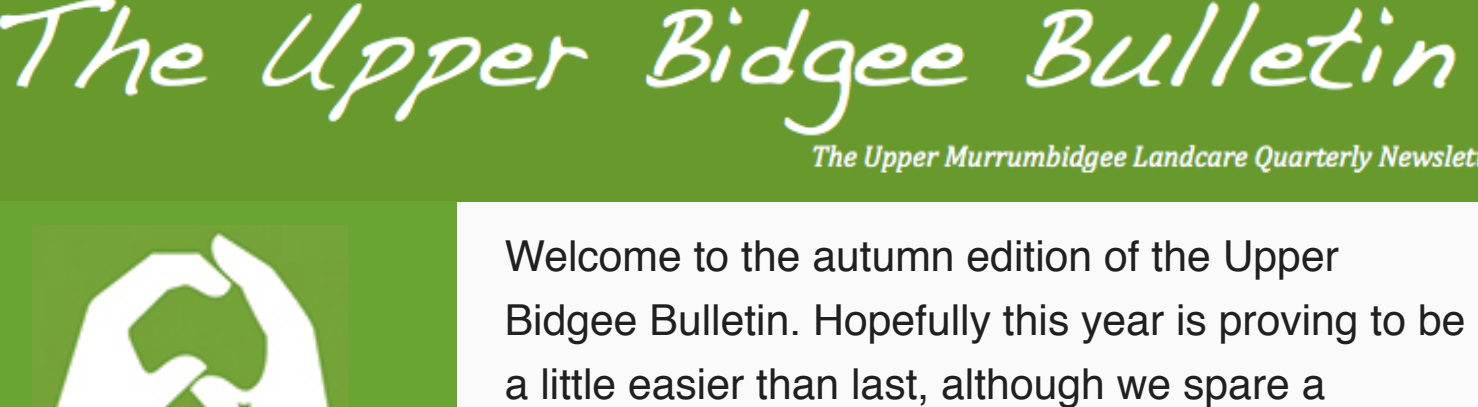
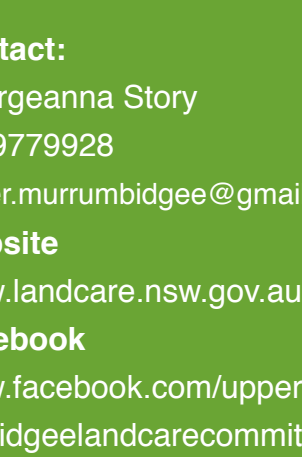




The Upper Bidgee Bulletin
The Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare Quarterly Newsletter

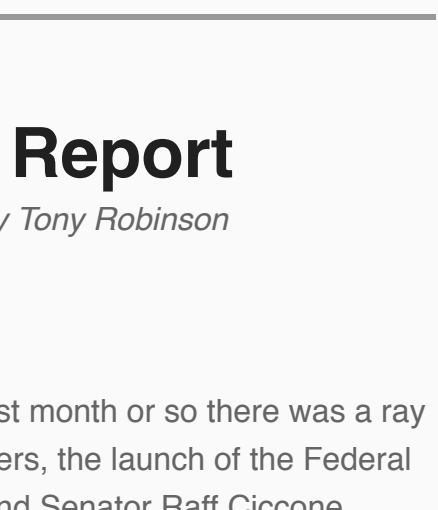


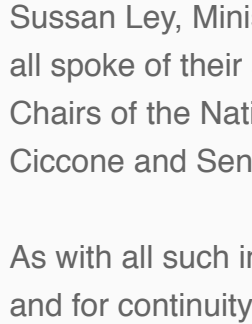
Contact:
Georganna Story
0429779928
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Website
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Facebook
www.facebook.com/uppermurrumbidgeelandcarecommittee

Welcome to the autumn edition of the Upper Bidgee Bulletin. Hopefully this year is proving to be a little easier than last, although we spare a thought for all those impacted by the recent floods. A relaxing easter break is definitely in order and what better way to start than flipping through our newsletter. We hope you enjoy...





UMLC President's Report

by Tony Robinson

Amongst all the appalling news coming out of Parliament House over the last month or so there was a ray of sunshine for Landcare. On 16 March I attended, with many other landcarers, the launch of the Federal Parliamentary Friends of Landcare led by Senator Perin Davey (National) and Senator Raff Ciccone (ALP). This follows on from State governments who have launched similar initiatives: NSW Parliamentary Friends of Landcare in 2015 and Parliamentary Friends of Landcare SA in 2019.

In addition to Senators Davey and Ciccone, the Hon. David Littleproud, Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management, the Hon. Julie Collins MP, Shadow Minister for Agriculture, the Hon. Susan Ryan, Minister for the Environment, and Ms. Tami Buller MP, Shadow Minister for the Environment all spoke of their support for the Landcare movement, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2019. The Chairs of the National Landcare Network and Landcare Australia also spoke and thanked Senator Ciccone and Senator Davey and the large number of parliamentarians for their support.

As with all such initiatives it will be interesting to see how this plays out in increased funding for Landcare and for continuity of employment for our Landcare coordinators and others. I managed to get a few seconds of time with Senator Davey to push the cause for coordinators, and I followed that up with emails along the same lines to both Senators.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the Upper Bidgee Bulletin with all that is going on in our region under the Landcare banner.

I do though want to express my sadness at Dennis Mason's passing. I have known Dennis for many years. He was always generous of his time to help the environment. As just one of the many examples I could mention, a few years ago there was a most weird intrusion along the Cooma Creek, well out of his patch, but of course Dennis had no hesitation in bringing down his spray unit at no charge to assist. As Lauren says, we will all miss Dennis.



Coordinators Corner

by Georganna Story

It has been a slow build up to the year but we are now in full swing. As you will see in the 'Upcoming Events' section, there are a number of information sessions coming up and our pest control program is in full swing. It is such a simple pleasure to be able to meet up with our community face to face again. It is also a busy time for grant applications, with many bushfire recovery funds becoming available. In anticipation for future projects and current expression of interests, our local Landcare groups would be interested in hearing about wildlife habitat restoration activities the community may be interested in. We will keep you posted on any success.

I would like to wish everyone a safe and happy Easter break. The weather looks like it will be perfect for getting those plants into the ground. For my break, it's all about the new chook house! Thanks again to those that have provided articles for our newsletter, it's great to see so much going on in our region.

Upcoming events

UMLC Bredbo-Michelago vertebrate pest control campaign. If you live in the live in the Michelago-Bredbo region and are interested in support for pests control, register your interest with Georganna on 0429779928.

Michelago Landcare Tree planting information session, 10am Saturday 10th April, Michelago Hall. Ross Kuchel, LLS Agricultural Advisor, will lead discussion on the planting options for various purposes, such as wind breaks & shelter belts. RSVP Georganna on upper.murrumbidgee@gmail.com or 0429779928.

Small Farms Network Cultural Burning Workshop, 8:30am Saturday 10th April, Bungendore, tickets \$225. Tickets available at smallfarmscapital.org/evlen-4210284.

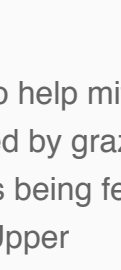
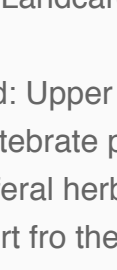
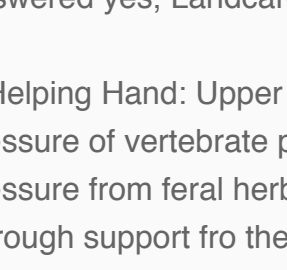
Royalla Landcare Living with Insects, 2pm Sunday 11th April at Royalla Community Hall. Roger Farrow, local entomologist, will discuss our local insects and their role in the balance of nature. Bring along any local insects of interest. RSVP Marjke on royallalandcare@shopbasics.com.au.

Royalla Landcare RHDV community release, 4pm Sunday 11th April at Royalla Community Hall. Registered participants can collect their RHDV baited carrots. For more information contact Marjke on royallalandcare@shopbasics.com.au.

Numerella Landscape Restoration Working Bee, 9-12pm Sunday 25th April. Plantings, installing possum traps and creating leaky weirs. For more details and to RSVP contact Alison at alisonrue@outlook.com.

Boorowa Landcare Strategies for Success, 8:30am 10th May Boorowa Ex-Services & Citizens Club, tickets \$30. For more information contact Linda on 0459681018 or boorowacomunitylandcare@gmail.com.

RCS Australia Soil Carbon Field Day, 9am 23rd April Nimmitabel Hall and 'Curry Flat', tickets \$22. For more information and to register call 1800 356 004 or go to the website rcsagloballearning.com/courses/scd-nimmitabel2021.



A Helping Hand

Upper Bidgee Landcare Wildlife and Farming Recovery Project

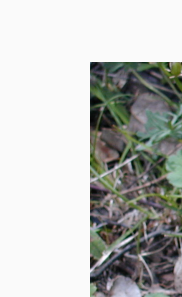
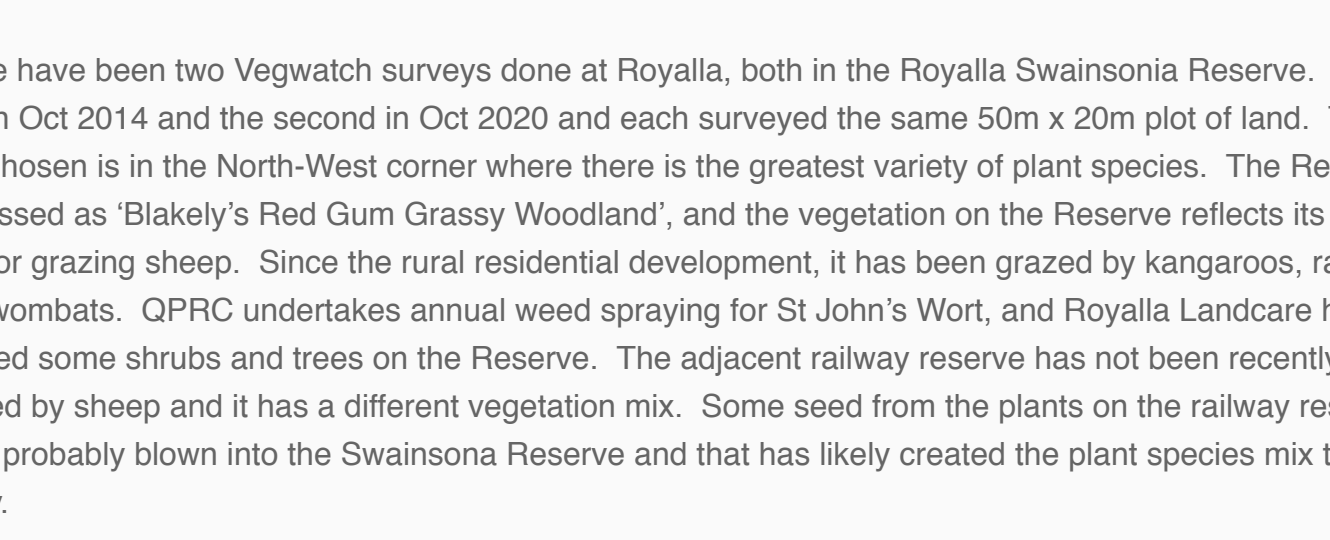
Do you live in the Michelago-Bredbo region? Are you having issues with vertebrate pests? If you answered yes, Landcare could support you in your pest control efforts.

A Helping Hand: Upper Bidgee Landcare Wildlife and Farming Recovery Project aims to help mitigate the pressure of vertebrate pests in the wake of recent fires. Regeneration is being hampered by grazing pressure from feral herbivores and increased predation pressure on stock and wildlife is being felt. Through support to the South East Local Land Services Bushfire Recovery Program, Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare are offering support in vertebrate pest control.

Our survey at the end last year identified that foxes, rabbits and cats were the main pest that people were dealing with. Deer and goats were the next most troublesome, although the recent rain has meant that many of these larger pests have retreated into the more bushy areas for the time being.

Control has begun, with several landholders borrowing cage traps for cats and dogs. The contract shooter is organising with participants and a contract trapper has been found. We are also looking to coordinate a RHDV release in two areas. The success of this project is determined by the number of neighbouring landholders that participate. So if you are concerned about pests around your property talk to your neighbours and consider the support Landcare can provide.

Contact Georganna on 0429 779928 or upper.murrumbidgee@gmail.com to find out more or express your interest in support.



Vegwatch at Royalla

Jim Noble, Royalla Landcare

Vegwatch is a scheme for monitoring the biodiversity of vegetation in the ACT and Region and, like Frogwatch and Waterwatch, are citizen scientist efforts to monitor aspects of our Environment. It was developed for the Molonglo Catchment Group, with support from others, and is based on the ACT Vegetation Survey and Monitoring Manual by Sarah Sharp and Loni Gould. It aims to monitor vegetation and habitat condition in the ACT Region, and through that, detect changes over time, more details can be found at <http://act-vegwatch.org.au/>. There are a great many things that impact vegetation and habitat—such as landforms, soil types, rainfall, land use, land management, etc. Considerable effort has gone into the design of the methodology to get consistency in the results.

There have been two Vegwatch surveys done at Royalla, both in the Royalla Swainsona Reserve. The first in Oct 2014 and the second in Oct 2020 and each surveyed the same 50m x 20m plot of land. The plot chosen is in the North-West corner where there is the greatest variety of plant species. The Reserve is classed as Blakey's Red Gum Grassy Woodland, and the vegetation on the Reserve reflects its former use for grazing sheep. Since the rural residential development, it has been grazed by kangaroos, rabbits and wombats. CPHC undertakes annual weed spraying for St John's Wort, and Royalla Landcare has planted some shrubs and trees on the Reserve. The adjacent railway reserve has not been recently grazed by sheep and it has a different vegetation mix. Some seed from the plants on the railway reserve have probably blown into the Swainsona Reserve and that has likely created the plant species mix there today.



Royalla's *Swainsona recta* and Hoary sunray, *Leucochrysum albicans* (Photos courtesy of Marjke Booth)

A Vegwatch survey entails assessing:

- Plant species diversity;
- The structural diversity of vegetation;
- Regeneration of native trees and shrubs;
- Species cover; and
- Terrestrial habitat condition.

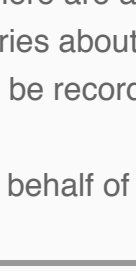
In each Royalla survey about 65 different plant species were identified and the relatively small differences can probably be put down to the drought leading up to 2020. In the latest survey two plant species (Hoary Sunray (*Leucochrysum albicans*) and Silky Swainsona-pea (*Swainsona sericea*) are classed as endangered and threatened, respectively. In the first survey we also had some Small Purple Pea (*Swainsona recta*) that had been planted, but none of this endangered species survived the drought. However, there are some of these plants growing on the adjacent railway reserve. Interestingly, the Royalla Vegwatch plot has the most diverse mix of plants of any site in the Region.

One of the challenges for us with the Vegwatch surveys is having people with the skills to identify the various plant species. In the latest survey we were privileged to have the assistance of Sarah Sharp. The survey usually takes about 4 hours and involves at least four people. Our hope is to continue the surveys every few years. As Sarah Sharp advises, a Vegwatch Survey tells you 'the What', but not 'the Why'. Understanding why changes are occurring is the more important issue. The excellent 'La Nina' 2020 growing season might help with seed germination and plant regeneration – time will tell!



Photo: a beautiful Grasshopper and Hoary Sunray (A. Noble)

Of interest, during the 2014 Vegwatch Survey, a potentially endangered native Key's Matchstick Grasshopper (*Keyascia scura*) was found. None were noticed in the latest Survey. The loss of suitable habitat seems to be causing a significant decline in their numbers.



We will all miss Dennis Mason

by Lauren vanDyke, Bredbo Landcare

A farewell to Bredbo Landcare's champion and friend was held at the Bredbo Hall on 20 March 2021. Dennis was a driving force of Bredbo Landcare for many years and current Landcare members spoke at his wake. Below are their heartfelt words.

On behalf of Bredbo Community Landcare Group we wish to extend our deepest sympathies to Sheila, Sean and other family members and friends.

The Masons are a family of hard working and devoted Landcarers. I say the Masons because while it was Dennis who was the member of Landcare for many years and the Chair for 8 years it was a family affair. The Monaro Post ran the following in Nov 2014:

The incumbent Chair of eight years, Dennis Mason of Colinton, decided it was time to step down and hand over the reins. The meeting toasted the committed and untiring efforts of Dennis and his wife, Sheila, a most energetic and productive pair. The new committee and the Bredbo community in general, would like to thank Dennis and Sheila for their services to the local landscape and for playing a critical part in keeping Bredbo Landcare alive. They would sometimes singlehandedly manage landcare projects and Dennis always ran meticulous committee meetings. Sheila performed most of the behind the scenes work and together it would be fair to say Bredbo Landcare would probably not be active without the Masons' passion and drive.

I would like to add to this that Dennis was also a stickler for keeping the purse strings tight and tight during his reign and consequently Bredbo Landcare had a healthy bank balance when he stepped down as Chair (and still is today thanks to his legacy).

One project of note was Jack's Gully. Dennis instigated the monstrous restoration job and oversaw it as a project from start to finish. He organised the huge clean up (where there was a historic rubbish dump) to planting masses of native trees and shrubs and many working bees to keep the weeds down while they established, which they have. He even took the brunt from the EPA about illegal earthworks in the gully as Ken was happily swinging his excavator arm in the gully (while donating his services) to clear out the blackberries. Dennis followed through with the EPA restoration instructions and signed in erosion control matting and straw bales. He then helped Jimmy with the fencing. The great work inspired a Tidy Towns Award.



Our committee met the other night and discussed the idea of establishing a Dennis Mason memorial walking track that goes through the Jack's Gully and Two Rivers Watlie Park Drive Landcare areas, past the river junction and loops back into town. (There was a resounding support for this on the day and we will work with Dennis' family to make this happen).

If there are any Bredbo Landcare members or anyone from the general community who might have some stories about Dennis could they please send them to Sheila by email dasmason4028@gmail.com as they will be recorded in a book of memories of Dennis..

On behalf of the Bredbo Community Landcare Group - RIP Dennis.



Upper Murrumbidgee River will benefit from native fish recovery funding!

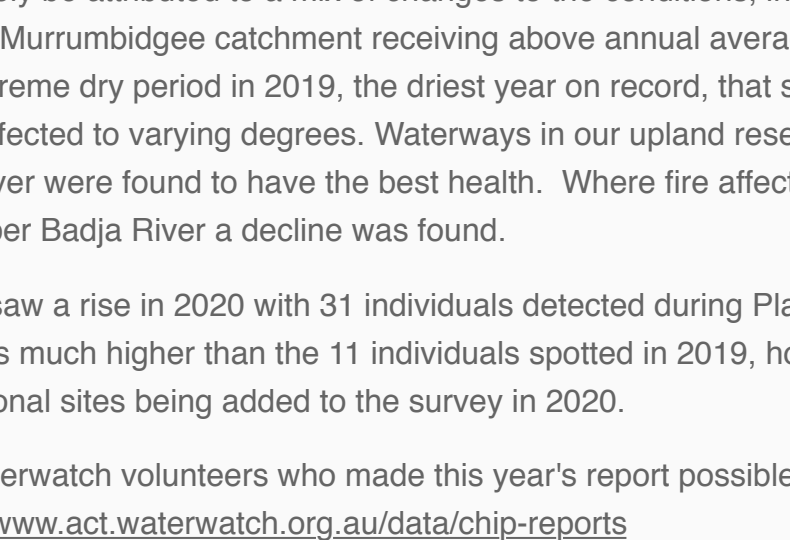
Antia Braddeman, UMDR

The Upper Murrumbidgee Demonstration Reach has been successful in securing \$300,000 in Native Fish Recovery Strategy funding to protect and improve the upper Murrumbidgee River over the next two years!

This is huge news for this vital 320km stretch of river on Ngarrigo and Ngurnawal country which rises in the Snowy Mountains, snakes through the Monaro high plain, through Canberra and on to Burrinjuck dam. The 'upper Bidgee' is home to several nationally and/or state (NSW/ACT) listed threatened species including Trout Cod, Murray Cod, Macquarie Perch and Platypus as well as Rakai (native water rat), Eastern water dragons and Eastern Long-necked Turtles.

The funding will support a number of key conservation actions on the river, including improving instream habitat affected by sand and sediment, mapping fish habitat, controlling invasive weeds like Willows and Blackberries, revegetating riverbanks, shoring up erosion sites and running capacity building workshops. The project will be supported by the UMDR's Adventurous Volunteers and an annual native fish showcase will be held at the end of each year to promote all the different things occurring on the upper Bidgee (by the project and otherwise) to help our native fish thrive!

The funding was announced by the Commonwealth Government recently as part the \$5 million National Native Fish Recovery Strategy. Approximately \$2.6 million will be split between four key areas in the Murray Darling Basin - the upper Murrumbidgee, the Mid-Murray Floodplains, the Lower Darling and the Condamine Headwaters.



ACT Government fish scientists carrying out a fish survey on the 'Bidgee' at Bush Heritage Australia's Scottsdale Reserve (Photo courtesy of Annette Ruzicka)

The UMDR partners include Bush Heritage Australia, Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch, the Australian River Restoration Centre, the ACT Government, University of Canberra, the Murray Darling Basin Authority, Local Land Services and NSW DPI Fisheries. The UMDR is looking forward to working with the community to help build healthier and more resilient river systems in the Murray Darling Basin!

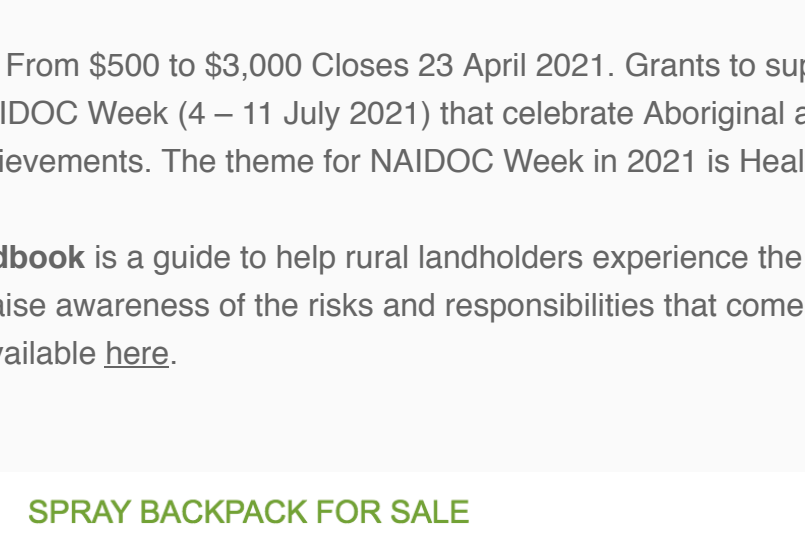
If you would like to be involved please contact Antia- upperbidgeereach@gmail.com



Feral Cats, why all the interest?

by Georganna Story, UMLC

You might be wondering why your Landcare groups are running a series of pest control campaigns and why some have a focus on feral cats. As a result of last years bushfires, there has been surge of funding for environmental activities that contribute towards recovery and restoration. The local knowledge, commitment and capacity of local Landcare groups meant that they were an obvious choice to help deliver these activities. Pest control was highlighted as an important aspect for wildlife recovery. The surviving wildlife were more exposed to predators, would need to travel further for food and water and herbivores, such as goats and deer, graze on the regenerating vegetation and hinder regrowth. There are challenges for control of all pest species but feral cats are particularly troublesome. They are cryptic, less likely to take baits and can be hard to trap.



Cage trapping is an intensive form of control (Photo courtesy of Allison Swain)

So why try to control feral cats? Feral cats are excellent hunters, have a broad diet and live in all habitats throughout the country. There are staggering estimates as to how many native animals are killed by feral cats annually. It is estimated that a single cat kills approximately 1,100 animals every year. So when we consider that the recent bushfires are estimated to have killed 3 billion animals, we need to remember that this is about the same number of animals killed by feral cats every year.

It can be hard to know what you can do to help. Unfortunately domestic cats are known to kill just as many native animals as their feral counterparts, so keeping domestic cats contained is an easy start. Other options include direct control and control prey such as rabbits and rodents, as these species keep cats at artificially high numbers. There are other options available and new research underway. To hear more about this Michelago Landcare is hosting a feral cat workshop with Dr Andrew Claridge, the DPI Feral Cat Research Officer. The session is on Saturday 24th April. For further details or to register contact Georganna on 0429779928 or at upper.murrumbidgee@gmail.com.



Waterwatch's 2020 Catchment Health Report released

Antia Braddeman, Cooma Waterwatch

Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch recently launched its 2020 catchment health indicator program (CHIP) report on World Water Day.

The report is based on a record 1,872 water quality surveys, 184 water bug surveys and 219 riverbank vegetation assessments collected by over 200 volunteers at 229 sites across the upper Murrumbidgee catchment. Waterwatch is proud to report that despite the many upheavals of the year including fires, floods and the COVID-19 lockdown all our volunteer remained part of the program showing their strong commitment to sampling our waterways!

The 2020 report has found that out of 98 report cards, 4 river reaches are found to be in 'excellent' health, 33 were 'good', 33 presents as 'fair' and 3 received a 'poor' rating. Overall, 59% of reaches fell into the 'fair/poor' range which is approximately the same as 2019 and a rise from 55% in 2018.

The 2020 results can likely be attributed to a mix of changes to the conditions, including the 2019/20 bushfires and the upper Murrumbidgee catchment receiving above annual average rainfall. This is following the already extreme dry period in 2019, the driest year on record, that saw all three main CHIP parameters adversely affected to varying degrees. Waterways in our upland reserves such as Gibraltar Creek and the Cotter River were found to have the best health. Where fire affected historically healthy reaches such as the upper Bidgee River a decline was found.

Platypus numbers also saw a rise in 2020 with 31 individuals detected during Platypus Month across eight reaches. This number is higher than the 11 individuals spotted in 2019, however this may also be attributed to three additional sites being added to the survey in 2020.

Many thanks to our Waterwatch volunteers who made this year's report possible! The 2020 CHIP report can be found at: <https://www.act.waterwatch.org.au/data/chip-reports>

The 2020 Waterwatch Catchment Health Indicator report was launched on World Water Day by the ACT Government's Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability (Photo courtesy of Shane Rattenbury)

In the news

NSW Landcare Program State Gathering. A key component of the NSW Landcare Program is the organising of a community of practice, or 'gathering workshop', for program participants (i.e. organisations and coordinators). The program team is now planning for the gathering in Dubbo on June 8-10.

2021 National Landcare Conference. The National Landcare Conference attracts delegates from around the world, and from rural regions to the communities in Australia. It all with a common goal: to share vision to actively restore and protect the environment in their local community through sustainable land management and conservation activities. Due to COVID-19, we understand that some people may not travel to Sydney this year - so we will bring the conference to you! You can register as an in-person delegate attending the conference or as an online delegate (free registration). Early Bird tickets offering a substantial discount for in-person on sale until May 1, 2021.

2021 Gallagher Landcare Electric Fencing Grants. Up to \$8,000 Closes 9 April 2021. Grants for an individual electric fencing project grant for fencing materials are open to Landcare, Coastalcare and Junior Landcare Groups, volunteer-based community groups, individual landholders, farmers, agriculturalists and graziers.

2021 NAIDOC Grants. From \$500 to \$3,000 Closes 23 April 2021. Grants to support activities and events in NSW held during NAIDOC Week (4 – 11 July 2021) that celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and achievements. The theme for NAIDOC Week in 2021 is Heal Country!

The Rural Living Handbook is a guide to help rural landholders experience the wonderful aspects of rural life as well as to raise awareness of the risks and responsibilities that come with that lifestyle. The handbook is free and available [here](#).

SPRAY BACKPACK FOR SALE

Southern ACT Catchment Group has for sale 5 used Solo Recover 418 spray back packs. 20L capacity battery powered. Charges and manuals included. All in excellent condition. Asking \$350 each but very open to negotiation.

Contact Martin Lind at waterwatch@actwaterwatch.org.au or 0470 870 448

Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare Committee is registered as a charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission ABN 51688917287.

Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare, Upper Bidgee Bulletin

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