

SUMMER 2012  
Newsletter No.31

# Newham & District Landcare Group



Working towards a  
healthier environment

Melbourne Water  
Production of this newsletter is funded through  
Melbourne Water's Community Grants Scheme



Address – PO Box 314, WOODEND, 3442



**'Cracking good' BBQ –  
ends our social year**

## President's Message

At the end of the 25th year anniversary of Landcare, it is worth looking back on the history and achievements of our Landcare group over its much shorter life.

Did you know that the inaugural meeting for the Newham & District Landcare Group occurred on May 2nd 2004? This meeting was instigated by founding president Jim Sansom, and was attended by 55 people who unanimously voted to form a Landcare group in the Newham District to complement existing groups in nearby areas. The first committee was big – 9 members – and enthusiastic, and since then 20 different members have served on the committee.

The scope of projects and activities of our group has been wide. There have been plantings and weed control on 18 local private properties, Wesley Park, Newham Primary School and Deep Creek. There are also broader landscape projects including the clearing of willows and revegetation of Deep Creek from Newham to 3 Chain Road and the creation of a biolink from the Cobaws to Mt Macedon. To carry out all these works, to buy equipment, and to support and promote Landcare activities in the area, grants of over \$300,000 have been secured.

But Landcare is not only about weeding and planting.

Specialists have given talks on

- Weeds, rabbit and fox control, local flora and fauna, wildlife care, wildlife landscapes, property and horse management, revegetation and regeneration techniques, local geology, biodiversity, fungi, farm forestry, energy efficient retrofitting of houses, soil improvement, honeybees, sustainable revegetation, property covenants.

Practical activities included

- Wildflower walks, biological surveys, demo of the bunny blaster, inspection of clearing and revegetation projects, how to use equipment, walk the Jim Jim, basketry, plant propagation, bat netting and ID, Clean Up Australia.

Several subgroups are very active, each with a particular focus

- Roadside weed management – the Weedies
- Primary School liaison including the Waterwatch Program and plant propagation group.
- Wesley Park management

And then there are the social activities – dinners on the hill, new members dinners, winter dinners, with dancing, and December BBQs, have been enjoyed by all over the years.

What a lot has been achieved – and thankyou to all who have contributed. With current membership at 108 properties/families, we hope that the next 7½ years will be just as busy and successful as the first.

***Jenny Waugh***

# DIARY OF EVENTS

## FEBRUARY

### Friday 10th – is there a platypus in my waterway???

7 for 7.30pm, Newham Hall.

Learn about the life of the platypus, find out how to monitor them and how you can help them in your area.

Presented by Geoff Williams from the Australian Platypus Conservancy.

Preceded by a walk along Monument Creek, 5 – 6.30pm, details tbc.

## MARCH

### Sunday 18th – *A Little Bush Magic*

Wesley Park, Show starts 3.30pm.

Help Wobbly Wallaby and Wombus J Wombat return the magic to the bush!

Designed for children, this interactive presentation is a celebration of the bush that gets everyone involved.

Presented by Vox Bandicoot performers (duration approx. 50 minutes)

Followed by a BBQ tea provided by Landcare.

Rsvp to Penny [54270795] for catering purposes.

## Group contacts

**President:** Jenny Waugh. **Vice President:** Penny Roberts. **Treasurer:** Hilary Roberts.

**Committee members:** Lorraine Rutherford, Helen Scott and Nick Massie.

**Secretary:** Fran Spain.

**New members, general queries:** Penny Roberts; 5427 0795.

**Roadsides:** Sue Massie; 5427 0065.

**Newham Primary:** Jenny Waugh; 5427 0408.

**Animal pests:** John Luckock; 5427 0909.

**Wesley Park:** Fran Spain; 5427 0661.

**Flora, library, small tools, grants:** Penny Roberts; 5427 0795.

**Spray trailer:** Chris Wiggett; 5423 5279.

The committee meets on the first Monday of the month (February to December) between 7.30 – 9pm in Newham. All members are welcome to attend the Committee meetings to become more involved or raise specific matters. Please advise a committee member if you wish to attend. Meetings start and finish on time... and we enjoy them!

## Christmas BBQ 2011

The Newham and District Landcare Group Christmas BBQ was again a great success with approximately 70 adults and 25 children attending the annual event. Despite the December chill there were many enthusiastic participants in the famous Welly Toss and Egg Toss competitions. Paul Tanner regained his Welly Trophy with an impressive throw while Penny Roberts and Niklaus Perch-Nielsen won the Egg Toss.

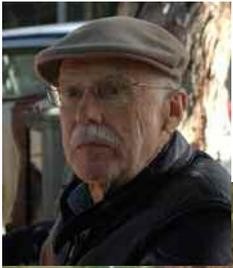
A highlight this year was a grand performance by the newly formed Newham Community Choir – *watch out You-Tube!*

The food delights were sensational, with desserts the big winner.

Special thanks to all those who helped with preparation and assistance on the day.

Happy New Year to all our members.





# What on Earth is Biochar?

## NEWHAM AND BIOCHAR

When Spanish explorers first sailed down rivers in the Amazon basin in the early 1500s they were astonished to see many cities of 50 to 60 thousand people. Tropical soils are notoriously poor once the rain-forest is removed so how could agriculture support such a population of hundreds of thousands of indigenous people along these river banks?

The secret was that these ancient peoples had discovered the agricultural technique of loading their soils with char. They gathered all their charcoal and used it in their farming.

BIOCHAR is superior to charcoal from the fire as it is 'cooked' at higher temperatures so that all the microscopic pores are open and unclogged by tars and wood vinegars.

Researchers have established that just one cubic centimetre of biochar has hundreds of square metres of surface area forming a kind of scaffold to accommodate billions of bacteria and fungi which are so essential for healthy and productive soils.

Biochar is itself inert but has the capacity to moderate the effectiveness of nutrients and moisture in the soil. It is an agent assisting in soil aeration, moisture retention and good drainage.

I have recently constructed a biochar kiln with encouraging results so far. Experimental beds have been planted to find out for myself how effective biochar is in the garden.

Char is a stable form of carbon remaining in the soil for hundreds if not thousands of years.

Effectively, making biochar is the reverse of burning which puts more CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Biochar in the soil means less carbon in the atmosphere.

Could we, in Newham, establish a community-size kiln to create this valuable resource instead of sending up smoke to pollute the atmosphere from our back yard bonfires?

*WATCH FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BIOCHAR IN 2012!*

**Jim Sansom**

## Wild Action at Newham Primary

As part of the celebrations for the 25th anniversary of Landcare, our Landcare Group has secured a grant to cover the cost of local 'Wild Action Zoo', coming to Newham Primary School in autumn this year. Some of you will have seen the owner of the zoo, Chris Humphrey, on TV last year with his wide range of Australian animals. He not only shows the animals to the audience, but also lets them hold and touch them after the show. He will concentrate on animals indigenous to this area— many well known, but also some lesser known such as quolls (see page 7) which used to be found on Mt Macedon.

As our contribution to the grant, students will also be planting several hundred indigenous plants on the school property. We hope that this will encourage and promote the next generation of Landcare members from the school and its community.

**Jenny Waugh**

# Echidna Quiz

## 10 things you may not know about echidnas..



- 1 What is a young echidna called?
  - 2 Can echidnas swim?
  - 3 How long can a mother cope with growing spines?
  - 4 What do echidnas eat?
  - 5 Are echidnas sociable creatures?
  - 6 How long does it take for an echidna egg to hatch?
  - 7 Do echidnas have nipples?
  - 8 How does an echidna defend itself from attack?
  - 9 How long do echidnas live?
  - 10 Do echidnas hibernate?
- Answers: on page 9.

## Quolls

These carnivorous marsupials are related to both Tasmanian devils and Thylacines. There are four species – the most prominent one being the Spotted-tail or Tiger quoll

Quolls' preferred habitat is in a rainforest, near creeks or rivers and in Eucalypt trees. They make dens in trees, rock crevices, hollowed logs and caves, and will hunt anything in the trees or on the ground from reptiles, birds, insects, carrion to rats, gliders, possums, bandicoots and pademelons.



Spotted-tail Quoll (*Daysurus maculatus*).

Once very abundant in this area, they have been decimated over the past few decades. There were recorded sightings in the Macedon Ranges in 1991, and some believe that they still inhabit forests in this area, but loss of habitat, poison baits, disease, competition for food from dogs, cats and foxes, and deliberate trapping or poisoning by humans all threaten their survival.

# Waterwatch in Newham

Grade 5 and 6 students have been collecting and testing water from the pond near the school for 5 years now. We are lucky to have the school right next to the creek, so that students can see the environment the water comes from, and can actually collect the water themselves. They use an extendable pole on which a bike water carrier is attached, enabling them to collect samples well away from the edge.

## Turbidity

One aspect of the water measured each month by the students is its turbidity. Cloudy or muddy water can be caused by runoff during heavy rain, disturbance of the bank of the creek by stock or erosion, or by algal growth. One case of very high turbidity was traced back to the water from a brick cutter being washed into the stream.

The turbidity is measured by pouring water into the turbidity tube until three wavy lines at the bottom of the tube can no longer be seen.

A reading of 10 means that the tube was filled to the top or nearly to the top and the lines at the bottom of the tube were still visible. This is very clear water and allows in plenty of light for photosynthesis by aquatic plants. Times of higher turbidity have occurred after episodes of very heavy rain, and during early stages of the new school building project.

### Jenny Waugh

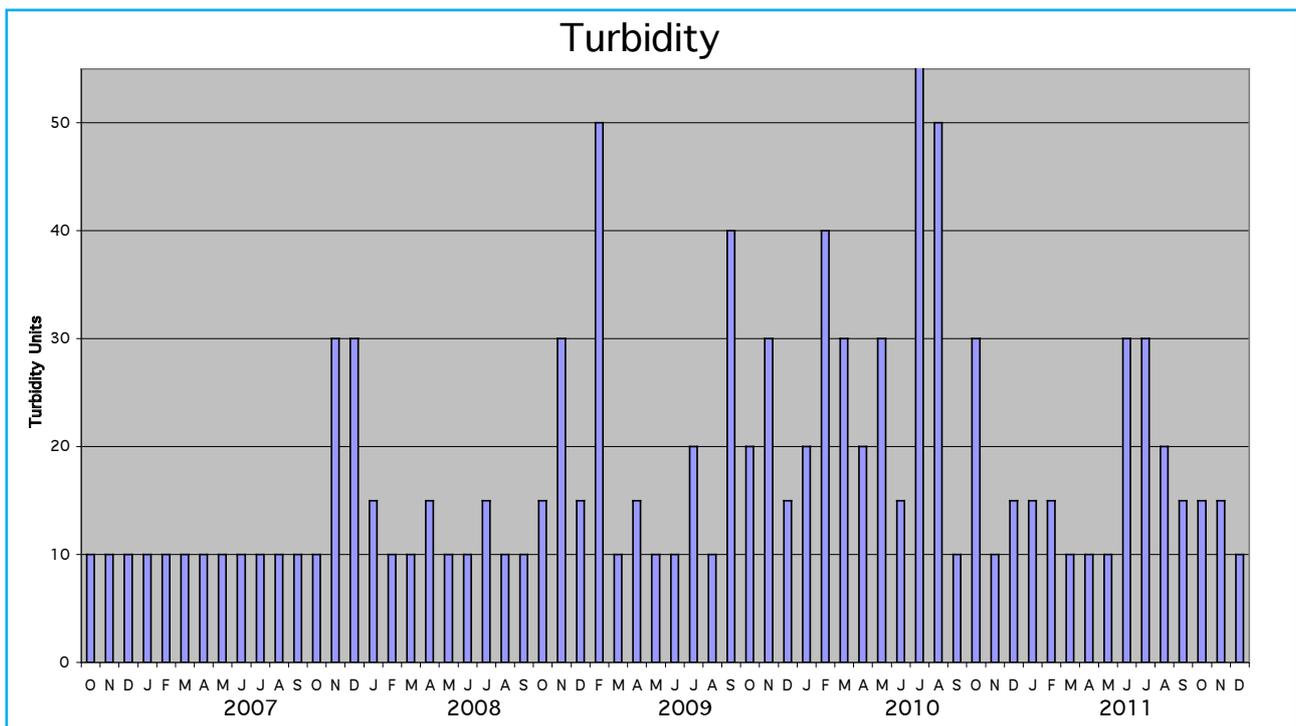
Waterwatch Co-ordinator



Monique and Kiara rinse out the water bottle before collecting the December water sample.



Ashley pours water into the tube while Aliyah checks the clarity of the water.



## **Macedon Range Flora**

*A photographic guide to the flora of Barrm Birm, Riddells Creek*

by Russell Best & David Francis

Barrm Birm is the name given to the slopes of the Macedon Range that provide the backdrop to the township of Riddells Creek, 50km NW of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

The book details all of the 208 native plant species known to exist on the bushland of Barrm Birm. This amounts to about 40% of the flora found in the Macedon Range and 1/25th of flora of Victoria.

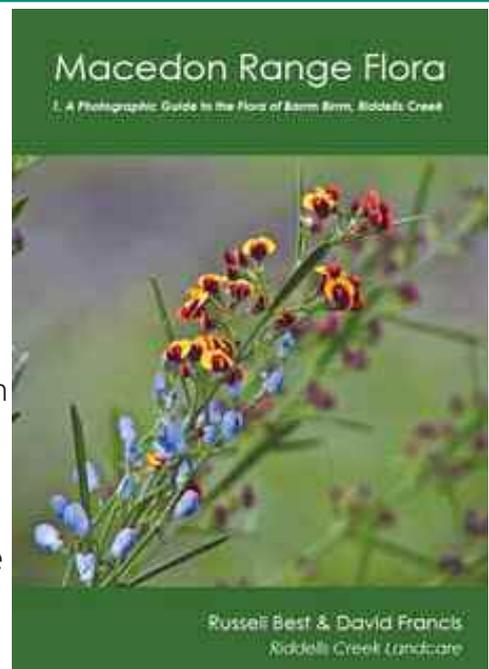
It is the most comprehensive book of the Macedon Range flora currently available.

### Features

- Landcare members; 487 photos taken on Barrm Birm).
- Foreword by Neville Walsh (co-author of *Flora of Victoria* and Senior Conservation Botanist at the Royal Botanic Gardens).
- Maps detailing the location of Barrm Birm and the extensive walking trails
- Many plants not previously known to exist in the Macedon Range.
- One brand new plant (Hairy-leaved Trigger-plant), discovered on Barrm Birm as part of this project – described for the first time in this book.
- Labels on photos to highlight key features of the plant or to help explain complex terms.
- A novel and comprehensive section on Eucalypts to help ID these difficult plants.
- All variations of each plant species are presented (eg. male, female and bisexual flowers of Early Nancy; blue and white *Wahlenbergia stricta* and the 4, 5, 6 and 7 petalled forms).

Available for loan from the Newham & District Landcare library (contact Penny 54270795).

Purchase from Riddells Creek P.O. or go to Riddells Creek Landcare website for details about purchasing direct from them @ \$15 plus postage.



## **10 things you may not know about echidnas. Answers:**

- 1 A pugile.
- 2 Yes, they are good swimmers.
- 3 About 2 months only, then the pugile is ejected from the pouch. After that it is left in a 'nursery burrow' and the mother returns to suckle it.
- 4 Echidnas eat mainly ants and termites, but also grubs, larvae and worms. All 'soft stuff' as they don't have teeth. They crush their food with the tip of their beak or between their tongue and the roof of their mouth.
- 5 No, they are usually solitary. During the breeding season in July – September you may see a female with a line-up of suitors following her. These 'trains' can last for up to 6 weeks before the female is ready to be mated and usually has 3-4 echidnas – but may have up to 11! When ready, the female will stop moving and the males will vie for position.
- 6 the single rubbery egg hatches 10 days after it is laid directly into a small, backward facing pouch on the female.
- 7 No, the mammary glands secrete milk through two patches on the skin from which the young suckle.
- 8 Weaning takes place at about 6 months of age.
- 8 Curls up into a ball.
- 9 Echidnas live up to 40 years.
- 10 Echidnas have a low body temperature (33°C) compared with other mammals and are able to vary it by up to 8 degrees. They can enter a state of torpor or hibernation easily at any time of year, and use this to save energy.