

The Upper Bidgee Bulletin

The Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare Quarterly Newsletter



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Welcome to the summer edition of the Upper Bidgee Bulletin. Well, it has been a year like no other and I think everyone has deserved some time off to rest and regroup. Sit back and enjoy the articles from our groups and partners, we hope you find their stories interesting...



UMLC President's Report

by Tony Robinson

Droughts, fires and floods. We expect that. This is Australia after all. What was unexpected was a plague, a new virus spreading through the human population. We have been spared the worst effects due to rapid action by our governments, most people abiding by expert's advice and that, as an island, we can control to a large extent people arriving at our borders. Nevertheless, such a pandemic has not visited us for a century, and the consequences have been profound, giving us an unprecedented year to remember. Here's hoping that in 2021, with the arrival of vaccines and continuing vigilance, we can put this behind us. As Georgeanna says, well done everyone for continuing to work on a range of projects to protect and enhance the natural environment, despite the tough conditions. This Summer edition of the Bidgee Bulletin is testament to that.

What has struck me this year on our own property, with the arrival of regular rain, is the extraordinary bounce back of species, particularly grass species that I haven't seen for many years. We used to remark on seeing Kangaroo Grass which we felt was unlikely to come back to any extent but is now emerging everywhere. Also, we hadn't seen the native Wild Sorghum for many years but back it comes, particularly along drainage lines. Corkscrew is a metre tall and Wallaby Grass species are dominating. Water drives the system as they say. It is a great sight.

Thanks, Georgeanna, for the wonderful work you have done for all of us this year and to our UMLC

Committee members, Maryke Booth, Antia Brademann, Jo Gaha, Alex Mond, Lauren van Dyke, and Jim Wharton. I hope we can all enjoy some normality over the Christmas and New Year period despite the virus upsetting plans once again. Go well and have a happy and productive 2021.



Coordinators Corner

by Georgeanna Story

Despite the extraordinary year we have had I still find it hard to believe we are nearing the end. It does however, encourage you to stop and reflect on what Landcare in our region has achieved this year. Despite the restrictions and challenges we have faced our groups have been very busy. We are involved with habitat restoration projects, pest control programs, revegetation plantings and many wildflower walks. The season has provided some spectacular days! We also continue to work with many of our partners such as Landcare NSW, Local Land Services, Molonglo Conservation Group, NPWS, CSIRO and DPI.

In last few months AGM's have been on the agenda, including UMLC. I am please to say that all of our wonderful committee members have been reinstated. I would like to thank each and every one of them for their support and guidance. It had been a change in the way we operate, with the coordination time reduced substantially and the patience and understanding from the group is greatly appreciated. I would especially like to thank our Chair, Tony Robinson, who manages everything with good humour and a smile!

On behalf of UMLC I would also like to thank our groups that have contributed to all of our newsletters this year. I would be lost without your contributions :) I would like to wish everyone a wonderful and relaxing Christmas break and look forward to catching up with you in the new year.

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 Georgeanna on 0429779928 or complete the [survey](#), it takes about 3 minutes!

UMLC and Numeralla Pest control campaigns are collecting camera trap footage and will need keen volunteers to identify the animals on the photos towards the beginning of next year. Anyone interested in assisting please contact Georgeanna on 0429779928 or Jim at dinoxing@westnet.com.au.

NSW Department of Primary Industry are exploring landholder perceptions and attitudes about nominating African lovegrass for future weed biological control research via an important preliminary short survey. Biological control of weeds uses natural organisms (insects and/or plant diseases) to reduce the harm these plants cause to the environment, including land used for farming. More information and to complete the preliminary survey [here](#).



A Helping Hand



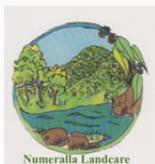
Upper Bidgee Landcare Wildlife and Farming Recovery Project

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 from the South East Local Land Services Bushfire Recovery Program, Upper Murrumbidgee Landcare are offering support in vertebrate pest control.

To understand what is needed and what is already being done, we are asking residents of the Michelago-Bredbo region to undertake our short survey, which is open until the end of the year.

Contact Georgeanna on 0429 779928 or upper.murrumbidgee@gmail.com for details, or take the survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/597X2FH>.



Numeralla Landcare working with CSIRO on rabbit calicivirus predator research

by Robyn Hall, CSIRO

Numeralla Landcare are in the midst of their second pest animal control program, controlling feral cats and foxes around the Numeralla township. The first program removed 7 predators around the fire scar area and dietary analysis demonstrated the impact they were having. Seven native species were identified and included mammals, reptiles and fish. Monitoring also highlighted the need for continual predator control with a koala seen in the area. In this second campaign Numeralla Landcare have teamed up with CSIRO to provide samples for ongoing research.



A little visitor at one of the Numeralla trap monitoring sites

CSIRO is currently collecting samples from predators as part of their research into rabbit calicivirus. Rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus 2 (RHDV2) is a new strain of rabbit calicivirus that was discovered in Australia in 2015. In contrast to older strains, RHDV2 also kills hares as well as rabbits, although no reports have yet been published of RHDV2 infecting anything other than rabbits, hares, and cottontail rabbits in North America. However, there is a renewed debate around the safety of RHDV2 for other species, in particular as traces of the virus can be detected in the faeces of scavengers.

To shed more light on these issues, scientists are looking at predators that may scavenge infected rabbit carcasses to look for any evidence of exposure to RHDV2 and whether this is associated with signs of a true infection or simply the result of environmental contamination. Through this CSIRO-led project, funded by Meat & Livestock Australia, scientists will look for traces of RHDV2 in faeces, the liver, and in the blood, and look to see if there is any evidence of liver disease. The Team is also planning to grow liver cells from predators in the laboratory to see whether these cells can be experimentally infected with RHDV2.

This project also indirectly supports work currently carried out through the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions (CISS), which is currently investigating whether RHDV2 would be a suitable registered biocontrol product, which would then enable the strain to be used strategically. While RHDV2 is currently circulating naturally, these natural outbreaks only occur once rabbit populations build up to very high levels. Registered controls could be applied to rabbit populations before a critical mass of rabbits is reached, thereby preventing numbers from building up and resulting in less rabbit damage.

For their planned work CSIRO needs access to very fresh samples from scavengers (feral cats, foxes or wild dogs), ideally immediately after or within a few hours of them being killed, due to the nature of the samples that need to be collected. If you think you or your organisation are able to help provide these samples, please contact CSIRO (Robyn.hall@csiro.au or Ina.smith@csiro.au).



Queanbeyan Landcare's mammoth tree planting effort

by Helen Hadobas, Queanbeyan Landcare

Queanbeyan Landcare planted nearly one thousand trees on seven properties in the **Fernleigh Park**

subdivision near Queanbeyan this year, with grant money from the Federal Government.



The **Friends of Mount Jerrabomberra and Stringybark Ridge** subgroup has put in 240 person-hours over the last two years, shared over Mt Jerrabomberra Nature Reserve and the Old Cooma Road offset block, removing or poisoning woody weeds including briar rose.



The **Bicentennial Park Group** in August and following months has replanted the lookout hill which was badly affected by the drought. Council paid for plants and fixed the watering system. We hope the *Eremophilas*, *Atriplex* and other species we have chosen will thrive, even in the next drought.



There was a fabulous flowering of native species in the natural areas of the park this Spring after the welcome rain.

We have started a new project in collaboration with Queanbeyan Wildcare and Queanbeyan Men's Shed to provide **habitat boxes for brushtail possums** needing a new home after being booted out of their city dwellings! QPRC is also working with Queanbeyan Men's Shed to produce habitat boxes for other arboreal and flying animals including birds and bats in the urban areas.



A walk in the Tinderrys

Well it took three attempts but we finally managed to take our walk in the Tinderrys. It was a beautiful day in the end and our host, Markus Buchhorn, was a perfect guide. Despite missing the peak of the orchid flowering period, 10 participants from 4 of our Landcare groups were treated to spectacular views and an interesting assortment of plants.



Markus was a wealth of knowledge about the geology and ecology of the area

There were some challenging sections in the walk and a shout out to our octogenarian who put us all to shame. Happy birthday Alex!



Our long time Landcare member, Alex Mond, taking in the sights and hills!

The diversity of the property is fluid and changes across the site, with season and with conditions. Markus uses camera traps to keep track of these changes and provides wildlife watering point to spy on the local wildlife. You can see some of his camera footage on our Facebook page. Thanks again to Markus for hosting us and we look forward to more visits in the future.



Stable roads and tracks- its all in the design!

Antia Braddeman, UMDR

Unsealed roads and tracks are essential to get around on your property, yet a track that is continually washing out costs time and money to fix, not to mention the wear and tear on vehicles. Roads and tracks are also a source of sediment pollution into our creeks and waterways, and this can greatly affect their health. Knowing about good road and track design can, therefore, make a big difference to erosion, water quality and the amount of time and money spent on maintenance.

Landholders and catchment managers alike recently learned about all this and more at a webinar and field day jointly organised by the UMDR, Rivers of Carbon and the ACT Government's NRM program. The webinar and field trip were presented by Peter Fogarty from the Soil Knowledge Network and Ashley Bolton from the NSW Soil Conservation Service who both provided a wealth of knowledge on the topic

and gave participants the opportunity to ask specific questions. A big thanks to Icon Water who hosted the field trip at their offset property at Williamsdale.



Participants at the field day discussing waterway crossings on farm tracks.

A roads and track guide and a recording of the webinar are now available on the Rivers of Carbon website: <https://riversofcarbon.org.au/improving-farm-roads-and-tracks-to-withstand-erosion>



Royalla Vertebrate Pest Animal Management Program wrap up

Georgeanna Story, UMLC

That's a wrap for the Royalla Vertebrate Pest Animal Management Program, with the Spring 2020 session signalling the second and final control session of the project. This second round of the pest program was once again offered to all landholders within the Royalla area and provided a professional pest control contractor free of charge. With the recent rain and improved conditions, rabbits were the dominant concern for most people. The larger pests, like pigs, goats and deer, which were of higher priority in 2019, were less frequently seen since the rain. Australian Feral Animal Control and Management Services (AFACMS) were again contracted to survey and control and spent a week working across the village and surrounds.

The program in 2019 identified the importance of neighbouring properties participating in the program and effort was made to sign up adjoining properties this time around. In all 35 properties signed up for the 2020 program and while this was almost 3 times more than in 2019 with greater clustering, links with key properties were still missing. This was despite QPRC again permitting access to the creek reserves within the target area. This recent work was also hampered by mid-week evening rain and an unfortunate incident between the drone and a wedge-tailed eagle. The drone came off second best and was not usable for the majority of the control period. Both events served to reduce the number of properties attended and the number and diversity of animals controlled.



The goats in the line of fire and the of wedge-tailed eagles that had other ideas!

Despite these issues over 170 rabbits and two foxes were shot. As part of the rabbit control, blood samples were collected for Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV) antibody testing by CSIRO. There are several strains of RHDV and results suggest that a release of the K5 strain towards the beginning of autumn would be successful in reducing numbers across Royalla. The delay of delivery of the K5 strain is due to two factors, firstly the virus is released on carrot baits and unlikely to be consumed during these good conditions. Secondly, the K5 strain is also less effective on kittens and has the potential of immunising those young rabbits instead. The R2 strain was found in one rabbit and provides hope that it will move through the population naturally over the coming weeks as insects become more abundant. Royalla Landcare have registered for the K5 release that Local Land Services will run in autumn next year, which encourages landholders to free feed rabbits with carrots before providing K5 baited carrots for landholders to distribute across their property.

Vertebrate pests are a concern for many Royalla residents, however the smaller size of properties within the Royalla Estate and the mixed level of experience and capabilities within the community provides challenges for pest control. Pests are moving across boundaries, baiting is restricted and the use of firearms is difficult. The Royalla Vertebrate Pest Animal Program was a novel program that looked to address some of these issues. We demonstrated that the use of a professional contractor could successfully and safely work within the estate and highlighted the necessary factors for future programs. We thank the community for their participation and Local Land Services for the grant funds. Royalla Landcare would also like to thank our chair, Maryke Booth, for all of her effort throughout the program.

The critically endangered Bredbo gentian (*Gentiana bredboensis*) is a tiny, annual plant with pale blue to white star-shaped flowers known from only one small population east of Bredbo. The entire known range of this plant is a 20 m x 20 m patch in a boggy drainage line. The highest number of plants ever recorded in this population was 200 over 20 years ago, but for the past few years less than 10 plants have existed within a 5 m x 5 m section of the total known habitat area.

In January 2020, half of the patch was burnt in the summer bushfires. Monitoring was recently undertaken by DPIE threatened species officers as part of the Saving Our Species program and to our astonishment and joy, we found 280 plants, mostly within the burnt area, making this the largest number of Bredbo gentians ever recorded. Many of the plants were even setting seed, some of which were collected and sent to PlantBank at Mt Annan. Prior to 2020, only one seed collection had been made and considering no plants exist in collections or botanic gardens, this has been a remarkable and critical achievement for the conservation of the species.



The characteristic pale blue to white star-shaped flowers of the Bredbo gentian

The reasons behind this amazing increase in plant numbers include the reduction in shading from canopy vegetation that burnt in the fire (the plants thrive in full sun) and the fantastic post-fire rainfall since autumn 2020.

Bredbo Landcare members are helping to keep the habitat healthy for the gentian, with volunteers lending a hand with hand-weeding and maintenance of the site.

For this extremely rare and enigmatic little plant, 2020 has provided a precious opportunity to study the fascinating ecology and seed biology of this species and to give it a fighting chance in the future.





Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch releases 2020 Platypus Month Survey Summary

Antia Braddeman, Cooma Waterwatch

Waterwatch has been monitoring platypus in the upper Murrumbidgee catchment every year, during 'Platypus Month' (August) since 2015, supported by community volunteers. A big thanks to our volunteers who brave the cold winter conditions to collect this valuable data especially with this year's added complications of COVID-19.

This year's surveys were certainly monitoring a very different river system to 2019! The record-breaking drought of 2018/2019 saw many of the smaller tributaries (ie. creeks and streams) of the upper Murrumbidgee catchment cease to flow or dry up altogether. In contrast- for the month of August 2020, 105mm of rain was recorded on top of an already wet year and several surveys were flooded out! Two of our Murrumbidgee River sites (Point Hut and Scottsdale), were impacted either directly or indirectly by the January/February 2020 fires. The volumes of sediment and ash that washed into the river from the heavy, post fire rain, smothered much of the river substrate. This is key habitat of waterbugs which are the primary food source of platypus.

Despite this, Waterwatch was pleased to report numbers were more or less steady over-all across all the sites monitored, compared to previous years. Even in the fire affected sites (where we had feared the worst as anecdotal reports initially suggested a lack of activity) numbers were comparable to 2019. Past research by the Australian Platypus Conservancy has suggested that a wet Autumn and Winter may support a successful breeding season in the Spring. Fingers crossed!



Keep an eye out for our platypus!

Photo courtesy of the Australian Platypus Conservancy.

While we are seeing steady number of platypus at our sites, it is important to understand that there can still be localised declines and situations where populations are cut off from each other, resulting in the species becoming less resilient over time. In our region, there are anecdotal reports of declines in neighbouring catchments and these are of great concern, especially in light of recent calls to list the

species as vulnerable. Hence it is critical that we continue to monitor platypus and do all we can to protect the species and their habitat both in areas where declines are occurring and in areas where populations are steady or doing well.

One issue that was picked up this year was the effect of litter and fishing line. One platypus was seen with a fish hook and line lodged in its back and another had a band around its body- both situations which are lethal (after a long period of suffering). Preventing litter going into our waterways and never leaving behind your fishing line are important actions we can all take to protect our platypus.

For a copy of the Upper Murrumbidgee Waterwatch 2020 Platypus Month Summary or to register your interest for next year's surveys please email coomawaterwatch@gmail.com.

In the news

Rivers of Carbon provided an article on their Riparian grass restoration along Gungoandra Creek at Scottsdale Reserve project. The article can be found [here](#).

The **Australian Season Bushfire Outlook** is an analysis of the predicted fire conditions for each state. Australia's landscape is now under the influence of La Niña and as a result the landscape and weather conditions are very different to those experienced in the last two years.

This is a summary of the key points for NSW and the ACT:

- In NSW the fire outlook for forested areas not burnt in last year's fires remains normal. In these areas we need to monitor for an escalation in fire danger associated with prolonged heatwaves that can occur during La Niña years.
- September and November 2020 have been the hottest on record since records began in 1910.
- The La Niña weather event and decreased stocking rates has resulted in high grass and crop fuel loads. This has increased the risk of grass fires particularly later in summer depending on the grass curing rates and rainfall.

The report states that ACT/Capital Region residents should review their fire plans with a particular focus on grass fire risk and take steps to mitigate that risk. This includes managing grass near their properties to prevent the impact of fast running grass fires. [Read the full report](#)

Small Farms Network Grassing the Bare Patches Project have a webinar on soil tests and what do they mean. Check it out here: <https://smallfarmscapital.org/summaries-and-links/9401219>.

NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment Adapt NSW webinar series. The topics included adaptation for health, Aboriginal communities, the environment and achieving net zero emission outcomes. We particularly enjoyed **Beyond the tipping point? Adaptation of NSW's natural environment**. [Watch the webinar series](#)

The University of Sydney have released a series of video clip highlights of their research into farming Australian native grains for food, culture and the environment. Aboriginal people have sustainably produced food from native ecosystems for thousands of years, including the world's oldest bread. To view the previously held webinars, along with some smaller video-clip highlights on the youtube playlist "Native Grains: from Paddock to Plate", click [here](#).

Treading Lightly Inc. is proud be offering 'djamanj djamaga ganj' a free and informative webinar series about traditional Aboriginal cultural burning, proudly sponsored and brought to you by the National

Indigenous Fire Network & Treading Lightly Inc. View webcasts [here](#).

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](#).

SE Local Land Services, Supporting Our Neighbours Program. This program supports landholders with boundary fencing bordering public lands damaged during the 2019/20 bushfires. Find out more [here](#) or call 1300 778 080 for more information.

SPRAY BACKPACK FOR SALE

Southern ACT Catchment Group has for sale 5 used Solo 'accupower 416' spray back packs. 25L capacity, battery powered. Chargers and manuals included. All in excellent condition. Asking \$350 each but very open to negotiation.



Contact Martin Lind at

waterwatch@sactcg.org.au or 0447 870 448



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



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