

# P N H A N E W S

Summer 2023 Issue 98

Pittwater Natural Heritage Association - thinking locally, acting locally



MERRY CHRISTMAS & BEST  
WISHES FOR 2024 TO  
OUR PNHA MEMBERS  
AND FRIENDS

## PNHA AGM 2023 October 8

We ended another PNHA year with an interesting and enjoyable meeting.

Our guest presenter **Lynleigh Greig** shared stories and photos of the work of Sydney Wildlife Rescue and as an add on, talked about some local snakes. PNHA donated \$200 to support of SWR's work.

**Leigh McGaghey**, PNHA's representative at the Northern Beaches Council's Environment – Strategic Reference Group, provided an overview of the E-SRG purpose, makeup and issues covered, and of the two meetings she attended this year.

**Jenny Cullen** presented a copy of Hazel Malloy's book "Sydney Local Native Plants" to Marita Macrae in recognition of Marita's and PNHA's assistance with the book.

**Mayor Sue Heins** addressed the meeting explaining aspects of NBC's environmental activities.

## PNHA President's Report

PNHA Newsletters and emails during the past year have given members regular accounts of our activities, but I'll go into details with a few.

We try to be proactive in caring for the natural environment of our area, but of course life happens and we → p. 4



*Protecting Pittwater's Environment*

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**INSIDE:** PNHA Activities— Katandra, Bangalley, McCarrs Creek. Mona Vale Rd East Fauna Bridge, Bush regeneration grant for Lynette's land, Bushcare to start on 62/85 Hillside Rd, Two Butterflies, Powerful Owl Project, Moths:Underrated Insects? Robber Flies, Leopard Slugs.



## PNHA Activities:

### Katandra Reserve by Night October 15

Katandra Bushland Reserve President David Seymour led us by torchlight down the tracks through the wonderful bushland of Katandra. The bush was very dry. We heard a distant Powerful Owl, known to breed there and had a good view of a rather surprised Brushtail Possum. and two Water Dragons sleeping safe from predators above the water. But a highlight were the almost magical fireflies that darted about in pitch darkness, silently flashing.

Fireflies are actually a type of beetle. The Blue Mountains Firefly *Atyphella lychnus* is the only one found in Sydney. Adult fireflies only live for a few days and do not feed (they have no mouthparts) but their larvae generally feed on snails. They hunt by following the slime trail to their prey, which is seized, injected with poison and eaten.

More info from the [Australian Museum](#)



On a mossy rock beside a creek was a large spider, its body about 3 cm long. Australian Museum arachnologist Helen Smith suspects it was some kind of fishing spider (family Pisauridae) and she was able to make out the bowed front tarsi—a hallmark of Megadolomedes species. The females have a spectacularly large leg span, males are rather smaller. These spiders hunt near or in water and they can scoot across the surface or dive beneath. Pisaurids have been recorded eating fish and other vertebrate prey up to a third longer than their body length, but they also eat insects and other invertebrates.

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### Bangalley Head Reserve October 29

Always a wonderful place for plants, geology and views. These included several Peregrine Falcons flying out over the sea from their nest in the cliffs. Below, L-R: Hillock Bush *Melaleuca hypericifolia*, Stiff Bottlebrush *Cyllistemon rigidus*, Drumsticks *Isopogon anemonifolius*



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### McCarrs Creek Reserve by Night November 25

We set up a sheet illuminated by a mercury vapour bulb and also had a large LED torch, so that the two different types of light would attract a variety of invertebrates. Luckily the drizzle that threatened all day cleared up just in time. The evening was cool. We photographed insects on or near the sheet and on nearby vegetation. Some images were sent to iNaturalist as observations for the Great Southern Bioblitz over that weekend. Many thanks to Gary Harris for organising this event.





**What will turn up?** Watching the light sheet.

Photographing insects on the sheet. The egg cartons below the sheet are to temporarily catch any insects that fall to the ground so they can be removed and not trodden on. The umbrella protects the light from the slight drizzle.



**What we saw:**

Far left - a Crane Fly, *Ptilogyna ramicornis*

Left: a species of Ichneumon Wasp. Possibly *Enicospilus* sp.

Both bodies about 3cm long.

Mostly we found many small moths and tiny flies. Some of us found spiders and beetles on the bark of nearby trees.

The bush is alive at night!

## Fauna Bridge

The development of the vegetated fauna overpass on Mona Vale Rd East is progressing. We have been in consultation with Council, MP Rory Amon and Transport for NSW about how to ensure that it is used by fauna only, not cyclists or pedestrians. It will be only 5m wide, so it is not a multi-purpose bridge.







At the AGM: L-R: Edna Blanchard, Robyn Hughes, Mark Turner, Mayor Sue Heins, Leigh McGaghey, Marita Macrae, Julie Bennett

From p.1:  
must also be reactive, as I will relate.

### **Proactive**

Our planned project for last year was to take action to improve Council bush regeneration in our area. We can assume the promised extra funds were spent as proposed, but it is difficult to ascertain. We hear that bush regeneration companies faced staff shortages because of Covid and afterwards. We continued that this year, with an added focus on improving NBC's information to the community about local weeds.

In July we attended a **Weeds Round Table** organised by Conny Harris, President of Northern Beaches Envirolink and PNHA member. It was attended by about 30 people from bushcare groups across the LGA, as well as with NBC staff. A major problem is that the NSW Biosecurity approach to weeds replaces the old Noxious weeds act, but does not seem suitable for environmental weeds in urban bushland like ours. Also it does not give council staff the legal strength to take action. It emphasises action on new and emerging weeds. Of course stopping new weeds before they spread is sensible, but our area suffers from well established weeds which damage our biodiversity. But according to the Biosecurity approach, they are of lesser importance as they are considered already out of control. The meeting resolved to approach the NSW government to review the Biosecurity approach but this has not yet been done. Some good news is that Tuckeroo, not native to our area has now been accepted by NBC as a weed, to be removed by bush regenerators and not needing council approval to be removed from private land.

**Progress in the Conservation Zones Review.** Along with many residents and other community groups we objected to so many properties changing from conservation to residential zoning, particularly in the Pittwater ward. We urged changes to the criteria for assessing the properties and inconsistencies in the mapping. A sneak preview of possible changes to the mapping, then a meeting with NBC staff about this seemed successful. Changes include a better recognition of bushfire hazards, removal of some zoning inconsistencies and consideration of foreshore protection areas. But the decision now lies with the Department of Planning to approve the changes NBC has requested. This is holding up finalisation of the new LEP.

**Mona Vale Road East Fauna crossings.** We had several meetings with Transport for NSW to fight for these on the widened Mona Vale Rd East. The underpass near Ingleside Road has been completed, some of the fencing is in place and work is progressing on the fauna bridge. We have to thank Jacqui Marlow and David Palmer for expertise and determination for

this. We still meet with the project manager to discuss environmental issues associated with the road upgrade and will be meeting with Northern Beaches Council management about the threat of mountain bike riders using the overpass.

**Sunday Nature Walks** started in June this year. Some have been well attended, but there were no bookings for the last one on Sunday 24 so it was cancelled. The next one will be a spotlighting adventure in Katandra Bushland Sanctuary on October 15<sup>th</sup>.

**We have completed the grant** funded project to revegetate a small area of Palmgrove Park in Avalon. This is in Pittwater and Wagstaffe Spotted Gum forest and was funded by \$5000 from NBC to engage contractors. Council provided the tubestock. Planting was completed with the help of two classes of Avalon Public students and National Tree Day volunteers. We pushed NBC for a bushcare group to follow up and that is now established, meeting on the morning of the first Saturday each month. Powerful Owls breed in this reserve.

**We were pleased that land owned by Sydney Water** on the corner of Mona and Bassett Streets Mona Vale will not be rezoned to residential. It contains Estuarine Swamp Oak Forest, a form of endangered ecological community listed under the NSW State Biodiversity Conservation Act and the Federal Government's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act.

**PNHA is now a member of the Nature Conservation Council.** This is an influential environmental advocacy umbrella group active all over the state. Many well known environment organisations are members. NCC hosts **Picnics for Nature**. Jayden Walsh has set up one with PNHA as co-host with Friends of Narrabeen Lagoon Catchment and Northern Beaches Greens. **This is Saturday October 21, 4.30 to 7.30 at McCarrs Creek Reserve. See recent email from PNHA.**

PNHA is a member of the **Pittwater Community Alliance**, consisting of several Pittwater community groups. We join forces on behalf of the Pittwater Ward in advocating for causes with NBC.

Our representative on the NBC's Environment Strategic Reference group is committee member Leigh McGaghey, who will talk about this.

**PNHA Newsletters.** We appreciate responses to our newsletters. Let us know what you think of them.

Please look at our Facebook page and **Like** us. We have 938 followers and want to reach that millennium!

## **Reactive:**

The so-called proposed **Lizard Rock** development at Oxford Falls is now called **Patyegarang** and is on public exhibition. You will have seen our email to members in the last week. We will continue to oppose this destructive proposal and we urge all members to do likewise. It has nothing to do with the Voice to Parliament Referendum as some assume.

**Tree Canopy Plan.** Very briefly, the plan proposes planting canopy trees in more southerly areas of the LGA where many trees have already been lost. In the Pittwater area, canopy trees are being lost largely because of residential development. Changes in the new LEP may reduce this loss. We stressed the need for dedicated budgeting for the operation of the Plan.

We will be meeting soon with NBC staff to state our opposition to Council formalising a mountain bike track through Ingle-side Chase Reserve. The destruction caused by illegal bike tracks in our bushland is not to be tolerated.

## **Next Year**

We'll be continuing our campaign for more funding for weed control and bush regeneration. Our urban bushland and native ecosystems are as much assets in need of management as others - sports fields, roads etc, with the difference that neglect raises the cost of management or makes it completely prohibitive. We need members to be active individually in this, be intolerably squeaky wheels. Contact your local councillors about your concerns who can talk to staff about the issues.

We'll plan another series of guided **Sunday Nature Walks** for next year. Suggestions of where to go or topics to focus on are very welcome.



Finally, thanks very much to our current retiring committee – Mark Turner our treasurer, Secretary David Palmer and our rep on the PCA, Robyn Hughes our Membership Secretary, Leigh McGaghey - NBC ESG representative as well as Edna Blanshard, Julie Bennett, and Gary Harris.

Marita Macrae, PNHA President

**PNHA Management Committee 2023-24.** There being no other nominations, the current committee of PNHA was re-elected.

Marita Macrae (president), Julie Bennett (vice president), David Palmer (secretary), Mark Turner (treasurer), Robyn Hughes (membership secretary), Gary Harris (committee member), Edna Blanchard (committee member), Leigh McGaghey (committee member).

### Grant for Lynette O'Neill's land

PNHA received \$5000 from Pittwater Environmental Foundation to fund bush regeneration on this property in Newport. It is original forest in very good condition but weeds are intruding around the boundaries. Lynette is no longer able to do this work herself. She has willed it to NBC, to become a bushland reserve in the future. We have engaged a bush regenerator who will begin work soon.

Lynette in her beloved bushland a few years ago.



### Good News!

**The littoral rainforest at 62/85 Hillside Rd Newport** is ready for bushcare volunteers to get busy, probably in February 2024.

The old fibro huts have been safely fenced off for later demolition. Bush regeneration contractors have already been working to clear major weeds and help remedy damage done by the previous owner.

Saved from proposed development as a “gated residential community” the land was bought in 2019 by the Department of Planning and Northern Beaches council for about \$4.5 million after a strong protracted community campaign to save it. Littoral Rainforest is a federally listed endangered ecological community. The land is an addition to the adjacent Attunga Reserve.

We expect a bushcare group to start on the site in February 2024.



How about doing bushcare here beneath this tree fern?



## Two Butterflies

Butterfly caterpillars need food, so how about growing nettles in your garden?

Both native and introduced nettle species are host to caterpillars of the **Australian Admiral butterfly**, *Vanessa itea*, about 30mm across its front wings.

Some of these butterflies have sniffed out some nettles planted for their enjoyment in a North Avalon garden. Their caterpillar offspring are munching on the tasty stinging foliage. Adults feed on flowers and sap oozing from tree trunks.

Foodplants include native nettles *Urtica incisa* and *U.urens* and the introduced European *Urtica dioica* as well as other species in the nettle plant family.

The butterfly has an interesting habit of resting head downwards with wings open (usually) or closed, on vertical walls of buildings, fences, tree trunks, rock faces etc. It will also slowly open and close its wings in this position, which usually indicates it is aware of your presence. The butterfly has a rapid, darting flight and is easily startled from its resting position. Males will use this position to investigate anything flying in the near vicinity, dashing off to intercept the intruder, but usually losing interest quickly if it is not a female Admiral to return to the same or nearby position. This information and butterfly image is from the wonderful website of [South Australian Butterflies and Moths](#). Here you can also see images of the butterfly's Images of eggs, lava and pupa.

The related **Australian Painted Lady** butterfly *Vanessa kershawi* is a more common butterfly in Pittwater. About the same size as the Admiral, adults feed on flowers in open areas. The caterpillars feed on native daisies such as Everlastings, Cudweed *Gnaphalium* sp (a weed of lawns often) and other daisies, as well as the introduced Cape Weed *Arctotheca calendula*, Scotch Thistle *Onopordum acanthium* and Lavender *Lavendula officinalis*.

Lots more about it and its foodplants at [The Australian Museum](#)



Image: © Mike Goad | Pixabay

Would you think a mass of butterflies could stop a train in its tracks?

Yes it can. Sometimes this butterfly migrates in really huge numbers, described in this [The Great Eastern Ranges](#) web page.



Capeweed Image: Wiki Commons

### Vanessa - isn't that a girl's name?

**Yes.** According to Google, it was invented by the Anglo-Irish writer Jonathan Swift for his lover Esther Vanhomrigh. He took Van and added Essa, a pet form of Esther. The name appeared in print for the first time in 1726 in his poem "Cadenus and Vanessa". **Vanessa** was adopted as the name for this genus of butterfly by the Danish zoologist Johan Christian Fabricius in 1807.



## The Powerful Owl Project

Birdlife Australia's [Powerful Owl Project](#) continues in urban NSW, Queensland with help from citizen scientists.

There are probably 170 breeding pairs throughout the Greater Sydney area. Several of these are in the Pittwater area.

How many owls can you see in this photo, taken in Avalon on December 2? See last page for the answer.



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## Moths: Underrated Insects?

**When you think of moths**, do you see holes in your clothes, pests in the pantry, or pesky insects drawn to night lights spoiling your social BBQ? Or worse, do you have an irrational fear of moths? (That's called [mottephobia](#)).

Would it surprise you to learn moths are not the poor cousin of butterflies? They're incredibly diverse and deserve a second chance.

There are about [160,000 species of moths](#) known to science. Compare that to 17,500 species of butterflies.

Moths vary enormously in their size, what they like to eat, how they reproduce and how they live their lives. Read more: [moths and butterflies](#)

We spotted this day-flying Forest Day Moth *Cruria synopla* in Catalpa Reserve Avalon during bushcare recently. Wingspan about 40mm, below.

Another closely related local day-flying moth is the spectacular **Josephs Coat moth**, *Agarista agricola*, wingspan about 50mm, right.



Its caterpillars feed on **Native Grape**, *Cayratia clematidea*. This native vine is scrambling over other plants at this time of year, but watch out for these and other less obvious Hawkmoth caterpillars so you can leave them some food. Images: Gary Harris.



Caterpillars of the **Forest Day Moth** feed on **Elephants Ears/ Conjevoi**, *Alocasia* species, right. *Alocasia brisbanensis* grows along Mullet Creek in Ingleside Chase Reserve, Narra-been.







**Giant Robber fly *Blepharotes* sp,**  
body about 2.5cm long in an  
Avalon garden.

## Robber Flies

A common question asked about an insect: “**is it Friend or Foe?**” For humans this usually means: Should I welcome it, or fear and kill it?

The answer depends who is asking and who is answering the question. Assassin or Robber flies belong to the family Asilidae, one of the most diverse fly families, with over 7400 described species worldwide. Adults are predators on mostly smaller insects which they catch on the wing.

Their larvae are predators on soft bodied arthropods in the soil or rotting wood, usually beetle larvae, often curl or white grubs (Scarabaeidae). Predation by larval and adult Robber flies affects populations of their prey above and below ground.

So the Robber fly is a “Friend” to some other species (such as humans) as it controls other insects we might not welcome, and it doesn’t bite us.

But what a fearsome “Foe” to those insects it feeds on, with its large eyes, claws and piercing sucking mouthparts ready to zoom onto its prey and clutch it mid air.



**A smaller Robber Fly with moth prey in**  
Angophora Reserve Avalon.

**A FOE: The Leopard Slug *Limax maximus*** was introduced to Australia in the 1800s. They will eat living plants, unlike other slugs, and can appear in large numbers in humid weather. Beer at night will attract them to their deaths. Read all about their weird habits [here](#)



**OWLS: Parent lower left and two juveniles**

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](mailto:pnhainfo@gmail.com) for one to be sent to you.

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