

# PNHANews

Winter 2024 Issue 100

Pittwater Natural Heritage Association - thinking locally, acting locally

## PNHA Newsletter Issue 100 & Our 30th Anniversary

In 1991 some bush regeneration friends alarmed about impending loss of bushland between Park St and Waratah St Mona Vale got together to form an *ad hoc* committee to try to save it.

This NSW government owned land was known as “the former TAFE site.” On the western half was some of the last lowland eucalypt woodland around Mona Vale. The eastern half was a paddock with an occasional horse. The government proposed to use all the land for multi-unit housing.

The bush regenerators’ survey of the bushland showed its actual native plant species list was far larger than the list provided by the developer to the Government.



Grey Ironbark *Eucalyptus paniculata* near Park St entrance



Appeals to the then Pittwater Council and the NSW government succeeded in reducing the amount of bushland to be cleared. The site today is occupied on the east by Woodlands, a multi-unit housing complex and the remains of the bushland area to the west is Woodlands Reserve.

The friends realised the lack of awareness of the value of this bushland was part of a Pittwater wide problem.

Our local native flora and fauna needed recognition and support so the committee became an incorporated Landcare group whose 30<sup>th</sup> birthday we celebrate this year. →



Protecting Pittwater's Environment

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**INSIDE:** submission: Draft Plan of Management for North Narrabeen Reserve, Fauna Crossings on Mona Vale Rd East, Felling of large trees in Ruskin Rowe, Palm Beach Headland Urban Night Sky place, PNHA Activities to come, Project Restore—Seagrass, Frogs and Chytrid fungus, Fishing Spiders, Osprey Nesting Platform, Angophora Reserve by India Turner-Schiller



Our first newsletter published in October 1994 is attached with this newsletter. It was printed as a two-page A4 double sided, and folded, so apologies – finding your way through it might be difficult. Our first general meeting was in November 1994.

The photos are taken from the Park St side of the reserve. A bushland stroll from Park to Waratah St takes you past many species of Eucalypts now gone from the rest of Mona Vale.

Right: Grey Gum, *Eucalyptus punctata*. This favourite Koala food tree would once have been common in the area

A copy of the 1993 native plant species list is available on request.



## What's PNHA been doing?

### Draft Plan of Management for North Narrabeen Reserve

Our submission comments focused on two aspects of the Plan of management: additional tree plantings, and the proposal to instal synthetic surfaces (synthetic turf) on playing fields.

In NSW there are standards in place for most other materials for public use but this essential consideration has been neglected in respect of synthetic turf. We believe that it is wrong to destroy a natural, biodegradable grass surface and replace it with a plastic surface which has a limited life, is known to pollute as it wears and has end of life problems including the difficulty and cost of disposal and recycling.

### Mona Vale Road Rd Fauna crossings update

David Palmer took some photos of the fauna underpass. " I was surprised at the sight of the huge detention basin and associated earthworks and the lack of planting. It seems they still have a way to go before it is finished.

Below: Underpass with "fauna furniture" to help animals use it.



Though motorists are now enjoying the upgraded Mona Vale Road East, at the time of writing June 2024, the project has not yet finished. Work is continuing on drainage and planting of native species on the fauna overpass and around the underpass is still to be completed.

The PNHA team will continue to liaise with the project managers to try and secure the best outcome for local native species.

**Do fauna crossings actually work? Are animals using the crossings easy prey for lurking predators? More general information [here](#)**



## Loss of large trees in Ruskin Rowe Avalon

PNHA recently joined local opposition to the Council felling four big Flooded Gums *Eucalyptus grandis* on public land in Ruskin Rowe Avalon. We considered the risk the trees were thought to pose was not properly assessed and that along with Canopy Keepers we supported getting two extra arborist assessments of the remaining two trees. While the trees are not a local species, they are a significant part of the canopy. Loss of tree canopy is ongoing in our general local government area.

[Canopy Keepers](#) is a community group with a focus on preserving and regenerating our Pittwater tree canopy.

John Illingsworth made [this video](#) with PNHA commentary on loss of these trees and tree canopy loss in general.



At time of writing (June 28) Council refuses to respond to appeals to save the two trees. Canopy Keepers has commissioned two expert arborist reports, one generously donated by arborist Paul Shearer and another by arborist Mark Hartley, his fee funded by community donations. Both found the trees were low risk and should not be felled.

### How you can help:

- ◆ Please contact Northern Beaches Council to demand that these trees be preserved and properly managed. Email: [Council@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Council@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au) and CEO [Scott.Phillips@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Scott.Phillips@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au)
- ◆ Sign the [petition](#), now with over 1000 signatures.
- ◆ Visit the trees at the far end of Ruskin Rowe and chat to the people keeping a vigil there

## Palm Beach Headland Urban Night Sky Place – first in Australia

Announced June 27, we are delighted this has been declared at last. Our committee member Edna Blanchard has been working on the campaign for this, along with Northern Beaches Council and **DarkSky International**. The mission of [DarkSky.org](https://www.darksky.org) is to preserve and protect the nighttime environment and our heritage of dark skies through environmentally responsible outdoor lighting.

Did you know that more than 60% of our mammals and invertebrates are nocturnal and rely on the dark sky for foraging, nesting and breeding as well as safety. The lighting at Palm Beach, now designated as an **Urban Night Sky Place** shows what state of the art lighting can be. The street lights are fully shielded to avoid upward spill and are in the warm spectrum which still provides safe and adequate lighting. It is worth a night time visit to see what can be done and of course to see the night sky. We are only just becoming aware of the importance of dark skies not just for astronomers but for the wellbeing of wildlife and us.



Copy and paste this link into your browser for a Channel 9 video about the official opening of the Urban Dark Sky Place at Palm Beach. <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C8tnJqTpCnI/?igsh=MTF2c3dkZTdhd3RiZA==>

## Activity Report:

### PNHA Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion West Head Field Trip, April 28 2024

John Illingsworth kindly made this video record of the event. Here is a condensed version of the five hour April 2024 walk and talk session at West Head.

You can watch the whole video here, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g00xjOSJ8FI>

or watch the sections that interest you:

INTRODUCTION and outline of GeoRegion proposal <https://youtu.be/g00xjOSJ8FI?t=0>

RED HANDS CAVE – Art, Angophora Cave, Octavia Man <https://youtu.be/g00xjOSJ8FI?t=840>

WEST HEAD LOOKOUT – Dykes, sea levels, the Pittwater River <https://youtu.be/g00xjOSJ8FI?t=1642>

BASIN TRACK ENGRAVINGS <https://youtu.be/g00xjOSJ8FI?t=2112>

ELVINA TRACK ENGRAVINGS and TESSELATIONS <https://youtu.be/g00xjOSJ8FI?t=2564>

We hope you enjoy these videos of our marvellous environment, in a small area of the whole proposed Georegion.

### Activities to come:

**July 20, Saturday 9.30-1** Weed information in the Avalon Shared Space. Weed specimens and how to control them. Bring your own for identification. The Asparagus Weed Monster will mingle with shoppers.

**August 25, Sunday 9-11** Chiltern Track North walk. Wildflowers and birds.

**August 31, Saturday 9-2** Coastal Environment Centre Open Day stall. PNHA display, our famous cards, weed information.

**September 8 Sunday 9-2** Woorarra Lookout Reserve walk, Elanora Heights. Wildflowers and birds

**October 13 Sunday 11.30-2.00** Katandra Bushland Sanctuary. Our AGM and 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary picnic and guided bush-walk.

**Please book for the walks and the AGM to [pnhainfo@gmail.com](mailto:pnhainfo@gmail.com) including your mobile number**



### Project Restore - The Seagrass Collection Project

Seagrass is a very important marine ecosystem, but damage over many years means it needs a helping hand. This project involved volunteers on beaches collecting fragments that can be planted in those degraded areas to restore habitat for marine fauna.

Tia Bool of the Sydney Institute of Marine Science reports they now have approval to install the collection box system on the Pittwater side of Palm Beach, in July. She looks forward to getting community helpers started on the beaches in July/ August. "We'll start with a collection session and meet and greet at the Joey café at Palm Beach and invite local community members to meet the Project Restore team." Watch out for more news and how to help.

### Frogs and Chytrid Fungus

Worldwide, frogs are dying of the Chytrid fungus. [This article](#) tells how a frog sauna helps them overcome this problem, somewhat. Frogs that could keep warmer were able to throw off the infection. But the story is complicated.....

Right: Brown Striped Marsh Frog, Avalon aka Tennis Ball Frog





## Fishing Spiders

Some quite large spiders live beside and in our local creeks. Gary Harris found spiders of two different genera beside Cicada Glen Creek, right. Some new Trivial Pursuit names for you: genera *Megadolomedes* and *Dolomedes*.

Another common name is "nursery web spiders" Females suspend their egg sacs underneath their bodies with the aid of strands of silk.

They are adept at travelling across the water surface, the front and rear legs are extended while 'sculling' with the second and third legs. Hairs and the spider's weight-spreading stance keep them afloat. However they are also adept at diving and swimming underwater, and when threatened can remain submerged for at least 30 minutes. A layer of air trapped by hairs around the body allows them to breath during this time.

This and more information [here](#) from The Australian Museum

Gary noticed that the spider at right is missing a leg. We asked arachnologist Helen Smith at the Australian Museum if it could grow another?

"Yes, it can happen. Spiders can regenerate a leg provided it is lost at a suitable joint (usually near the body). Only juveniles can do it because the new leg is formed inside the old exoskeleton and appears at the next moult (provided it has time to grow between losing it and moulting). The new leg will always be smaller and is usually less differentiated in details of colour and the hairs and spines. If the spider loses a leg when it is very small then the regrown leg is hardly noticeable but one lost at a larger size will look very obvious."



Megadolomedes species with 130mm legspan



Juvenile Dolomedes species, 60mm leg span



To see these spiders you have to be very observant and quiet, also patient, as they are quick to take cover underwater, where they can remain for some time.

Spot the spider in image on the left.

## Osprey Nesting Platform for Careel Bay

PNHA supported Council's proposal to erect a nesting platform near the mangroves in Hitchcock Park beside Careel Bay. Comments have now closed but there is a lot of information about Ospreys and their nests on the [Have Your Say page](#).

Right: a type of proposed platform







## Angophora Reserve, a Tribute

**Angophora Reserve cradles the town of Avalon from the south like an old friend; a piece of remnant bushland steeped by extraordinary ecology and cultural history.**

It is the confluence of no less than four vegetation communities, although this is not immediately apparent from the purlieu- when you move past what I, as a child, had appraised as the *weedy* margins as I wandered through a Hawkesbury sandstone archway, replacing the original timber one erected in 1968 by the Avalon Preservation Trust. You then enter into the sweet embrace of Spotted Gum *Corymbia maculata* open forest, or more specifically Pittwater-Wagstaffe Spotted Gum Endangered Ecological Community, so tall and ancient that you will want to dance around in bewildering-time-effacing-circles!

Picture this- A swimming, kelp like canopy of *Corymbia maculata* (Spotted Gum), *Eucalyptus gummifera* (Red Bloodwood) and *Angophora costata* (Sydney Red Gum) (oh my!), and bird-sound - listen for the call of *Ninox strenua* (Powerful Owl) and then below your feet a swimming sea of *Pteridium esculentum* (Bracken Fern).

You will continue upward until, just like magic (and perhaps millions of years of geological formation), the canopy transforms into open Hawkesbury Sandstone woodland. The light is starry and everywhere on the forest floor, casting an appropriately extravagant stagelight on the understory of *Actinotus helianthis* (Flannel Flower). But you will also feel (in no small deal of sorrow) the absence of the humble Koala, one that might have sat up there only thirty years ago amongst the straggly branches of a *Eucalyptus punctata* (Grey Gum). With the continuing overdevelopment of Avalon and further eradication of bushland due to changing council policy, much of the friendly-faced fauna in the Reserve are at risk of local extinction.

At last, you will come to sit upon a sandstone ridgeline above a cave. Below, a great cathedral of *Angophora costata* Sydney Red Gum subsides to the Reserve's final two vegetation communities; a gallery of *Livistona australis* (Cabbage Tree Palm) stands, and at last in the deepest topological depression, a sedge swamp fills the forest floor. Sitting up there, you feel that it's the kind of place where you might have your first kiss. Or a good sandwich and a cup of tea! Time stands still for you here.

Of course, it is important to remember that Angophora Reserve has had a rich and long history before even taking its current name. Beneath the ferny rushes, beneath the ridge, before Australia was invaded by colonists, the Gamaraigal People occupied this cave and used it as a midden- Macdonald (in Smith, 1995) speculated that it was used in Autumn and Winter primarily due to presence of *Macrozamia communis* Burrawang remains, although much of this is still conjecture since Avalon has largely since been developed and opportunities for substantial research into how Indigenous people once used this land have been *paved over*.

Angophora Reserve is both at the physical periphery of Avalon and at its metaphysical centre. It holds in its hands the many pieces of culture, nature, and history of the area in which I live.

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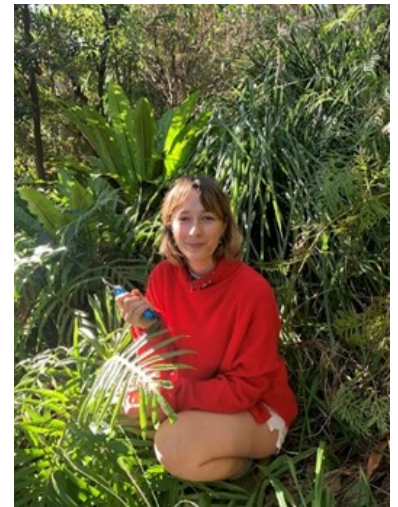
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**India Turner-Schiller, PNHA Member.** India is a poet and co-founder of Equilibrium Gardens and has lived by Careel Bay all her life. She is studying Writing and Publishing at UTS, but hopes to continue her bush-regen-garden pursuits and become an established poet and essayist.

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.