes.

The Hunter TAFE delivered this great course with participants finishing with a NSW TAFE Statement of Attainment: Introduction to Native Plant Identification, Seed Collecting and Propagation Certificate and receiving a go-to manual to take home for future referral. The course was organised and funded by Hunter Local Land Services through the Federal National Landcare Program.

Knowledge gained from these workshops and training will help drive Merriwa Landcare's Tree Planting and Biodiversity project. This will include development of a local species seed bank—also helping support re-vegetation in the Sir Ivan Fire ground near Cassilis.

Merriwa Landcare will hold an "Inspire Farm Biodiversity Forum" on 2nd June, featuring top speakers (refer Events section page 4).

Whether you are interested in planting trees, looking after your land and environment, animals and birds, creeks and rivers or maybe sustainable farming, it's worth finding out more! Call Jenny Lee on 6548 2282 or 0429 337 556 or Maria Cameron on 0409 636 765.

Jenny Lee



Misty & Malloy

On Tuesday 28th of March students from Ellerston Public School enjoyed a visit by Abe, a Keeper at the Tasmanian devil conservation facility Devil Ark, located here at Tomalla in the Barrington Tops. Abe brought two hand-reared devil joeys, Misty and Malloy with him. Misty slept in the carrier (she must have been really tired) but Malloy happily curled up in Abe's arms or had a bit of a crawl over his shoulders, sniffed the air at times, scratched behind his ear and had a good look at the world around him.

These brother and sister joeys were 10 months old when we met them. Misty (the girl) weighed over 3kgs. and Malloy (the boy) about 4kgs. Just like us, they can have different likes and dislikes. Misty is the most adventurous when in her enclosure. Malloy just loves to lounge about or snuggle up in Abe's arms or sit on his shoulder and when he is fully relaxed he even tends to snore!

Misty and Malloy live together. At about 12 months old they will be introduced to other young devils and finally move in with them.

Abe told us about the purpose of Devil Ark, the breeding of Tasmanian devils as an insurance population against the loss of devils in the wild in Tasmania, due to a deadly Devil Facial Tumour Disease. Devil Ark recently raised \$375,000 in a crowdfunding campaign so they can build a big 64 hectare free-range enclosure and increase the devil population at the Ark by 25% to over 200.

February to June is the annual devil breeding season and the keepers at Devil Ark are keeping a close eye out for new babies.

We had six other special visitors that day—members of Rotary in Argentina, South America. They all live near the capital Buenos Aires. Two of them teach English as a second language so they were very interested in the teaching of literacy at Ellerston school. It was a great way for them to learn about issues Tasmanian devils are facing as well as connect with our wider local community.

Our Argentinian visitors hadn't heard of devils before, let alone their plight from the deadly Devil Facial Tumour Disease and how they are Critically Endangered. They wanted to find out about other Australian animals too. Abe talked about Eastern quolls and how they can still be found living wild in Tasmania. Devil Ark recently built seven covered enclosures designed to house Eastern Quolls (a Threatened Species) and twenty now live at the Ark. Just like the devils, they eat meat and are fed once a day.

Eastern quolls start breeding at only a year old. That might sound really young to you but that is really important as they usually only live for about 3 years so they don't have much time to produce babies. Tasmanian devils and Eastern quolls both have a three week breeding cycle, and only once a year. Females have 6 teats for feeding so they can have up to 6 babies. Imagine that!

Abe allowed ample time for students (and our international visitors) to ask questions. The students asked anything and everything, from how high can devils jump to how fast can they run. We all had an opportunity to get close to Malloy and give him a gentle pat.

Our international visitors really enjoyed the journey to Ellerston, the beauty of the countryside and meeting the students and devils.

Sam Small & Ruth Hardy



Abe & joeys at Ellerston school



Malloy training for the devil Olympics



Malloy - just a few months old

The Week of Tastes

What sort of activities related to food and producing food do you have at your school? How many can you remember from your time at school last year? What have you learnt about different food, about growing food and how important it is for your health?

A great project for your school to be involved in is the Week of Tastes from the 7th—11th of August. Along with other students you can taste, bake and cook at your school. Find out more about using your five senses to identify and appreciate different food; learn new words related to food, try different flavours of food and learn more about the link between good food choices and good health.

Does your family grow any food at home? What chefs, bakers, pastry chefs, cheese makers and other food producers do you know of in your local area or in other parts of the Hunter Valley? Get connected to some of them through the Week of Tastes.

Last year over 5,000 students in New South Wales and Tasmania participated in the Week of Tastes during August. They baked, cooked and tasted a whole variety of food. They created great artwork or let their classmates, families and community know about their knowledge and memories of food by writing and sending stories and/or poetry to the "My most memorable meal" competition.

There are a whole lot of food and taste activities you and your school can be involved in during the Week of Tastes in August.

You and your classmates can learn more about this great event for schools and how to register for it by going to the website www.weekoftastes.com.au/. The website has a video clip showing other students participating. Let your teacher know about it too!

Ruth Hardy

Farming & Native Grasses

The “Pasture Cropping” farming technique and farm management system is practised in Australia and overseas. Developed by Col Seis who farms at Gulgong, pasture cropping allows animal grazing in a paddock to just before a crop is due to be planted out, whilst allowing for a good return on the grain harvest. Improving farm production costs via increases in soil health and fertility, crop yields, animal production and reduced pest management needs. Growing native grasses is fundamental to this process.

Recently Martindale Creek Catchment Landcare organised an on-farm Field Day which included a visit to the Seis family farm. With other landholders I travelled by bus to the property, keen to hear him discuss and demonstrate pasture cropping first-hand. On arrival we spent time in the wool shed, along with Merino rams quietly looking on from their inside pens. I did wonder about the tennis ball lying in the raceway between two of the pens and was assured it belonged to the farms working Kelpies, not the sheep!

Four thousand sheep are usually run on this property producing fine wool merino fleeces for the local and international markets.

We learnt about the property’s history, its sheep, the Pasture Cropping system using Native Grasses to enhance production, improving the environment and sourcing plant seeds on the property. In the paddocks we saw outcomes using this system—gains like year round groundcover for stock and farm and environment enhancement.

The property also has a volcanic diatreme. Around 60 million years ago this formed part of a larger volcano. A small, second eruption about 11 million years ago, along with erosion over the years, formed the diatreme existing there today (see photo).

Lunch provided good opportunity for us to discuss what we had learnt and share our experiences of farming in the Upper Hunter area. On the way back we also visited a farm at Cassilis to see their tree planting programme and pasture management.

For information on the Pasture Cropping system go to www.winona.net.au. You can view a Native Grasses in the Farmscape report from a workshop held at Martindale and featuring Col Seis. This includes grassland diversity and short graze/long rest for plant recovery. Go to www.landcare.nsw.gov.au/groups/scone-landcare-group/

Ruth Hardy



Resources

Belgenny Creamery—Belgenny Farm was established by Elizabeth & John Macarthur in 1805. The Belgenny Creamery section has a website with teacher resources and teaching units related to dairying. Students consider the way that science and technology have changed and improved agriculture over time (K-6 syllabus) Just link into <http://belgennyfarm.com.au/education/creamery>

Groundwater in NSW: Department of Primary Industries, Office of Water—has a real time data website to view groundwater data from a network of NSW Government monitoring bores. Groundwater level information and water quality on individual bores includes the bore depth, geologist/driller log and bore construction details. Go to <http://allwaterdata.water.nsw.gov.au/water.stm>

FarmDiversity—Rural Industries & Development Corporation site where you can search crop and animal production enterprise alternatives by type and location. Discover which may be best suited to your farm. Just go to <http://www.farmdiversity.com.au/>

eSpade—NSW Office of Environment & Heritage site providing soil profile and soil map information. It includes map data, reports and images sourced mainly from the and Land Information System. You can go to <http://environment.nsw.gov.au/eSpade2Webapp>

Bee Mite ID website—US Department of Agriculture web-based tool for Identification of Bee Mites. With over 700 described mite species (and at least 200 undescribed) associated with managed and wild bees, some coexist beneficially with bees, some are harmful parasites. Website shows mite features, distribution, natural host ranges <http://idtools.org/id/mites/beemites/index.php>

BIBY TV—has a great selection of short videos from gardening tips to regular uploads of birds. Have a look at the behaviour of Powerful owls, nesting Tawny frogmouths or hear Australian ravens calling. Go to <https://www.youtube.com/user/birdsinbackyards>

Bowercam—this webcam streams live footage of a Satin bowerbird ‘doing its stuff’ in a NSW coastal garden. How does the male undertake maintenance on all of his interesting blue objects? Visit Bowercam at <http://ustream.tv/channel/karawarra-bowerbird>

Bush Regeneration Resources—The Australian Association of Bush Regenerators is developing videos and worksheets on trusted techniques for bush regeneration. The first resources, on reference ecosystems and seed for revegetation projects, will be available in July. A sample of the videos being produced is now available on the AABR website at <http://www.aabr.org.au/regentv/>

Ag Health Machinery Safety on Farms—for a diverse range of resources covering farm machinery safety visit aghealth.org.au

Financial Hardships Tax Provisions—the Australian Tax Office has a range of options for farmers experiencing financial hardship such as deferred payment plans. More information via <https://www.ato.gov.au/General/Financial-hardship/> or call 137 286.

Funding

Farm Innovation Fund—an incentive-based initiative to assist NSW farmers to identify and address risks to their farming enterprises, improve permanent farm infrastructure, ensure long term productivity, sustainable land use and in meeting changes to seasonal conditions. Loans up to \$250,000 to meet costs of carrying out permanent capital works having a significant beneficial impact on the land, long term enterprise profitability and to address adverse seasonal conditions. Find out more Tel:1800 678 593.

Farming Together—\$14.9 million initiative for primary producers and processors to collaborate and claim marketplace power, building financial and social sustainability. It provides farmers with free one-on-one consultation, opportunity to create collaborative groups and product research and development assistance. Just log into www.farmingtogether.com.au for more information.

Events for your Diary

Landcare UpHunter stall - farming, environment, Landcare, education resources, plants/herbs. Visit us at:

Merriwa Festival of the Fleeces on Saturday 9th of June 8.00a.m. to 3.00pm, Golden Highway, Merriwa

Other Events:

Soils Field Day—Exploring Practical Solutions For Common Soil Issues: Upper Hunter Sustainable Farming Group hosts this on-farm event with speakers from the Soil Knowledge Network. To be held on the 31st of May from 9.00am to 4.00pm at "Kingslyn", Depot Road, Merriwa.

To RSVP or for more information Tel: Kim Fenley on 0418 570 743 or Email: fenshome4@bigpond.com

World Environment Day 5th June

An Inspire Farm Biodiversity Forum will be held by Merriwa Landcare at Cassilis Community Hall, Cassilis on Friday 2nd of June from 6.00pm A complimentary dinner includes soup, gourmet fare & dessert treats.

To RSVP for this event email Jenny Lee email top_house@bigpond.com Tel: Jenny on 6548 2282 or 0429 337 557 or Maria on 0407 636 765

Glenbawn Catchment Landcare Group. Contact Gavin MacCallum glenbawncatchment@outlook.com

Merriwa Landcare Group. Contact Jenny Lee on 0429 337 557

Murrurundi Landcare Group just Email Sandy@boyds creek.com.au

Pages River Warriors Working Bee Wilson Memorial Oval, Murrurundi 1st & 3rd Sunday monthly (morning) Email Sandy@boyds creek.com.au

Landcare UpHunter & Scone Landcare—refer details below

Farm Forestry Mentors

Hunter Farm Forestry Network (HFFN) has a peer group mentoring program across the Hunter Valley region. The program is based on using experienced local farmers and tree-growers to mentor new members who want to integrate trees into their farming systems.

The farm forestry peer mentoring concept was developed by the Otway Agroforestry Network in Victoria who provided guidance and training to the Hunter group. Funding to run the program over the past two years has come from Hunter Local Land Services.

HFFN's mentoring program provides landholders with a valuable way to learn from each other. There are 11 local landholders trained as mentors. They do not act as consultants, they are there to assist and encourage new landholders with their ideas and concepts and share experiences with growing and maintaining trees for timber and biodiversity.

In 2016 Field Days were held first at Allynbrook and then Wootton to kick off the program and gain interest in farm forestry. Rowan Reid, a leading tree grower and founder of the Australian Master Tree Grower (MTG) program shared his experience of growing and managing trees for timber production and biodiversity and to introduce peer mentoring.

Rowan, HFFN members and landholders explored concepts of multipurpose tree growing and demonstrating of thinning and pruning in mixed species farm forestry plantings.

The third Field Day was held at the Upper Hunter property of Trevor and Marion Woolley at Martindale. A farm walk showed people new to farm forestry inspiring 15 year old mixed species plantings. Tree thinning and pruning for timber production, re-growth for forest management and management of the open grassy woodlands was discussed.

A site where regrowth is being thinned to restore the property's open grassy woodland was inspected. The regrowth was dominated by Bull Oak (*Allocasuarina luehmannii*) and Slaty Gum (*Eucalyptus dawsonii*). Terrestrial orchids like Donkey orchid (*Diuris tricolour*) and Waxlip orchid (*Glossodia major*) grow in the grassy understorey. Some thinning was required as regrowth reduced grassland to a point where orchid habitat was engulfed.

It would have taken many years to eventually thin the forest and allow these orchids to survive. Selective thinning allows this important grassy woodland to be well maintained.

The property is part of Hunter Valley Footslopes Slaty Gum Woodland. Under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act, it is listed as a Vulnerable Ecological Community. It typically forms a low to mid-high woodland of Slaty Gum (*Eucalyptus dawsonii*), Grey Gum (*Eucalyptus punctata*), Grey box (*Eucalyptus macrocarpa*) and Forest Red Gum (*Eucalyptus tereticornis*). All grow on the property and have been included in plantings.

Farm forestry on smaller properties can bring big outcomes for local biodiversity—along with good planning and preparation, ongoing oversight of plant growth and weed control.

Landholders in the Upper Hunter Shire and other Hunter Valley areas, who may want to access HFFN mentors, can contact Annabel Kater on 0437 399 511 or Trevor Woolley on 6547 3552 to find out more about this innovative landholder to landholder service.

Annabel Kater & Trevor Woolley



Landcare UpHunter is hosted by Scone Landcare Inc.

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Landcare UpHunter

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Visit us at www.landcare.nsw.gov.au/groups/scone-landcare-group