

Landcare UpHunter

Autumn 2020

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Hunter River Turtles—the Fight Against Extinction

Home to more than one million species of plants and animals, Australia's wildlife is uniquely ours, found nowhere else in the world. However, new pressures from invasive species, as well as severe drought, devastating bushfires and record heat waves, have triggered the loss of entire ecological communities and possibly entire native species.

Australian freshwater turtles, like many more native species, are faced with extinction. Working already with the endangered Manning River turtles, conservation organization Aussie Ark has also given a commitment to saving and providing a secure future for the Hunter River turtle species by launching the "Save Our Turtles" project.

Why the Hunter River turtle specifically? The species is, like other freshwater turtles, nature's vacuum – they help to clean up our natural river systems, keeping aquatic vegetation in balance and maintaining the health of our stunning waterways. Hunter River turtles are essential to our local freshwater ecosystems. This endangered species is endemic to New South Wales, Australia. They can be found nowhere else on earth!

Turtles are classed as reptiles and are cold-blooded. The top-of-body shell (carapace) and underbody (plastron) is connected by a bridge of bone. The shell is made up of some 60% bones covered by interlocking plates that form its exoskeleton. There are numerous nerves embedded in the shell so the turtle can feel pressure and touch through it.

Compared to the more familiar Eastern long-necked turtle you might see in freshwater systems, the Hunter River turtle has a short-neck. They spend up to 80% of their time in the water, they breathe air and like sunning themselves on rocks or burrowing into mud.

Mainly feeding on insects, yabbies, fish, worms and live plants. An adult female lays eggs on land and covers them with earth for incubation and protection from predators. After a few months hatchlings emerge and if surviving long term, take up to 10 years to mature.

More recent catastrophic effects on Hunter River turtle habitat and ecosystem, from drought and fire, forced turtles to travel in search of food and water to survive, making them more susceptible to road strike, cattle trampling and predation from foxes and cats.

The Aussie Ark team relocated 160 turtles to deeper water last year, taking 30 other turtles into care who were found to be too sick to be left in the wild. After rehabilitation and when the conditions are right, they will be re-introduced to their wild environment.

Through the "Save Our Turtles" initiative, Aussie Ark, in collaboration with Australian Reptile Park (ARP) and NSW Government, will construct specialised facilities on the ARP site, to create a perfect environment enabling an insurance population to be established.

Early this year Aussie Ark staff collected from the field, together with NSW Government staff, twenty Hunter River Turtles to begin an insurance population. They are the first founders of a healthy captive population providing protection of the species into the future. To our surprise, a newly collected female Hunter River turtle dropped a single egg. It was collected and then placed into an incubator. It hatched in March! To Aussie Ark president's Tim Faulkner, the hatchling named Timi: "is a hero and a gesture of hope because he may be the only juvenile in existence of this species (..) since all the babies are being eaten in their eggs by feral foxes".

Aussie Ark, with the NSW government, will continue to conduct ongoing in situ population surveys to monitor the status of the wild population, protect nesting sites and land management activities within their natural habitat. Once captive breeding is established and increased, wild translocation from the captive facility to areas the turtles were formally found will be conducted, to bolster wild populations and to ensure the species remains ecologically functional while further wild solutions are addressed and implemented.

To prevent this unique Australian species disappearing and to support Aussie Ark conservation efforts visit <https://aussieark.org.au/>
Brodie Chiswick & Ruth Hardy



Upper Hunter Youth Council

Our Youth Council comprises school students from both Primary and High Schools across the Upper Hunter Shire, who meet two times per term. During 2019 and 2020 our major focus has been on improving environmental sustainability within our community, building people's understanding of climate change and its effects and creating a better, cleaner, more sustainable area to live in.

Working in unison with Melinda Hale, the Environment & Sustainability Manager (Local Council) we created a plan of action. Taking a slow and steady approach has been an important part of our planning and implementation, enabling us to see different aspects of organisation processes and understand the various steps involved to be able to launch a successful project.

Steady progress has also allowed us to really think about what type of change we as young people want within our community and how we are going to make it happen. Whilst thinking about what will be effective with local communities in our Shire and trying to utilise the strengths our towns and rural areas possess, we are also focussed on bringing new ideas and methods to life, to achieve the best possible outcomes from our final goal, not just for young people throughout the Shire but for communities too.

Working with Melinda we established our main points of environmental sustainability to focus on. The biggest issue that we unanimously voted on was that of litter within our community, lack of recycling and an emphasis on rubbish and single use plastics.



To improve this, we put forward our thoughts at Youth Council with the main ideas being:

Colourful, Inviting Bins With Images to Persuade People to Put Their Rubbish Not Only Into the Bin, but Into Correct Bins

We decided to create a competition within local schools, preschools and early learning centres. Designs were due by April however, closing date has been extended TBA. These designs will be brought to the next Youth Council meeting for initial judging and those winners entries sent to the final judging stage, to be assessed by a panel of selected judges.

Our colourful, creative bins should create an inviting atmosphere of community cohesion and reduce litter issues across the Shire.

A Song Promoting Sustainability Throughout the Community as well as Individually in People's Homes and Schools Alike

We participated in a song writing workshop with 'Damo and Stolzy' from Power FM during our March meeting where we created a parody song together as a group. Youth Council members have taken these ideas back to their schools and where each are working on creating their song, workshopping some lyrics to present back to Youth Council at our next meeting. This will allow us to put all our ideas forward and create an effective, final song in which to have a strong impact on members of our community.

The song is planned to be debuted along with a music video created from footage of aspects of our Shire and people within it. We plan to post it over social media platforms, ensuring the broadest range of people reached with the message the song contains.

More Advertisement and Opportunity for 'Return and Earn' Type Systems Where People can see Positive Outcomes for Recycling and Proper Rubbish Disposal.

Effective promotion to a target group should provide evidence of how their actions benefit them, someone else or something else.

We will initially liaise with businesses throughout Scone to further promote the collection of cans and bottles which can be used in the 'Return and Earn' system. Creating a donation system for people to choose where their 10c goes too, such as what school in the community or a selection of charities, decided from a token-based selection system is planned too.

In July of last year, Youth Council members participated in 'Plastic Free July'. We all signed a pledge stating what types of plastic we would give up for the month. Many young people pledged to give up plastic straws and others to give up takeaway coffee cups.

Since then, other activities with Youth Council included participating in RUOk Day, Clean Up Graffiti Day, National Walk Safely to School Day, and also Pink Shirt Day. Some Creative Photography workshops using Smartphone or Tablet were held in Murrurundi, Merriwa and Scone.

Glow Run at Merriwa during Youth Week saw many students brought in by bus from Murrurundi, Wingen, Parkville, Bunnan and Scone.

Cont'd on page 3



Upper Hunter Youth Council (cont'd)

A 'Colour Run' held last September was a great day of fun for students and their families (see photos below)—this also coincided with Mental Health Month. We met at the main Sports Complex in Scone and had the option of running two to four kilometres.

As we each finished a run, to celebrate, we were covered in coloured powder before going down the 'slip n' slide—again and again.

The Kingdon Ponds Rural Fire Service were on hand to manage the water spraying activities and to help keep the slip n' slide in good working order. The weather was great—as was the sausage sizzle after the run. A lot of us went home very tired that day.

Our 'Creative Creatures' workshop (using recycled materials) scheduled for April will occur later this year. Looking forward to that!

Despite the troubles being faced this year we continue our goals, particularly in reducing rubbish and litter in our community and we look forward to sharing our projects with you in the future. Our online page at <https://www.facebook.com/uhyouthcouncil/> lists lots of information on our events, some past and some planned for later this year. Have a look at the youth related topics on the site.

Vanessa Whitten & Indi Welsh



Resources & Funding

Aquatic animal diseases significant to Australia: identification field guide 5th edition—Australian Government Department of Agriculture publication includes 53 diseases that affect species of molluscs, amphibians, crustaceans and finfish. It is available as a PDF or Word downloadable document at www.agriculture.gov.au or you can download the app from the App Store or Google Play.

Track My Fish app—Recreational fishers can be involved in citizen science by uploading photographs they take of fish they have caught, with results assisting in diagnosing the health of fish and particular illnesses and injuries to fish that can occur when reeling them in too quickly from depths. The app is used across a range of fishing tournaments. You can also use it in an offline mode in low signal range. It can be downloaded via Apple Store or Google Play and is compatible with iPhone, iPad and iPod touch.

Bin Trim—Environmental Protection Authority information on waste solutions for business to reduce, reuse and recycle waste, in three simple steps. Step 1: Input details on bin contents and recycled articles. Step 2: Simple survey on waste volume and types going in your bins. Step 3: Selecting materials for your business to include in a sustainable plan. Go to epa.nsw.gov.au/bintrim

Talking Point Recorders—Landcare UpHunter has easy-to-use resource kits for local community group & school use in the Upper Hunter Shire e.g. downloading frog calls from the frogs.org.au website or recording frog sounds as part of your activities.

Garden Clubs of Australia—a Not-For-Profit organisation. The website includes information on locating a club closest to you and information on their activities, a practical resources section, quarterly magazine and details of their insurance for members community garden projects, even if they are located on Local Council Land. Have a look at their website at gardenclubs.org.au

The Australian Native Seed Survey Report—Australian Association of Bush Regenerators (AABR) report highlighting results from a national survey capturing behaviour and views related to native seed supply in NSW and the sectors ability to meet current and future demand and within a framework of drought and fire events. The Report project forms part of the NSW Government's Healthy Seeds Project. View and download the Report at <https://www.anpc.asn.au/media-releases/where-will-the-seeds-come-from/>

Funding

Organics Infrastructure Fund—NSW Environment Protection Authority (NSW EPA) has various grants available each year to Local Councils, Business, Industry, community groups etc. For example, Waste Less, Recycle More grants up to \$300k to develop new markets or expand existing markets for compost; Love Food, Hate Waste Education or Litter Reduction projects. Includes case studies from past projects at <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/working-together/grants/organics-infrastructure-fund>

2020 BBM Global Industry Scholarships—Career Harvest (PIEFA) initiative providing \$8,000 scholarships for young people aged between 17 to 23 years to travel overseas and gain international experience in agriculture, trades, horticulture, the performing arts, innovation and sustainability. Applications close 31st May. Go to careerharvest.com.au for more information and application form.

Small Environmental Grants Scheme—Wettenhall Environment Trust awards grants four times per year. To support Australian biodiversity projects that focus on one or more areas of community education; community capacity building (training); monitoring & recording data or research & science. For more information & to download application form go to <https://wettenhall.org.au/grants/>

Events for your Diary

Landcare UpHunter stall—farming, environment, Landcare, education resources, plants/herbs. Visit us at: No stall events will be held during Winter. Further advice will be given in the Spring LUH edition.

The International River Foundation (IRF) are hosting a monthly on-line forum, starting in May. The first one will focus on post-drought and fire called "Recovery to Resilience". There is a charge for these forums.

Link into riverfoundation.org.au to register and for more information on IRF activities. For forums, click on RiverStreaming then RiverTalk.

International Compost Awareness Week from 3—9th May with "Better Soil, Better Life, Better Future.

A 'Compost photo competition' also open from 3-29th May. For entry information & to submit photos just log into compostweek.com.au.

Online Agricultural Careers Expo 2020 on 23rd June from 11.00—1.00pm. For teachers & students.

Register at www.eventbrite.com.au/e/online-agricultural-careers-expo-2020-registration-102136123896

Merriwa Landcare group. Contact Jenny Lee on Tel: 0429 337 557

Murrurundi Landcare group. Just Email Sandy@boydscreek.com.au

Pages River Warriors Working Bee Postponed until further notice.

Email Sandy@boydscreek.com.au

Scone Landcare Inc. Contact Ruth Email: sconelandcare@gmail.com or Tel: 0407 232 539

Landcare UpHunter—details below.



Landcare UpHunter

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Opinions & views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Landcare UpHunter. We reserve the right to edit article contributions.

Landcare UpHunter is hosted by Scone Landcare Inc.

Stories from My World

Entries: Open to residents of the Upper Hunter Shire.

Send us your story of native birds, animals, insects or reptiles you see in your garden. For example, their colours, where they are feeding, what they eat, how they behave or sound. Why do you enjoy seeing them and why are they important to our environment?

Create a drawing about your story or take a photograph of this wildlife in your garden.

We want to share your story.

It may be shown in a future edition of Landcare UpHunter, on the website or other media.

A 300 word maximum applies to your written story.

Send your entry to landcareuphunter@gmail.com with the words Stories from My World in the 'subject' heading line at the top of the email. Your story and the drawing or photo must be sent as attachments to your email, with the drawing/photo in compressed form.

By submitting your entry to Landcare UpHunter, you agree that we may use it for media purposes—if you under 18 years of age you need the approval of your parent/guardian.

Ruth Hardy



Online Exploration

Here are some great environment and sustainability related websites and resources for you, whether studying at home or school, working from your home, from your office or elsewhere or enjoying time out from regular activities. More ideas in the next edition.

ClimateWatch

This is part of EarthWatch, an international organisation with a focus on landscape protection and restoration. It has some research projects in Australia, along with a wide range of citizen science and education resources and activities for children and adults.

You can access teaching resources for classroom or home schooling, link students into the Kids Teaching Kids project or maybe they can participate in TeachLive Week.

Watch vision of the ClimateWatch sub-alpine trail in Victoria and other sites, access their maps, other imagery and digitalglobe or maybe join up for Bush Blitz and undertake a species discovery expedition in your own backyard—you don't even have to leave home.

You can download their app. for iPhone or Android and be part of their Climate Action Army and input your own information as you go—visual data on flora, fauna, landscape.

To access their website or to download the app. just go to www.earthwatch.org.au

BIRDS in BACKYARDS

BirdLife Australia activities across our continent are extensive. On their website, the Birds in Backyards section has fun based resources where children and adults can learn more about the great variety of birds we have in Australia, their looks, behaviour, habitat etc.

The Kids magazine and activity books include "The Wing thing" which follows the Swift Parrot, Mallee Emu-wren and Hooded Plover (just to name a few) under the Shorebirds, Woodland Birds, Beach Nesting Birds and the Threatened Mallee Birds icons. Apart from stories, it provides you with board games to play, puzzles for you to solve and lots more.

The Birds in Backyards Parents Pack has some art, craft and science activities you can undertake whether indoors or outdoors. You can make nocturnal bird masks, build your own birds nest (complete with eggs in it) or you can play a game of Backyard Bird Bingo.

This is a great website to learn about bird watching in your backyard, or wherever you are. There is a Field Guide to assist in identifying particular birds you see, the Aussie Bird Count app. downloadable via App Store; or you can use the Bird Finder online.

To access Birds in Backyards downloadable resources go to www.birdsinbackyards.net

You can also participate in building the BirdLife survey data on the species of birds local to your area by downloading the Birdata app. in your App Store (search for BirdLife).

Ruth Hardy

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