

SPRING 2012
Newsletter No.34

Newham & District Landcare Group



Working towards a
healthier environment

Melbourne Water
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Address – PO Box 314, WOODEND, 3442



Hanging Rock Revegetation Project –

DIARY OF EVENTS

DECEMBER

Saturday 1st – End-of-year BBQ. 6pm Wesley Park Newham.

As in previous years, the 1st Saturday in December is the date to remember.

Loads of fun and fantastic food.

Great Scott Wellie Toss (defending champ Paul Tanner) and egg tossing competition (Niklaus Perch-Nielsen and Penny Roberts defending) will be on at about 7.15pm.

Bring something for the shared table – sweet or savoury – Landcare provides meat or vegetarian options for the BBQ. Also bring a chair or picnic rug, your drinks and plates, glasses, cutlery etc.

Encourage new neighbours to come along and house guests welcome.

There is space for ball games – so bring something along for the children or young at heart.

RSVP: Penny and in order to co-ordinate/balance contributions, please indicate what you plan to contribute to the shared table.

2013 will soon be upon us. Plenty of activities are in the planning stage – so keep a look out!

Group contacts

President: Penny Roberts. **Vice President:** Helen Scott. **Treasurer:** Hilary Roberts.

Committee members: Howard Stirling, Karl Kny 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!

Hanging Rock Revegetation Project Community for Nature Grant



Over 30 Adults and 15 children had a great day at the second planting at Hanging Rock. Entertainment was provided for the kids and was enjoyed by all – the adults participating with equal excitement!

Over 600 plants (understorey, grasses and trees) were positioned on both sides of the creek and, given the preceding wet weather, the ground was a pleasure to dig, the Hamilton tree planter being particularly effective.

After completion a BBQ was enjoyed by all. Special thanks to the Roberts for organising the entertainment and Fran, Jim and a host of others for cooking.

A great day spending the \$5,310 grant.



Plant Profile: Clematis

Clematis are my latest favourite plant and there are 2 species that are native Australian and indigenous to this area.

Small-leaved Clematis (*Clematis microphylla*) is a vigorous plant that can be seen sprawling across the ground if there is no tree or shrub to clamber up through. Large flowers (up to 4cm) with 4 creamy-yellow petal-like sepals occur in profusion from late Winter to early Spring. Attractive fluffy-looking seed heads follow the flowers. Leaves are light – mid green and composed of 9 narrow leaflets.

Old Mans Beard or Travellers Joy (*Clematis aristata*) is seen in damper areas. It tends to have sparse white flowers in Spring and broader, dark green serrated leaves. Young leaves are distinctive, having an irregular white stripe down the central vein.



Mini-beasts with Margaret Holmes at the Newham primary School

Children and adults alike were delighted by Margaret Holmes amazing array of creepy crawlies at the Newham PS working bee. Some of the highlights were: a water beetle which breathes through its bottom straw (an extendable air tube that comes from – you guessed it – it's bottom), stick insects bigger than my hand, and a giant cockroach – which was much cuter than it sounds! It was actually a woodroach, which lives in leaf litter.

Generally speaking, feral cats are those domestic cats *Felis catus* which survive and reproduce without a close association with man. However, their status is very variable and feral cats may live either in close proximity to human habitation or be completely isolated in the bush.

The two extremes are represented by urban populations of stray cats which obtain much of their food by scavenging human food scraps and supplement their numbers by the recruitment of strays, and remote populations which survive by hunting naturally occurring prey and maintain their numbers solely through reproduction. The situation is further complicated by the existence of semi-domesticated farm cats and roaming domestic cats, so no completely precise and all embracing definition of feral cat is possible.

Domestic cats were first brought to Australia by Europeans. Feral populations may have begun to establish soon after initial European settlement. The major spread of feral cats throughout inland Australia took place last century as the continent was opened up. Today feral cats exist over much of Australia and have successfully colonized most habitats. In Victoria, feral cats are distributed throughout the State.

Biology

Feral cats are similar in size and physical appearance to typical suburban domestic cats.

Feral cats are opportunistic predators and will eat a wide variety of foods. Their diet at any time will usually consist of those species of prey most available to them. On average, females have two litters per year, the first in spring and the second in late summer or early autumn. However, litters may be dropped in any month and litter size usually ranges from two to seven.

As adults, feral cats usually maintain discrete home ranges which may be up to 10 sq km in area for males and somewhat less for females. Home range sizes may depend upon available food supplies but when local foods become scarce they will undertake longer migrations.

Although feral cats may be active at any time, they are usually more active at night, with the two periods of greatest activity centred near the times of sunrise and sunset. Often during the day, feral cats will lay up in sheltered areas, usually in rabbit burrows, hollow logs or dense thickets of scrub.

Feral cats collected in past surveys were found to be healthy and well fed. However, the normal range of parasites found in domestic cats such as tapeworms and roundworms, and diseases such as feline panleukopaemia and toxoplasmosis also exist in the feral populations.

Environmental damage

Observations in wildlife habitats throughout Victoria indicates feral cats prey heavily on small indigenous mammals and birds. It is possible that feral cats may exert a detrimental effect on small carnivores such as the tiger quoll, eastern quoll and the brush tailed phascogale by direct competition for food. They may also have played a significant role in some extinctions, particularly when introduced to islands, eg. causing the local extinction of the ground nesting parakeet on Macquarie Island, but hard evidence on their ecological impact is difficult to obtain.

Because feral cats are widespread throughout Victoria, no large-scale control methods can be applied to them, and in some areas they may have reached a state of equilibrium within their habitats. However, in areas of special concern such as National Parks or areas where endangered species of birds or small mammals exist, traditional control measures such as shooting and trapping can be used.

Protect your cat, protect your wildlife

Have you noticed that there are no longer any small birds or lizards in your garden? Do you miss the sounds of the bush? Do you or your neighbours own a cat?

The information below, courtesy of the DSE, shows what cat owners are now required to do legally, how to help conserve our unique wildlife, dispels some myths about cats, and outlines just how great an impact cats have on wildlife.

Australia's wildlife is both unique and special. The many kinds of marsupials, birds, reptiles and frogs living in this country evolved in an environment that did not include cats. Cats are introduced predators with which our native wildlife cannot live. While native predators do exist, these have evolved in a way that preserves a natural balance between animals, plants and the land. The relatively recent addition of cats to our environment has upset this natural balance because cats are very efficient destroyers of wildlife.

For more information on the effect of cats on native wildlife see the Action Statement Predation of native wildlife by the Cat *Felis catus*.



The law in Victoria

Since the introduction of the *Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animals Act* in 1996, all cat owners in Victoria are legally required to register cats aged over six months with their local council each year.

Councils are required to issue an identification tag to the owner. This tag must be worn at all times when the cat is outside its owners property.

The Act also contains a mechanism to provide protection to a property owner who does not wish to have neighbouring cats entering their property.

Councils wishing to restrict the presence of cats on public areas or requiring owners to keep cats on their own property, particularly at night, may exercise a number of options:

- Under Section 25 a Council may make an order specifying hours during which a cat may not be outside its owners premises.
- Under Section 26 a Council may make an order to prohibit the presence of cats in any public area of the municipal district of the Council.
- Under Section 42 a Council may make a local law prohibiting or regulating the keeping of cats in a specified area of the municipality where threatened native fauna are at risk of attack.

Not all councils have the same local laws or orders regarding the confining of cats. You need to check your local regulations at the council offices.

How many cats live in Victoria?

There are nearly 1 million cats in Victoria.

- Over 500 000 owned cats.
- Over 300 000 stray cats in urban areas.
- An estimated 200 000 feral cats.

This is about one cat for every household or one for every five people. In cities there can be over 40 in each suburban block. Every year many thousands of cats end up in animal shelters, and very few are reclaimed by owners.

There are still a large number of cats in Victoria that are not registered, or not properly cared for. Are you a responsible owner?

Do cats harm wildlife?

All cats, even well-fed pet cats, can kill wildlife. In Victoria, on average, each pet can kill 25 creatures every year; this adds up to 12.5 million creatures every year. At the same time, feral cats eat the equivalent of seven native rosellas each week, over 70 million creatures each year.

Most wildlife killed by roaming pet cats is often caught just outside the back door. All cats, including your pet cat, hunt by instinct. Often a captured bird or possum will appear undamaged but, almost certainly, it will die within 36 hours from shock or infection. Cats' mouths are hot-beds of bacteria. One bite to a native animal leads to rapid spread of infection against which it has little resistance. Cats carry Toxoplasmosis, a disease which can devastate wildlife populations.



Don't cats control rats and mice?

Cats will kill some rats and mice. However, readily available household poisons are a more effective and efficient way of treating a rodent problem. The most effective poisons contain anti-coagulants such as Bromadiolone. These are readily available from supermarkets.

Don't cats control snakes?

As snakes are native wildlife they are protected by law. Having a cat is no deterrent to snakes and cats can be killed by snakes.

If you are concerned about snakes around your house:

- Be alert.
- Remove piles of rubbish and other shelter.
- Keep the grass near the house very short.
- Keep garden ponds (which attract frogs, a favourite food of snakes) away from children's play areas.

Can cats and wildlife live together?

Cats reduce wildlife populations by predation, diseases and competition. When combined with habitat loss and failing natural processes Australia's wildlife is struggling to survive.

Keep cats and wildlife apart.

You can do this by keeping your cat confined, most importantly at and between dusk and dawn. Ideally indoors at night, and during the day outdoors by building a special cat enclosure. For ideas see <www.dse.vic.gov.au/plants-and-animals/native-plants-and-animals/caring-for-wildlife/keeping-your-cat-happy-and-safe>

Not all councils have the same local laws or orders regarding the confining of cats. You may be required to confine your cat for part or all of the day, check your local regulations at the council offices.

Why do we have cats as pets?

Well cared-for cats can be wonderful companion animals BUT...

- Roaming pet cats can annoy neighbours.

- Noisy cat fights or mating calls are disruptive to the night-time neighbourhood.
- Uncontrolled stray and feral cats are a serious community problem.
- Wildlife cannot survive increasing predation, competition and disease from cats.



How can I better protect cats and wildlife?

Having a pet cat is a privilege. Remember, a pet requires a lifetime of proper care. Properly cared-for pet cats will live for over twelve years, few pet cats living outside survive as long as three years.

Be a responsible pet owner:

- Register your cat and ensure it wears the council tag when it is off your premises, as required by law.
- Desex your cat – neutered cats make better, more contented pets.
- Confine your cat to your property, this may be a requirement of your council.
- Keep your cat in at night – cats kept indoors won't be hurt in fights, won't be hit by cars and won't harm wildlife.
- Put bells on your cat's collar.

Never dump your cat.

- Either rehouse or arrange humane euthanasia for unwanted cats.
- Contact your local vet or animal welfare shelter for assistance.

Help control stray cats:

- Contact your local council for assistance.

Cat trap now available for loan

In response to queries by members, N&DLG has purchased an Australian designed purpose-built trap for feral cats. Made of galvanized sheet steel and mesh, it has handles so that trapped cats can be carried safely.

Contact Penny: 5427 0795

Weeds ID guide

The North Central CMA has recently published the second edition of the Weeds Identification Guide for North Central Victoria, which includes updates content and new weeds. The guide includes photos, descriptions, and control options for 88 different weeds that are present or pose significant threats to farms and natural environments in the region. Hard copies are water repellent and will fit in your glove box or back pocket.

Copies are available through NCCMA Regional Landcare facilitator on 54487124 or can be downloaded from www.nccma.vic.gov.au

