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Native Wildlife & Native Flora Photo Competition - now OPEN

Landscapes in the Upper Hunter Shire stretch from World Heritage Barrington Tops rainforest in the east to the Merriwa Plateau and Great Dividing Ranges in the west. Our waterways support native fish and other freshwater life and our valley floors, hills and rainforest support local and migratory birds, animals and plant life. Some of them are formally recognised as Endangered, Threatened or Vulnerable species. To celebrate the diversity of our local natural world Landcare UpHunter & Scone Landcare have launched their first Native Wildlife & Native Flora Photo Competition.

Get out your camera - show us the natural world through your lens

Send us your favourite photos of local native wildlife and flora - animals, birds, insects, reptiles, trees, shrubs, flowers, fungi

Category – Native Wildlife	Category – Native Flora
1. Wildlife (Junior ages 8-12)	4. Flora (Junior ages 8-12)
2. Wildlife (Youth ages 13-17)	5. Flora (Youth ages 13-17)
3. Wildlife (Adult 18 and over)	6. Flora (Adult 18 and over)

The Competition is open to Upper Hunter Shire residents only. Photos must have been taken within the Upper Hunter Shire.

Over \$2,000 worth of prizes to be won

Closing date for entries is midnight on Tuesday 28th of April 2015. For Guidelines & Entry Form go to:

www.landcare.nsw.gov.au/groups/scone-landcare-group/projects/2015-photo-competition

For further information contact sconelandcare@gmail.com or Ruth Hardy 0407 232 539

This competition has been made possible with the support of the following sponsors



Tunnelling into Wildlife Below Your Feet

There was a little rabbit who was lying in his burrow when the Dingo rang him up to say
- he'd call on him tomorrow

But the rabbit thought it's better

That the Dingo did not meet him

So he found another burrow and the Dingo did not eat him.

Now that's a clever little rabbit, but whose burrow did he borrow???

(The Clever Rabbit - poem by DH Souter -1976)

Many of Australia's native marsupials rely on burrows- a large hole or a Collection of holes joined by twisting tunnels to create the communities and homes they in. Whether you are a wombat, platypus, bilby, bettong or snake - you need a burrow. Some other species like frogs, lizards, insects, reptiles and quolls also dig burrows (or they 'borrow' another burrow).

To build these homes underground our native marsupials (and some animals introduced into Australia too) are designed as earthmovers. Most burrowing animals have powerful front legs and sharp claws that are perfect for digging (like wombats and echidnas). Some have strong back legs that kick out the soil from behind, like the non-native species - the pesky rabbit.

Like the rabbit and fox, our small native marsupials such as the burrowing bettong, the bandicoot and the numbat just love digging. If you are bored, dig, if you want to show off to others, dig, if you want a new home, dig, or dig just for the heck of it!

There is the powerhouse digger often called the bush bulldozer, the wombat, and the curious Tasmanian Devil and then there are the forest floor specialists whose burrows are hidden under the fallen leaves. Echidnas prefer to rest in hollow logs, under stones or clumps of vegetation or in short burrows. The females use a burrow to give birth and to raise their young in. The little Echidnas then venture out into the world at about three months of age.

Let's go back to the rabbit - which arrived in Australia by boat many years ago, along with the fox. As we know, they were originally used for hunting, with people and their hunting dogs chasing them for sport. Of course many got away, probably hiding for the first time in a native burrow (oh how lucky was that!). Soon they took up residence - and did it very well!

Unfortunately they have bred in their squillions since then, often degrading the land, creating soil erosion, destabilizing riverbanks, eating out natural vegetation, our farmers crops and plants in our gardens. They even live in our towns and cities!

The European Rabbit (*Onyctolagus cuniculus*) is the only rabbit that builds and lives in burrows - this cool dark home keeps them safe from hot dry days, high temperatures, heavy rains and predators such as the fox.

Rachelle Worth



Carp Fishing at Ellerston

A recent P&C fundraiser for Ellerston Public School saw local residents from Hunter Springs to Moonan Flat fishing for Carp in their local streams, rivers and waterholes.

Carp are a large, freshwater species of fish introduced into Australia - they originally come from Asia and Europe. They cause damage to streams, rivers and waterholes, eating native aquatic plants, algae, insects and other small aquatic life.

They feed on the bottom, suck in sediment (looks like dirt), expelling it through their mouth where it floats through the water, stopping light getting into the waterway for other fish. Ever seen a local murky waterway and wondered if there are Carp in it?

Carp can grow up to 4kgs. a year, depending on living and breeding conditions.

Catch of the day was Mathew Grainger's 2.2kg Carp. Using sweet corn as a lure was his tip for catching these fish. Mathew said "Corn out of a tin is better, than corn on the cob, maybe because the added flavour and salt in tinned corn probably tastes better to Carp. You have to be very patient as they usually strike gently at your bait several times before finally grabbing it".

Some families had patiently waited for ages for the fish 'to bite' in their local waterway but hadn't caught anything. They still happily came to the 'Carp weigh-in' and award presentation in the grounds of the Victoria Hotel in Moonan Flat.

Darcy and Emily Taylor didn't catch any Carp but they did bring some local shrimp. At Ellerston school they learn about keeping local streams and waterholes healthy and the native insects, shrimp, water bugs and other small aquatic life in them.

The P&C held a B-B-Q and a raffle at the weigh-in centre, helping to raising more funds for the school. They were both a great success. A big thank you to all the local businesses who provided donations for prizes.

There is more than one way to support your local school, learn more about your natural environment and have fun!

Ruth Hardy



Great Eastern Ranges - Connecting the Dots

The Great Eastern Ranges (the Great Divide) stretches 3,600kms. from western Victoria through New South Wales to far north Queensland. It contains over 8,000 plants, the world's greatest concentration of primitive rainforest flowering plants, Australia's largest and tallest old growth forests and has 63 major river systems.

The Ranges are narrowest and lowest in the Hunter, providing a 'bridge' for important species between inland and coastal ecosystems and important bird migration and dispersal links through the corridor.

The Great Eastern Ranges (GER) in the Hunter works with landholders and local communities to create a connected and healthy landscape - a landscape that supports people and nature. Some landholders have even been recorded on camera!

Staff work with school students to develop native bird survey skills and establish Youth Leading the World groups, training students to undertake sustainability projects and run Youth Forums.

Cressfield Stud at Parkville regularly produces bird surveys on local and migratory woodland birds, to monitor and report on improvements in ecological connectivity and landscape health, as part of a north-south corridor in conservation planning.

Under the GER's Stepping Stones project, landholders in Upper Hunter regions, including the Merriwa Plateau, can access funding to plant native vegetation, provide shade for stock and fence off planted areas. Creating 'stepping stones' across our landscape helps conserve native flora and fauna and contributes to healthy landscapes and waterways systems.

Merriwa landholder Bob Telfer received funding last year. Bob said "Kirsten from Stepping Stones visited our property, helped us select native tube stock and plan for a natural landscape outcome. We planted trees like Rough-barked apple (*Angophora floribunda*), Blakely's Red Gum (*Eucalyptus blakelyi*), and Narrow-leafed Ironbark (*Eucalyptus cebra*) and shrubs like Golden Western Wattle (*Acacia Decora*) and Sticky Hop-bush (*Dodonaea viscosa ssp. angustifolia*) in the paddock. Common Rush (*Juncus usilatus*) and Mat Rush (*Lomandra longifolia*) were planted along our Merriwa River banks.

They are all growing well - definitely improving the property and will eventually add shelter for wildlife, homes for birds, shade for my stock and improve agricultural outcomes".

Visit the website www.gersteppingstones.org.au or call Kirsten on 6549 3785 or email kirsten@gersteppingstones.org.au

Ruth Hardy



Resources & Funding

NSW Moisture Maps - provide information on topsoil moisture and subsoil moisture across the State. This information can be accessed via <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/drought/>

The Fish Habitat Network - started in NSW in 2009 and is across Australia. Provides information and resources for individuals, organisations and government to work together on protecting and improving habitat that fish need to survive and thrive, for a healthy and sustainable future. Go to <http://www.fishhabitatnetwork.com.au/>

Rediscovering the Country - a journey into landscape restoration in South-east Australia and Sri Lanka through film (30 minutes). View at www.rediscoveringthecountry.org

UNEP-DHI online water & sustainability game - national on-line competition for students 11 - 17 years (2 per team). Winners can also play in the global competition. Addresses ACARA Cross-curriculum Priorities of Sustainability and Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia. Go to [Curtin University Innovation Eco Challenge](http://www.curtin.edu.au/innovation/eco-challenge).

Australian PlantBank -(formerly NSW Seedbank) Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust science and research facility at Mount Annan. It has an internationally significant seed vault, tissue cultures, orchid mycorrhizal fungi etc. Learn about our native flora, download the free app. or play the on-line PlantBank Q&A or watch short films. Go to www.plantbank.org.au

Funding

Landcare Australia - Coles Junior Landcare Garden Grants (to \$1,000) pre-schools, day care centres, primary & secondary schools, youth groups. Includes vegetable/bush tucker gardens, composting/worm farms, green walls. closes 27th of March.

Landcare Australia - Yates Junior Landcare Winter Veggie Challenge. Registrations for seeds close on 5th of April. For details go to www.juniorlandcare.com.au for information on these Junior Landcare activities & to register or download forms.

Disney World Conservation Fund - supports comprehensive conservation projects - research, community conservation, engagement/education. Grants up to \$25,000 including Australian terrestrial regions. For Guidelines/Application form go to the 'Conservation Funding page at www.disney.com/conservation

Events for your Diary

Earth Hour - 28th March - turn off your power for an hour - organise your own event. To register go to www.earthhour.org.au

Pre Season Crops & Tropical Grass Field Day at Merriwa 9.00 - 4.00pm on 20th March. To register go to www.lls.nsw.gov.au/hunter

For more LLS events refer website e.g. Farm Financial Mgt.; Property Planning or Farm Water Mgt.

Biological Weeds Control Forum in Scone 12th May (Quirindi on 13th). For more details email Doug at uhwa@muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au

Tocal Field Days - C B Alexander Agricultural College, Tocal Road, Tocal 9.00-5.00pm 1-3 May go to tocalfielddays.com for updates

Landholder Info. & BirdLife Australia Woodland Bird Identification Workshop at Martindale 26th April Tel: Kirsten 6549 3785 email kirsten@steppingstones.org.au

Upper Hunter Region School Bird Survey at Denman on 25th May & Youth Leading the World Facilitator Training, Muswellbrook 2-3 June contact Kirsten details as above

Pages River Warriors Working Bee Murrurundi. Tel: Robyn 0419 705 753, email ethelo009@hotmail.com

Glenbawn Catchment Landcare Group Contact Katherine 6546 5007 glenbawncatchment@outlook.com

Landcare UpHunter & Scone Landcare - refer details below

Spotted-tailed Quoll in the Hunter

The Spotted-tailed Quoll is an interesting native predator that is rarely encountered due to its large home range and secretive nature. Historically both the Spotted-tailed Quoll and the smaller Eastern Quoll (no spots on its tail) were found across much of Eastern Australia. Unfortunately the last known sighting of an Eastern Quoll on mainland Australia was a road kill in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs in 1963.

Quolls date back over 15 million years in mainland Australia with the ancestors of our current species diverging 4 million years ago. Listed nationally as Endangered, the Spotted-tailed Quoll mainland population is now only found in Eastern States.

This marsupial is a mainly solitary animal, is nocturnal and lives for up to five years.

Females raise up to six babies (pups) at a time. Pups are the size of a grain of rice when born but grow rapidly in the eight weeks that they are in their mother's pouch. They spend the next couple of months or so in their dens or 'hanging around' on their mother's back before becoming independent of her by about 18 weeks of age.

They are species related to the Antechinus, Dunnart and the Tasmanian Devil.

Habitat range includes rainforest, woodland, open forest and inland riparian forest. It dens (lives) in tree hollows, logs, small caves, boulder fields and rocky outcrops.

Having Spotted-tailed Quolls in an area is the sign of a healthy landscape.

As a landscape ecologist, I am part of a research team from the University of Wollongong who are undertaking Spotted-tailed Quoll field surveys across New South Wales. In general we believe there has been a large decline in Quoll numbers. If this continues this species could become extinct on mainland Australia.

After comparing numerous historical records we undertook surveys in those identified locations to determine if Quolls are still living in those areas.

We set up motion activated cameras in prime locations to record Quoll movements, over a two week period (see photo - in the Hunter).

Our cameras are regularly baited with chicken wings to attract any Quolls living in the area.

They get a feed and we get the photos!

The Hunter Valley appears to still contain a large Spotted-tailed Quoll population.

Surveys across the Barrington Tops, Watagan Mountains and grazing lands have recorded areas of moderate population density however further research is needed.

Our cameras will be recording on some Upper Hunter Shire properties over coming months.

Over the next few years we plan to diversify our research on this species, with a focus on the use of grazing lands by Quolls in the Hunter. Research will combine motion activated camera surveys, cage trapping and fitting individual animals with GPS collars to track their movements over several months.

A genetics study to investigate how far individuals disperse and how related populations are between Barrington Tops and the Hunter Valley floor is planned.

Some landholders may see Spotted-tailed Quolls as an annoyance (they can kill poultry) but they do help to control introduced pests like rabbits and even young feral pigs that damage land, natural vegetation, waterways and crops.

Apart from existing landholder participants, we welcome hearing from others who have Spotted-tailed Quolls on their land and would like to know more about them.

I can be contacted on chrismc@uow.edu.au or 0488 224 106.

Dr. Chris McLean



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Scone Landcare Inc.

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