

The Upper Bidgee Bulletin

The Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare Quarterly Newsletter



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Welcome to the autumn edition of the Upper Bidgee Bulletin. We come to the end of a long and stressful summer and in this newsletter some members have shared with us how they have been dealing with drought and bushfires. We hope you find their stories interesting...



UMLC President's Report

by Tony Robinson

It is hard to avoid fire talk with the season we have just had. Fortunately, our property in the Michelago area was not impacted but others were not so fortunate. It will take a long time for many to recover. Many of the fire brigades in our area are holding recovery sessions to help people through the trauma of it all.

It will also take a long time for our environment to recover and many of the articles in this edition of the Bidgee Bulletin address that issue. Not only the fire damage but also some very serious gully-rakers scouring out the soils, rocks and burnt trees following very heavy rainfalls. One farmer in our area has lost all the vegetation and top soil on some of his paddocks, leaving just a rocky landscape.

Prior to the fires, in the earlier drought, one could see the trees on the ridgelines near us drying up. I have not seen that before. Many of them are broad-leaved peppermints which on our property seem to go first. I have been asked if these trees will recover. I would be interested in the answer. I am monitoring some of them and it seems to be a mixed bag. Some are now put out some green leaves particularly at the tips of the branches. Others are not but I suspect there may be some epicormic and lignotuberous responses as after a fire.

I wish everyone all the best in the recovery phase.



Coordinators Corner

by Georgeanna Story

It's been a long and stressful summer for many of us and it is only the recent rain that has allowed us to stop and take a breath. There are many of our Landcare community that have been impacted by the fires and the support from our members has been wonderful. We will continue to work together to support those that need it.

With everything that has been going on we have only now begun to look towards the upcoming year. It proves to be a busy one, with projects dealing with pest control and creating habitat moving into their final phase. There are upcoming events with the Cooma Show and Royalla Fair and other activities on grazing, erosion and pests in the pipeline. Our UMLC calendar has been selling well, with profits going to support future activities. There are still a few left though, so let me know if you would still like to source one. Also let us know if there is an activity that you or your group would like to host or attend and we can help to make it happen.

The SE LLS Save Our Scarlet Robin is moving into its 4th year and for this round UMLC have been engaged to help landholders participate in the project. So if you are interested in creating bird habitat and protecting existing patches contact me and we can discuss your options.

I'd like to thank our groups that have contributed to this newsletter and would encourage others to share your stories in future editions. Our members often comment on how interesting it is to hear from the other groups in the region. I hope you enjoy this season's contributions.

Upcoming events

UMLC 2020 Calendars are still available. The calendars are A4, saddle stitched with one photo per

month. Calendars are \$20 and can be ordered by emailing upper.murrumbidgee@gmail.com or at 0429779928. Preferred payment is EFT, details supplied on order.



Charlie Massy Seminar Tuesday 10th March 5pm at Snowy Mountains Grammar School. For more information contact Lauren on 0411 402978.

UMLC meeting Friday 13th March. For more information contact Georgeanna on 0429 779928.

Cooma Show Saturday 14th March. UMLC and Upper Snowy Landcare are hosting a combined stall, come along and say hi.

Royalla Fair Sunday 15th March. Royalla Landcare and UMLC will be there to talk pest control, scarlet robin projects and all thing Landcare.

Bredbo Landcare meeting 21 April 7pm at Bredbo Community Hall. For more information contact Lauren on 0411 402978.



Fires, Koalas and Survival

by Jim Wharton, Numeralla Landcare

Many patches of bush around Numeralla were devastated by fire over the summer period. One of the concerns for us was the long-term survival of koalas in the area, with those that survived the fires usually injured and facing problems with finding enough food. In response we joined forces with a number of other organisations to search for and collect the remaining koalas.

To do this we have a line search 5 -10 people sweeping through fire impacted bush. All those involved in the sweep were volunteers, and came from far and wide. There were people from Canada, Moreton Bay (QLD), Port Macquarie(NSW) and of course our locals. The people from outside the area were from wildlife carer groups with at least one arborist to scale the trees when required. Once found, a surviving koala up a tree and is coaxed down by the rattling of discs on top of long 9 meter poles. If the koala comes down they are caught in a bag then taken to the local vet for assessment at either Queanbeyan or Cooma and treated appropriately. Once recovered the koala is released back into the wild. Not all are cooperative and for those we can't get down a trap is set. With the hope that when the "crowd" departs the koala comes down and wanders into the trap. The tree is checked the next day.



The results of fire at Undoo and the koala catchers at work



Acts of kindness amongst drought and fires

Lauren Van Dyke, Bredbo Landcare

What a crazy time we have all just had. I am so grateful to all the hard-working men and women keeping those fires at bay. Not everyone has been as lucky.

Something special happened over this xmas/New Year break. Out of nowhere a fabulous man by the name of Errol moved into Bredbo village to be with his son and daughter in law – new residents themselves to Bredbo and new owners of Monaro Tyres in Cooma. Some of you may remember Errol when he ran his washing machine repair business many years back in Cooma. He has since been here, there and everywhere and has now, lucky for us, settled in Bredbo.

I came to meet Errol when I was on my way to Cooma (get this, with a broken portable washing machine) and bumped into Errol on Two Rivers Wattle Park Drive. Errol had in the back of his ute dozens of water containers filled to the brim. It didn't take long before I had unloaded my washing machine into Errol's ute and he revealed he had started regular watering stints and had been digging water catchments around the wattles that had previously died and were desperately resprouting. I did recall being bemused by these under-tree scratchings thinking the local rabbits had finally worked out what we want. Functional rabbits!

Days later I met Errol again and this time he had a 1000 litre water tub and pump rig and was watering all the trees (guards or no guards). In the stifling heat no less. Consequently, the trees and shrubs are looking absolutely amazing. Please take a drive. You will also see how Sue has been doing a fine job over the break inside the grass and forb pens.

Over the desperate couple of weeks we had, I hadn't seen Errol and when I enquired I learned that Errol had lost his little Countegany house and all the beautiful bush around it in the recent fires that burst through the area with such fury. He was then out fighting the blaze even after it consumed his place. Bredbo Landcare are now offering Errol and other Bredbo landcarers devastated by fire assistance in replanting native seedlings to help in the regenerative process.



The regenerative powers of our native plants in action

On a happier note we are pleased to say the Bredbo Gentian flower (one site in the entire globe) has survived the fire that ripped through part of its habitat, although at reduced numbers.

For more information on Bredbo Landcare contact Lauren Van Dyke at landcarebredbo@gmail.com or 0411 402 978.



A Helping Hand for Native Birds

by Alex James, Small Farms Network

Land for Wildlife member Alice McGlashan has created a website and Facebook page called **Nest Box Tales** that aims to educate and support people wanting to provide habitat for hollow-nesting native birds and animals. Based in the Bungendore/Bywong area just outside Canberra, Alice aims to help birds and animals to survive in South East New South Wales by providing key information to people who want to help build and install nesting boxes.

Remnant bush with hollow bearing trees is essential for 114 native bird species across Australia that require tree hollows for nesting. A number of native birds, including owls and treecreepers, also live in hollows year-round. Land clearing has seen a significant decline in trees suitable to provide habitat for birds and mammals in the South East.

Large tree hollows used by ducks, owls, and black cockatoos can take centuries to develop and only form in mature, old trees. Even small hollows for birds such as treecreepers, thornbills and pardalotes require many decades to form. The hollows in mature trees are created by the natural forces of wind, heat and fire as well as wood-eating organisms such as fungi and insects.

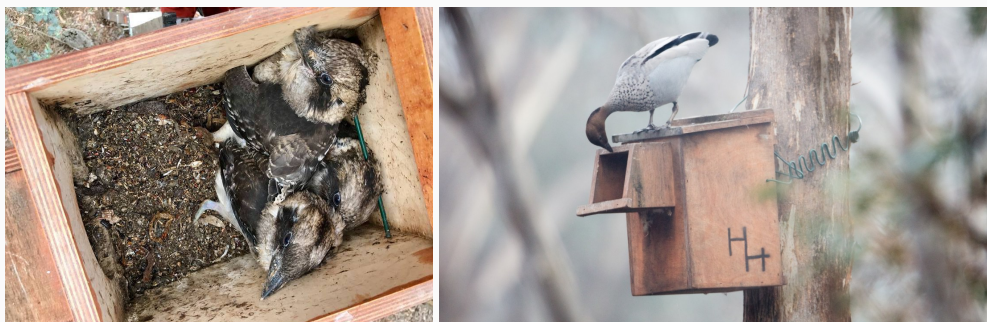
People who want to provide habitat on their properties where the vegetation may not have suitable hollows can use the Nest Box Tales website to learn from Alice's experiences.

"The website is my way of passing on the knowledge that I have gathered through trial, error and research

over the past four years, and the great thing about the Facebook page is that people from all over the country are sharing their expertise”, said Alice.

The website at <https://nestboxtales.com/> has links to designs for all types of nest boxes suitable for native birds and animals as well as information on making a nest box comfy for the target species. There are handy hints to make your next box building venture a success including dealing with predators and feral bees.

Follow Alice’s adventures on Facebook for some inspiration and to see fascinating videos of marsupials and birds using nest boxes. The Nest Box Tales Facebook page can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/nestboxtales/>



Kokkoburras and wood ducks utilising nest boxes (photos courtesy of NextBoxTales)



What to know about native plants and fire

by Rainer Rehwinkel & Georgeanna Story

The recent fires have caused many landholders to think about plants and fire risk, retardant values and regenerative capacity. While there is discussion on the role of exotic plants as fire suppressants there are also a number of resources available looking at natives with low flammability. These resources also outline the additional benefits of native plants for local birds, beneficial insects and other biodiversity values. Species lists are available for some areas but lacking for our local region. To help landholders in the UMLC area we asked local expert Rainer Rehwinkel what he felt were fire resistant and resilient native plants for the region. Below are Rainers thoughts...

Firstly, it would still be desirable to plant eucalypts, teatrees and other members of the Myrtaceae, because, although they do burn because of their flammable oils and often high litter loads, they also recover very quickly after a fire By reshooting, from epicormic shoots either in the branches and trunks, or from lignitubers.

Things like species of Cassinia and Callitris (flammable oils), and Allocasuarina (high litter loads) are generally killed by fires, but release their seeds and their seedlings should recolonise the areas immediately under their burnt remains.

In situations closer to infrastructure, such as fences, sheds and houses, it may be desirable to plant species less prone to burn. Here is a list of species, and justification where needed.

1. ***Acacia* species.** No flammable oils. Recommendations I read years ago were to plant acacias to stem fires. Provide a range of resources for mammals, birds and invertebrates (palatable leaves, wood-boring grubs, flowers providing pollen and nectar, nitrogen fixing benefitting nearby plants. Many local species of both trees and shrubs.
2. ***Banksia marginata*.** No flammable oils. The tops will be killed by fires, but seeds will be released. Provide a range of resources for mammals, birds and invertebrates (copious nectar flows, dense bushy habitat).
3. ***Brachychiton populneus*.** No flammable oils, because it's a rainforest remnants species that will survive dry conditions. Provides a range of resources for birds and invertebrates (flowers, fruit, leaves, dense bushy habit).
4. ***Grevillea robusta*.** No flammable oils, because it's a rainforest remnant species that will survive dry conditions, though not particularly frost resistant, especially when young. Provides a range of resources for mammals, birds and invertebrates (copious nectar flows).
5. ***Melia azederach*.** No flammable oils, because it's a rainforest remnant species that will survive dry conditions, though not particularly frost resistant, especially when young. Provides a range of resources for birds (fruit) and invertebrates (flowers and leaves). it is deciduous, which makes it good to plant near houses.
6. ***Grevillea* species.** No flammable oils. Great habitat because of their dense foliage, and flowers provide copious nectar flows, but red-flowered species should be avoided or minimised, because they will encourage the larger, more aggressive honeyeaters. Limited number of local species.
7. ***Hakea salicifolia*.** No flammable oils. Great habitat because of its dense foliage, and flowers provide nectar flows, and seed capsules are favoured by cockatoos. A local species Found in wetter sites, so will only do well with addition of water.



Hakea salicifolia and *Grevillea robusta*

We thank Rainer's input into this conversation and will continue to look into the topic of what we need to know about native plants and fire. Further information can be found at the [Australian Native Plant Society](#) and [State Flora](#) websites

In the period leading up to Christmas an algal bloom was observed on the Murrumbidgee River around Billilingra Road near Bredbo. Members of Bredbo Landcare quickly informed us and we were able to collect water samples and confirm the presence of high levels of *Dolichospermum planktonicum* and *D. spiroides*. While these species are considered potentially toxic, the absence of the highly toxic *D. circinale* ranked the site as moderate-high risk, rather than extreme. Subsequent flows

from Tantangara Dam and rainfall events has helped with water quality. Future water testing will identify the water quality and assess the algal risk.



Last years algal bloom in the Murrumbidgee River

How can you tell there is a bloom?

You can see from the photos that the river has a distinct green appearance. If this bloom intensifies there may be a floating paint like scum which forms, see below. We associate this with blue green algae. I have taken a sample for analysis to confirm. We have also notified the Regional Algal Coordinating Committee (RACC).

Why is this a problem?

Algal blooms that contain blue green algae are a problem because blue green algae contains a toxin that can have adverse effects if people come into contact with it or if people/pets or stock drink it. How dangerous this is depends on the concentration of blue green algal cells present. (It is important to note that blooms can develop quickly and algal concentration can change over a short period of time). Once the bloom dies off this can affect oxygen levels in the water and fish can die if they cannot escape the deoxygenated water. More info about algae can be found at: <https://www.waternsw.com.au/water-quality/algae>

What can you do?

- It is best not to pump green water from the river for stock and domestic purposes. You don't want the algae in your tanks and water supply system! If it contains blue green algae it will not be good for stock and domestic use.
- Please let others (your neighbours) know about this.
- We would like to know the extent of the bloom so if the river is green at your place, please let me know. A photo of the river and level of scum build up is useful. I can be contacted on this email or the mobile below. You can also notify the RACC (contact details on the website link above), but I will also forward your info.
- Please let us know asap if you see fish kills. This needs to be notified to NSW Fisheries.

Further information can be found at:

- WaterNSW Link – for general algal information as well as links to other related pages. <http://www.waternsw.com.au/water-quality/algae>
 - NSW Health Website – http://nswmoh-search.clients.funnelback.com/s/search.html?collection=nsw_health_meta&query=blue-green%20algae
 - NSW DPIE Website – <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/search?query=Blue-green+algae>
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In the news

LLS Bushfire assistance: use the below links to the latest bushfire related support and recovery information

- [Bushfire hub](#)
- [Rural Assistance Authority - disaster assistance](#)
- [Natural Disaster Assistance guide for primary producers](#)
- [Helping wildlife in emergencies](#)
- [Stock water impacted by ash and debris](#)
- [Managing soils and landscapes post fire](#)
- [Report damage to property and infrastructure](#)

Local Government support and recovery information:

- [Shoalhaven land managers](#)
- [Eurobodalla land managers](#)
- [Snowy Monaro land managers](#)
- [Queanbeyan- Palerang land managers](#)
- [Bega Valley land managers](#)
- [Wingecarribee land managers](#)

Contact your [local LLS office](#) for more information

Erosion concerns? Being burnt out is a devastating experience. To help avoid the added worry of a contaminated water supply, sediment fences made out of fabric, shade cloth or straw should be in place as soon as possible after the fire so you are prepared before the next rain. Fire affected landholders in hilly areas should prepare for flash flooding ahead of this week's storms. Given the severity of the bushfires, flooding, soil erosion and sediment is inevitable. Sediment fences, traps and levee banks can be used to protect farm assets and water supplies from becoming blocked or polluted.

Building a sediment fence instructions can be found

here: http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/287730/Building-a-sediment-fence.pdf?v=2

Information to assist landholders construct sediment fences and protect water supplies can be found at <https://go.vic.gov.au/ltE843>

Citizen scientists get snappy to monitor bushfire-ravaged environment. Citizen scientists are being encouraged to photograph bushfire-affected areas to help UNSW Sydney researchers track the recovery of flora and fauna after the fires. Click [here](#) for details.

FOG 2020 Grassy-ecosystem grants. FOG is again offering a small number of grassy ecosystem grants of \$500–\$1500. Any individual or organisation may apply. A grant may be used for a small project or as part of a bigger project and may support publications, research, education, on-ground work, advocacy, publicity and/or training related to grassy ecosystems. The application form may be downloaded from <http://www.fog.org.au/supportedprojects.htm> and completed forms should be submitted by c.o.b. Monday 13 April to supportedprojects@fog.org.au. We hope to announce successful applications by end May. For inquiries contact supportedprojects@fog.org.au.

2020 Landcare Australia Bushfire and Natural Disaster Appeal Bushfire Grants. The aim of the program is to support the urgent needs of the landcare community to restore essential wildlife habitat, shelterbelts and fences, protect our waterways, manage weeds and feral animals, work with Traditional Owner groups and run local community workshops, amongst other recovery activities. Grants of up to

\$15,000 (excluding GST) are available. Applications close Friday 13th March. The Landcare Australia Grants Team are here to help with any questions, and can be reached on (02) 8440 8819, or via email at grants@landcareaustralia.com.au. For the guidelines, application form and more information on the Bushfire Recovery Grants, click [here](#).

Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare Committee is registered as a charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission ABN 51686917287.



Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare, Upper Bidgee Bulletin

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