

PNHA NEWS

Autumn 2020 Issue 84

Pittwater Natural Heritage Association - thinking locally, acting locally

PNHA UPDATE

Avalon Golf Course bush regeneration grant project

Contract bush regenerators are targeting asparagus and other weeds including Mickey Mouse plant, *Ochna serrulata*. This shrub from South Africa throws many seedlings and is difficult to control. Here the bush regenerator is scraping the stem and applying Roundup to the bare area. Then patience is rewarded, as the top growth slowly withers as the herbicide kills its very deep roots. There are hundreds of seedlings.



Image: Josh Higgs



One of the many garden escapes that have become environmental weeds. *Ochna* has pretty yellow flowers and attractive green and red berries.

Images: Terry Inkson at

<https://weeds.dpi.nsw.gov.au/Weeds/Ochna>



Protecting Pittwater's Environment

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Mona Vale Dunes - grant project

Clearing the site continues. As it contains almost nothing but dense bitou, lantana and green cestrum, some of the clearing has been done by brushcutter and chainsaw, and recently with the addition of herbicide spraying. The contractors have found a large native Coastal Beard Heath shrub under the weeds. We may plant tubestock in July or August, later than we had hoped, because of slow progress with clearing and possible continuing Covid19 restrictions on bushcare. The work is not yet visible from the walkway between the dunes and the golf course.



Saving Grevillea caleyi. The Bahai Temple project is on hold because of Covid 19.

EPBC Act review 2020

PNHA's submission to the Federal Government's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC) 2020 Review:

We work to protect as much as we can of our local native fauna and vegetation but sometimes we feel disheartened when we see the loss of ecosystems and native habitat in our area. We believe that many of these losses are due to ineffective environmental laws and weak implementation of such laws, both state and federal.

We hope that your review of the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act will enable the federal government to understand how the current act is not working and convince it to bring in a new act that actually does what it says it will do: protect Australia's environment and conserve Australia's biodiversity.

Pittwater Natural Heritage Association's submission relates to this statement in the terms of reference: *"The review will be guided by the principles of protecting Australia's unique environment through strong, clear and focused protections."* Our association believes that the current act simply does not provide adequate protection. We provide the following case study to support this claim.

A few years ago the NSW state government announced that a residential development of 3400 dwellings would be built in the bushland suburb of Ingle-side NSW. Occurring within the proposed development area is about 10 ha of Coastal Upland Swamps. Pittwater Natural Heritage Association started action to protect the swamps by engaging experts to examine and report on them.

We were heartened when we found that the ecological consultants to the NSW Department of Planning and Environment had identified many of the Coastal Upland Swamps and acknowledged their listing as endangered ecological communities (EECs) under the EPBC Act. We believed that that effective action would be taken to protect them. However we found that the act provides little real protection for this vegetation community.



Christmas Bell, a plant of Coastal Upland Swamps

The main problem is that there is no recovery plan for Coastal Upland Swamps, as the listing decision under the Act states that *“...a recovery plan is not required, as there are a number of existing planning documents for conservation and threat abatement that align with the ecological community.”*

However the planning documents that guide residential and other development in NSW are inadequate for protection of this fragile plant community. Under the NSW planning regulations the Ingleside master planners were able to create a subdivision design that placed residential lots adjacent to the identified borders of the EEC.

Following the release of the master plan for the Ingleside precinct Pittwater Natural Heritage Association obtained advice from the School of Biological Sciences at Macquarie University which stated that there were serious doubts that these EECs would persist with their current composition should the development go ahead as planned.

Our position was that residential development being placed so close to the Coastal Upland Swamps within the Ingleside Precinct would cause:

- changes to the existing hydrological regime,
- pollution by high nutrient urban runoff and
- invasion by weeds.

Over time the swamp vegetation communities would be destroyed. Consequently, in one of our many submissions to the planners we called for 60 metre buffer zones to be created around all Coastal Upland Swamps within the Ingleside Precinct, as was done by the Blue Mountains City Council to protect Coastal Upland Swamps in their local government area.

However, it appears that our advice to the department was disregarded, and the master plan remained unchanged. We maintain that had a recovery plan which included creation of protective buffer zones around Coastal Upland Swamps been created under the EPBC Act, those buffer zones would have been included in the Ingleside Precinct



Dense low vegetation in this Coastal Upland Swamp, Waratah Rd, Ingleside. See aerial view p.5

masterplan.

As it turned out the land release under the Ingleside Precinct Master Plan did not proceed, but our point is still valid:

Our experience with the Ingleside Precinct planning process confirms to us that the new Act needs to be much stronger than the old one. It must enable the following:

- Creation of more and stronger recovery plans
- Greater emphasis on effective compliance and enforcement of the regulations under the act.
- The agency in charge of implementation of the act needs to be well resourced so as to be able implement the act in a way that achieves its aims including creation of effective recovery plans in a timely manner.

Community groups and volunteers like us are committed to protecting our local environment as much as we can. However we get disheartened when in instances like the above we feel that we are not being supported by our governments. We hope that this review will produce a stronger act that makes us feel that our federal government cares about the environment as we do.

Coastal Upland Swamps – an Overview

The *Coastal Upland Swamps of the Sydney Basin Bioregion ecological community* is endemic to New South Wales, being restricted to the Hawkesbury sandstone plateaus of the Sydney Basin Bioregion.

Coastal Upland Swamps are characterised by a diverse assemblage of vegetation and are essentially treeless, although trees may be present as scattered individuals or isolated clumps of mallee or eucalypts. Many plant species within the swamps are absent from or uncommon in the surrounding landscape, making swamps distinctive and recognisable.

Vegetation: The Coastal Upland Swamps ecological community is characterised by highly diverse and variable mosaics of vegetation depending on soil condition, size of the site, recent rainfall conditions, fire regimes and disturbance history. The community also includes micro-organisms, fungi, and cryptogamic plants (i.e. plants such as ferns, mosses and algae that reproduce with spores rather than flowers and seeds). Larger swamps may include a range of structural forms which include tall open scrubs, tall closed scrubs, closed heaths, open graminoid



noid (grassy) heaths, sedgelands and fernlands. Smaller swamps are more typically characterised by open graminoid heaths and/or sedgelands, but may include tall scrubs.

Fauna: The ecological community provides habitat to a wide variety of birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates. The Australian crayfish, hairy crayfish and Sydney crayfish are abundant. Stygofauna (fauna that live in groundwater systems or aquifers) are abundant and exhibit high levels of local endemism. A number of threatened frogs have been recorded as occurring within the community including the nationally threatened green and gold bell frog (*Litoria aurea*) and the giant burrowing frog (*Heleioporus australiacus*, Image Chris Jolly). The community also provides habitat for the NSW listed giant dragonfly (*Petalura gigantea*), which is now uncommon in coastal regions.

Reference (containing references and footnotes): <http://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/pages/8f72d4af-5d7a-4d7c-ad57-3cc2b4d6b42a/files/draft-description-coastal-upland-swamps.pdf>

A Coastal Upland Swamp



This aerial view of Coastal Upland Swamp, within the red line, shows how few trees grow in the swamp area. The image on the previous page was taken along the informal track on the left hand side. Below, a few of the many plant species here.



Update on Mona Vale Road East Fauna Crossings

In March this year Jacqui Marlow and David Palmer from PNHA met with Marjorie Yan, RMS project manager for the Mona Vale Road East upgrade to check on progress on the promised fauna crossings. We were assured that work on the overpass would be started soon, and work on the fauna underpass was to start once earthworks were complete. She also reported that installation of permanent fauna fencing is continuing. Since our meeting a concrete footing for the fauna overpass has been constructed, as shown in the photo below.



Shovel Ready Projects – The NSW Government’s Planning Acceleration Program

PNHA made a submission to Pittwater MP Rob Stokes, when the developer lobby (The Urban Taskforce) submitted to the NSW government a list of so-called “shovel ready” development projects.

We were alarmed to see that list included the Waterbook Estate seniors housing project on Bayview Golf Course. Along with Northern Beaches Council and community groups we have long opposed this inappropriate development on the golf course.

Rob Stokes replied:

To be considered under the Acceleration Program a project must already be in the planning system, deliver a public benefit, demonstrate an ability to create jobs during construction, and once determined, be able to commence construction within six months or, for a planning proposal, allow a development application to be lodged within six months.

I wish to reiterate that the fast tracking of the Planning system does not mean compromising due process or assessment of the merits of proposals. All regular legislative policy and consultation considerations will continue to apply

to any project identified through the Acceleration Program. The NSW Government is committed to ensuring the Acceleration Program results in benefits for the community and there is absolutely no guaranteed outcome for fast-tracked projects.

The Department of Planning Industry and Environment (the Department) has established a governance structure to guide decision making under the Acceleration Program and an independent probity advisor has been appointed to ensure a robust and transparent prioritisation of projects. Although a number of industry groups have identified projects for consideration, decisions on project selection are being undertaken by the Department through this governance structure. Councils have also been closely consulted in the design of the Acceleration Program and have opportunities to identify projects for consideration. The matters you have identified such as urban design and environmental sustainability remain important planning assessment considerations for any application in the Acceleration Program.

You can view the Acceleration Program criteria, governance structure and the first tranche of fast tracked projects by visiting www.planning.nsw.gov.au/fast-tracked-assessments.

The site compatibility certificate application for seniors housing at the Bayview Golf Club has not been identified for fast tracking in the first tranche of projects under the Acceleration Program. The application remains under assessment by the Department and would be referred to the Sydney North Planning Panel for a determination.

PNHA submission to NBC's Open Space and Recreation Strategy

PNHA understands that with the constant growth of population in the Northern Beaches Area there is an increasing need for parks, playgrounds and other community open spaces.

Our submission stressed the need to preserve bushland. We urged Council to develop a strategy which accommodates the recreational needs of present and future generations without sacrificing bushland. This strategy must include provision for acquiring land for active and passive recreation, including acquisition of privately owned local bushland.

Searching for Bauer's Midge Orchid, *Genoplesium baueri*

In March, its flowering time, some of us went hunting for this critically endangered terrestrial orchid in heathland at Ingleside. It is



Corunastylis fimbriata Wendy Grimm

known to exist near the Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden at St Ives. Wendy Grimm recently gained her Masters degree with a detailed study of this orchid, so we invited her to lead our search on land that had been listed for development in previous Ingleside subdivision plans. We didn't find it, but found a similar orchid, *Corunastylis fimbriata*. Many orchids have very specific pollination relationships with insects, and in this case the only pollinator is a Chloropid fly. *G. baueri* is self pollinating.

More information for *G. baueri*:

<https://>

www.environment.nsw.gov.au/threatenedSpeciesApp/profile.aspx?id=10875



Finding *Corunastylis fimbriata*



Superb Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus superbus*

This beautiful bird was sighted on 20 April in Bayview Heights. It is a male, and a very rare bird in NSW, especially south of Grafton. They are usually found in forests and woodlands in Queensland and Northern NSW, but can also be found in New Guinea and East Timor. They make an unusual southward ("reverse") migration in winter and in May, when Birdline receives these reports of window-crash victims. Sadly, this is mostly how these birds are spotted in the greater Sydney region.

This adult male hit a glass-window and did not survive. It had a severely damaged left eye. This splendid specimen was reported to iNaturalist, Birdline and eBird, and has been offered to the Australian Museum.

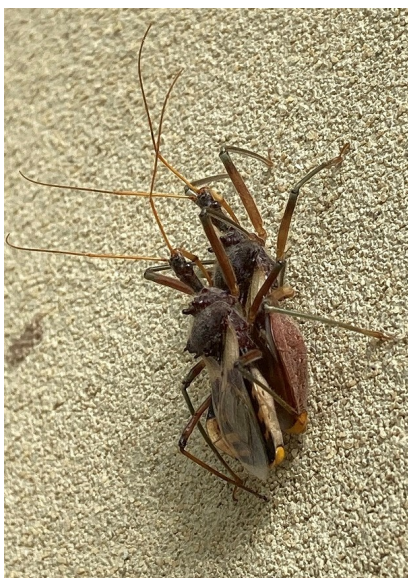
Roberta Conroy, article and image, left.

A PNHA member on Scotland Island also reported two window strikes about the same time, but the birds apparently survived, flying away.



A Superb Fruit-Dove as we hope to see it! Image: eBird

More information: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/threatenedspeciesapp/profile.aspx?id=10709>
<https://www.hbw.com/species/eastern-superb-fruit-dove-ptilinopus-superbus>
mick.roderick@birdlife.org.au; <http://www.eremaea.com/BirdlineRecentSightings>



Assassin Bugs are true bugs, having sucking mouthparts. Many bugs are plant sap feeders, such as Cicadas, but Assassin Bugs prey on other insects.



They are useful allies in the vegetable garden. This one has stabbed a beetle, spiked on its mouthparts. This pair were mating in early May. Juveniles are wingless, but adults are winged, in this species about 4cm long not including the antenna.

Various Lorikeets - Listen for their calls



Scaly-breasted Lorikeet on Queensland Firewheel Tree—

We're used to the harsh calls of Rainbow Lorikeets, but when the Swamp Mahoganies are flowering in autumn, Musk Lorikeets fly about in flocks, with a more high pitched shrill contact call. They are about two-thirds the size of Rainbows. One that often flies with Rainbows is the smaller Scaly-breasted Lorikeet. A still smaller one is the Little Lorikeet, about budgie size, flying in speedy shrill flocks. You'd be lucky to see these unless you're near a tree they are visiting. Swamp Mahoganies are flowering now in the Warriewood Wetland. You can identify birds out of sight by their calls, with some practice.

Hear some calls:

Rainbow Lorikeet: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsCjtdt5Alw>

Scaly-breasted Lorikeet: <http://www.graemechapman.com.au/library/sounds.php?c=320&p=326>

Musk Lorikeet: <http://www.graemechapman.com.au/library/sounds.php?c=316&p=336>

Little Lorikeet <https://ebird.org/species/litlor1>



Musk Lorikeets - Rod Warnock



Little Lorikeet—Neil Fifer



We like this flight of steps, at Taronga Zoo.

We are surrounded by the marvels of the natural world.

Some we look at every day.

But what we actually see is what makes us realise just how extraordinary our world is.

A friend's signature on his email is : *Nature, the Cathedral of Awe*



Membership of **Pittwater Natural Heritage Association Landcare Group** is open to all who share our aims of caring for the natural environment of the Pittwater area and working to enhance and protect it. You can find a Membership Application form on our website <http://pnha.org.au/join/> or contact us on pnhainfo@gmail.com for one to be sent to you.

Cost \$20 per year, \$10 unwaged.