

# Landcare UpHunter

Spring 2018

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## Aussie Backyard Bird Count

In the early 1900's an October month 'Bird Day' was established in Australia by the then Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU). It aimed to provide a focus for public interest and support, including participation from the education sector and schools were soon involved in the annual Bird Day Springtime study and recording of native species.

School excursions were organised to areas with a variety of native birds, for students and teachers to observe and note species, nesting sites and behaviour with the prime results collated centrally. For some schools, Guest Speaker talks on Bird Life were included.

Over the past century Bird Day grew in its outreach, education and research, eventually becoming part of National Bird Week and the RAOU became part of BirdLife Australia.

The Aussie Backyard Bird Count (as it is now known) will be held between the 22nd—28th of October with thousands of people across the country participating. Co-ordinated by BirdLife Australia and Birds in Backyards, for just 20 minutes at a time you can be part of this vital project and contribute to research on bird populations and our environment.

Spring is the ideal period to record birds as they are more visible and lively at this time of year. Nesting, breeding and flocking occur during Spring and birds that had migrated to warmer parts of Australia or overseas for Winter have headed back to their Hunter base.

You can enjoy and record sightings from the comfort of your own house or garden, view from a paddock or bushland, in a public park or a waterside area and record the native bird species you see on a particular piece of land or water. You choose how many times you 'count birds' that week, as long as each observation record is for 20 minutes.

Download your records on the [www.aussiebirdcount.org.au/](http://www.aussiebirdcount.org.au/) website or via the free app. A Field Guide/Bird Finder is built into the app and bird identification data is held on the website. Alternatively a Field Guide hard copy book (your local library may have one).

Binoculars can be particularly handy when observing and identifying smaller species.

For birds you aren't familiar with, observe how they look—the type of beak, angle of tail, size, colouring, feather and body markings.

BirdLife Australia updates the total number of birds counted by species, on a daily basis. It provides live statistics on the number of people near you taking part in the 'count', the numbers of birds and species already counted in your local area and across Australia.

Data you collect and register will assist BirdLife Australia to form a more detailed picture of the health of bird populations and our environment across urban and rural locations in local, regional and wider areas. In October last year the 2017 Aussie Backyard Bird Count saw over 60,000 people register their bird sightings by species on the website, totalling nearly 2 million birds!

The 'Events Calendar' on the BirdLife website lists other local and regional activities across Australia during National Bird Week. You may want to participate in a workshop or bird Bushwalk for example. Go to [birdweek@birdlife.org.au](mailto:birdweek@birdlife.org.au) or call (03) 9347 0757.

Some bird species I see outside my rural based office are (by common name) the Superb fairy wren, King parrot, Eastern spinebill, Double-barred finch, Rainbow bee-eater, Laughing kookaburra, Willie wagtail, White-eared honeyeater, Noisy friarbird, Olive-backed oriole, Australian magpie, Mistletoe bird, White-winged chough, Silvereye, Diamond firetail, Eastern yellow robin and Scarlet robin.

Pick your spot and see what birds you can find, record and download your data to contribute to the Aussie Backyard Bird Count.

Ruth Hardy



## Australian Land Snails

When I tell people that I study snails for a living, the reply is always the same: Why snails?" Often they follow it up with another question: "What use are they? Why do we need them?" I hope I can convince you that land snails are not only a vital part of our ecosystem but also fascinating and beautiful creatures.

Land snails belong to the molluscs, a large group containing bivalves, octopus and squid and chitons as well as slugs and snails and various other lesser-known groups. Molluscs are one of the largest animal groups. Like 99% of all animals, they are invertebrates (they have no backbone), and they are characterised by their soft, unsegmented body and in most cases, the ability to form a hard internal or external shell.

The study of molluscs is known as Malacology. There are about 1,500 endemic land snails in Australia, with hundreds more still to be described. Even the species that have been given names are often not at all well-known. These species range in size from less than a millimetre in diameter to as big as your fist. The biggest native land snail in Australia (*Hedleyella falconeri*), commonly known as the Giant Panda Snail, has a shell that is 9cm. long and is found from the Barrington Tops to southern Queensland, living in rainforest and adjacent wet sclerophyll forest.

Many land snails have extremely narrow ranges, sometimes limited to a single mountaintop or patch of bush. Very few native species can live in a disturbed environment, so they can easily be wiped out if the area they live in is cleared for farming or urban development. They are heavily affected by weed infestations, which change the vegetation structure and composition of the leaf litter, by fire and by introduced animals such as rats (especially on islands). For these reasons, land snails have a very high rate of extinction. World-wide, there are more extinct land snails than there are mammals, reptiles and amphibians put together.

Most slugs and snails live in the ground, under logs and rocks, and feed on fungi and biofilm in the leaf litter. Some species are arboreal and live in trees; others are carnivorous and eat other snails or other invertebrates. Several species of carnivorous snail are found in the Upper Hunter including the Common Southern Carnivorous Snail (*Austrohytida capillacea*), which is found in dry woodland and forest. One important rule of collecting is to never put more than one carnivorous snail into a single jar, or you'll come back later to find just one very satisfied snail inside! Snails are also an important food source for many other animals.

Most of our native snail species have colouration that blends in with their environment, which can make them really difficult to find.

Slugs have evolved from snails—so they really are just snails that have lost their shells. Our Australian native slugs are few in number and are often very hard to find, coming out only at night or during rain and they are able to squeeze into tiny crevices during the day due to their lack of an external shell. There are two species that can be found in the Barrington Tops area — the Red Triangle Slug (*Tribonopohurus graeffii*) and the Northern Humpback Slug (*Cystopelta septentrionalis*).

While Australia doesn't have many native slug species, there are many species of semi-slugs—forms intermediate between a slug and a snail which have a reduced, ear-shaped shell they can't fully retract their body into. Several semi-slug species are found in or near the Upper Hunter e.g. Golden Semislug (*Mysticaron porrectus*). Semislugs tend to be found in moist areas like rainforest.

Most land snails are hermaphrodites, meaning that each individual has both male and female reproductive organs. When they mate, they exchange sperm packages and both animals will produce eggs. They usually lay their eggs in a clump and leave them hidden in a moist spot in the leaf litter. Between two to four weeks later they will then hatch into fully self-sufficient juvenile snails.

People often complain that snails and slugs eat vegetation in their gardens. Actually, if something is munching on your veggie patch or flowerbed, it is almost certainly not a native species. It's rare that you would see a native snail in your garden, since they don't tend to live in disturbed habitats. We have many introduced land snail species in Australia and these are the true culprits.

At the Australian Museum, we have a huge collection of land snails. We continually study the native fauna and describe new species. We are always happy to help identify native species—you can send your photographs to the Australian Museum via the Search and Discover information and resource centre at <https://www.australianmuseum.net.au/searchdiscover>

So next time you're walking in the bush, especially if it's been raining, keep an eye out for silvery trails and maybe you'll spot one of our unique slugs or snails—who knows, it might even be a new species!

Isabel Hyman



*Mysticaron porrectus*  
Photo: Isabel Hyman



*Hedleyella-falconeri*  
Photo: Dr Frank Köhler



*Cystopelta septentrionalis*  
Photo: Dr Frank Köhler



*Austrohytida capillacea*  
Photo: Isabel Hyman

## Gundy Farmers Dinner

The drought in the Upper Hunter Shire began some two years ago, via the easing of normal rain patterns, resulting in the drying of land and sub-soil, streams and dams drying up and subsequent lack of food production for people, stock and other animals. By late 2017, under the intensity of the drought, greater governmental resourcing and practical support to farmers was really needed.

Farmers had to source and buy fodder etc. at increasingly higher costs, with morale amongst their communities at an all-time low.

A chance meeting between two farming women for coffee resulted in the organizing of a dinner at Gundy, to get drought affected farmers and friends together for first of all support, communication with one another and to share knowledge and experience to assist with farm related decision making such as keeping and feeding stock and ways to maintain their herds in trying times.

The first social evening was held in Gundy early this year, with some 70 people from the district attending. It was so successful that an event has been held the 1st Friday of each month since then, a welcome relief for farming communities in really tough times.

Voluntary guest speakers have talked on some very different and interesting life aspects and musicians have provided us with good entertainment.

Maitland Slow Food Movement offered to provide continuing support to farmers by purchasing and providing many boxes of fresh, Hunter grown vegetables each month. They travel up to Gundy with a ute-load of very full boxes! Local farmers really appreciate this support. This not only benefits farming families in the Upper Hunter Shire but also benefits vegetable growers in the Lower Hunter.

The social get-together for local drought affected farmers and their communities will continue, hopefully beyond the current drought.

It is held at the Linga Longa Inn, 2 Riley Street, Gundy from 6.30pm.

Anne McPhee



## Resources & Funding

Carping On About Pest Fishing, the 2018 Pest Fishing Competition—Citysmart is organising this ‘first of its kind’ competition to be conducted across Australia, where Local Councils & community organisations apply to run a competition in their local area. The Competition opens 20th October & closes 25th November. Go to [www.citysmart.com.au/events/pest-fishing](http://www.citysmart.com.au/events/pest-fishing) for more information.

Creating the “Roadmap” to move your agribusiness forward—Agri-Business Development Institute (ABDI) conducts webinars on a range of topics e.g. Planning & moving your business forward; Succession-How to start the Conversation; The Art of Sales-developing an effective sales process. You can access their webinars at [www.abdi.com.au/webinar-series/](http://www.abdi.com.au/webinar-series/) or go to their Resource Library for a wider range of information services at [www.abdi.com.au/resources](http://www.abdi.com.au/resources)

Exercise Bee Prepared—Plant Health Australia (PHA) is facilitating workshops across Australia, testing how to rapidly respond to a detection of Varroa mite (*Varroa destructor*), a serious pest of honey bees. Results from workshops & a planned national meeting will assist in the agreement of a national approach to biosecurity measures & responsiveness to prevent Varroa mite incursions. Contact the Program Manager for Training & Biosecurity Preparedness at PHA at [sdibley@phau.com.au](mailto:sdibley@phau.com.au) for more information.

Survival of soil organisms is a wake-up call for biosecurity—Science Daily article on a research study of nematode survival in dry conditions, their ability to invade plant roots, identifying exotic plant parasitic nematodes before they cross borders & potentially reduce crop & pasture yields. To read the article go to [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/08/170824090108.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/08/170824090108.htm)

National Plant Biosecurity Status Report (10th edition)—Plant Health Australia (PHA) an annual report which identifies the greatest exotic pests to plant production, biosecurity governance, management mechanisms such as surveillance & innovative research projects. You can download last year’s report at [www.planthealthaustralia.com.au](http://www.planthealthaustralia.com.au) View information on farm or citrus biosecurity programs, National bee or plant biosecurity. Six online training programs (5 of them are free, Beekeepers course is charged).

Trailblazers—the ABC gives the opportunity for young people aged 18—28 years of age (individuals or groups of up to 3 people) to become a trailblazer. Regional change makers can have their stories about working on projects to make regional communities in Australia a better place, shown on the ABC, in the Heywire section. For more information on how to apply & to read about the last 16 winners, their winning stories & about attending the Trailblazer Lab in Canberra. Go to [www.abc.net.au/heywire/trailblazers/](http://www.abc.net.au/heywire/trailblazers/)

### Funding

Junior Landcare Grants Program - Landcare Australia & Woolworths providing 100’s of grants to \$1,000, for environmental projects in schools & early learning centres. Applications close 23rd November <https://landcareaustralia.org.au/junior-landcare/grants/>

AgriFutures Rural Women’s Award—AgriFutures is conducting this Award, now in its 20th year. Focussed on women involved in rural industries (agriculture, forestry & fisheries). rural & regional businesses & rural & regional communities. Applicants must be aged 18 years or over, be Australian citizens or permanent residents. State & Territory winners each receive a \$10,000 bursary for innovative ideas & projects, professional development opportunities & alumni networks. Submissions for the 2019 Award close on 31st October 2018. For more information just go to [www.agrifutures.com.au/people-leadership/rural-womens-award/](http://www.agrifutures.com.au/people-leadership/rural-womens-award/)

You can also view a recording of the webinar based on applicants from last year by linking into <https://vimeo.com/235855873>

2019 Science & Innovation Awards—Dept. of Agriculture & Water Resources awards in Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry for people aged 18-35 years. Grants up to \$22,000 for projects on innovative or emerging scientific issues of benefit to Australian primary industries. There are 13 industry categories. Go to [www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/conferences-events/scienceawards](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/conferences-events/scienceawards)

## Events for your Diary

Landcare UpHunter stall—farming, environment, Landcare, education resources, plants/herbs. Visit us at 'Christmas in the Park' on the 1st December 5.30 to 9.30pm at White Park, Guernsey Street, Scone

Other Events:

Happy Healthy Sheep, Goats & Pigs on 1st November 5.30 to 7.00pm at UHSC, 135 Liverpool St, Scone—[www.trybooking.com/book/events?eid=416737&](http://www.trybooking.com/book/events?eid=416737&) to register.

National Bird Week 22nd to 28th October. Go to [birdlife.org.au](http://birdlife.org.au) to access the list of events.

For drought affected farmers & community — a social get together 1st Friday monthly from 6.00pm at Linga Longa Inn, 2 Riley St, Gundy. 'Growing Hunter Beef' forum on 8th November 9.00am to 4.30pm at Singleton Showground. Free buses from Scone & other areas. Register via [Hunter LLS Events](#).

2018 Pollinator Week 11th to 18th November. For information go to <https://beesbusiness.com.au>

Glenbawn Catchment Landcare at [glenbawncatchment@outlook.com](mailto:glenbawncatchment@outlook.com)

Merriwa Landcare Group. Contact Jenny Lee on 0429 337 557

Murrurundi Landcare Group just Email [Sandy@boyds creek.com.au](mailto: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](mailto:Sandy@boyds creek.com.au)

Landcare UpHunter & Scone Landcare—refer details below

## FarmWise

The NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) has developed a web based planning tool (called FarmWise), to assist people intending to build a home on rural land, to develop their own fire protection plan and inform landholders generally of safety precautions to reduce risk.

FarmWise aims to foster and to reinvigorate relationships between rural communities, their volunteer brigades and the State based RFS as partners in bush fire protection.

It also aims to assist landholders to view and assess bush fire risk on a more holistic level across the landscape. "Bush fire" means any fire involving grass, scrub or forest.

A FarmWise plan would be prepared and retained by you. It would identify the strategies you have put in place and areas that should be addressed for adequate fire protection. If you need to reduce hazards on your property, this can be implemented over a period that suits your priorities. It is your plan, not to be kept by others unless you authorise it.

Using the Farm FireWise checklist, you will be able to:

- \* Assess risks of fire to life and property;
- \* Determine what you need to do to reduce the risks; and
- \* Develop a bush fire management plan for your property.

### Planning to protect your home

The Farm FireWise on-line booklet will take you step by step through the process of developing a fire protection plan which covers all the assets on your property.

One of the most important assets on any property is often the family home. If you are intending to build on your rural property there are some general principles for protecting your home from bush fire at the planning stage, which you should really consider.

#### The home site

Whatever your land size, some parts will be safer as a home site than others. Fire travels faster, burns more intensely uphill than downhill. The steeper the slope the faster the fire. Flat ground is safer than sloping ground and bottom of a long slope is safer than the top.

Slopes that face east or south are also safer than north or west facing slopes, because these are the directions from which fires normally approach.

#### Fuel—reduced zones

Fuel is any combustible material. Fires cannot burn where there is no fuel. It is important to make sure there is an area of reduced fuel between the house and any unmanaged grass or bushland—this is often referred to as an Asset Protection Zone or APZ.

#### Ember attack

In a bush fire, airborne embers blown ahead of the main fire are responsible for a high proportion of damage to buildings and can ignite new fires on or around your home.

When planning to build, you might consider placing your home so that forested areas are to the south and east. A windbreak of high-moisture-content trees on the hazard side of the site will also help to shield your home from any flying sparks and embers.

Your local RFS brigade may be able to assist you more effectively during a fire incident if they already retain a copy of your plan (the choice is up to you). This plan is confidential.

Whilst a variety of factors come together to increase the risk of bush fire in your local area, ultimately the protection of your property comes down to you!

Myles O'Reilly



Landcare UpHunter is hosted by Scone Landcare Inc.

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#### Landcare UpHunter

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For more information on the NSW Rural Fire Service activities, your local volunteer RFS brigade or to access the FireWise planning tool go to [www.rfs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au)



Visit us at [www.landcare.nsw.gov.au/groups/scone-landcare-group](http://www.landcare.nsw.gov.au/groups/scone-landcare-group)