

**AUTUMN 2016**  
Newsletter No.46



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# *Newham & District Landcare Group*



Working towards a  
healthier environment

Address – PO Box 314, WOODEND, 3442



*Karl Just, Lisa Chesters, Alice Aird and Mary-Anne Thomas looking at high conservation value roadside remnant on Sheltons Road.*

*Photo: Sandy Scheltema.*

## DIARY OF EVENTS

Following on from the '*Moths*' session presented by Steve Williams on 18 March, negotiations are underway for another autumn speaker – all details still to be confirmed.

***Would you like to suggest a topic for a future event?***

Contact Nick Massie or Penny Roberts with suggestions.

### MAY

#### ***Sunday 15th. Planting at Hanging Rock Reserve***

This will be another session planting into pre-drilled holes (read 'easy'). We have 500 + Tall Tussock Grass and Tall Sedge to stabilize the banks along with some shrubby species to plant in clusters, expanding on our last planting and then extending east along the creek.

9.30 – 12.30, BBQ lunch provided.

RSVP: Penny <penroberts@bigpond.com> 0418 396837.

### **Newham rainfall**

Rainfall for the start of the year has been low with 37mm in January and 5mm in February. However this is not the lowest start for the first two months of the year with 2009 (7mm), 2008 and 2011 (38mm) being lower. At the other extreme 2012 (188mm) and 2013 (101mm) was a very wet start to the year.

While it may have seemed warm in January and February a review of mean temperature shows no significant warming trend with 2014 and 2013 warmer than 2016.

**Nick Massie.**

### **Group contacts**

**President:** Nick Massie. **Vice President:** Penny Roberts. **Treasurer:** Hilary Roberts.

**Committee members:** Howard Stirling, Karl Kny, Doug Dalgleish, Jim Sansom and Luke Spielvogel.

**Secretary:** Helen Scott.

**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:** Doug Dalgleish; 5427 2666.

**Website:** <http://www.newhamlandcare.info/>

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!

# *Banksia marginata*



Photo: courtesy Ian Luntton

Otherwise known as Silver Banksia or Honeysuckle, it is a very variable species belonging to the Proteaceae family. It grows in SE Australia, from 2 to 12m, depending on the origin of the plant. Plants are hardy and will grow in a variety of soils, climates and topography. It is drought tolerant once established, frost tolerant, and fire tolerant. The leaves are fairly narrow, have a silvery grey underside and grow to about 6cm in length. Young leaves are toothed, but become smooth edged as they mature. Yellow flower spikes are produced in spring, summer and autumn – these range from greenish to bright yellow and stand 5 to 10cm tall. The fruit is a woody cone with follicles, which carry the seeds (those “Bad Banksia men” of childhood). Some plants have lignotubers which produce new growth after fire, other plants are killed by fire and regenerate by seed. Like all Banksias, it produces copious nectar and is ideal for attracting wildlife into gardens. The main pollinators are nectar feeding birds, in particular honeyeaters, especially the New Holland Honeyeater. Other pollinators include insects and small mammals such as the Gliders. Seeds are also eaten by cockatoos, particularly the Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo.



The Honeysuckle was one of the trees described by early travellers through this country – part of woodlands of ‘she oak, lightwood and cherry’ – now called Drooping Sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*), Lightwood (*Acacia implexa*) or Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*), and Wild Cherry (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*). Major Mitchell recounted travelling all day – approximately 40km, through a Honeysuckle forest. Early surveyors inscribed combinations of ‘oak, honeysuckle and gum’ across many survey plans, as on an early map by Gerry Gill of Mt Alexander in central Victoria. Mt Alexander is still covered by bush, but it’s now dominated by eucalypts, not Silver Banksia. Think of all the homes, creeks and lanes you know with Honeysuckle in the name. They were abundant

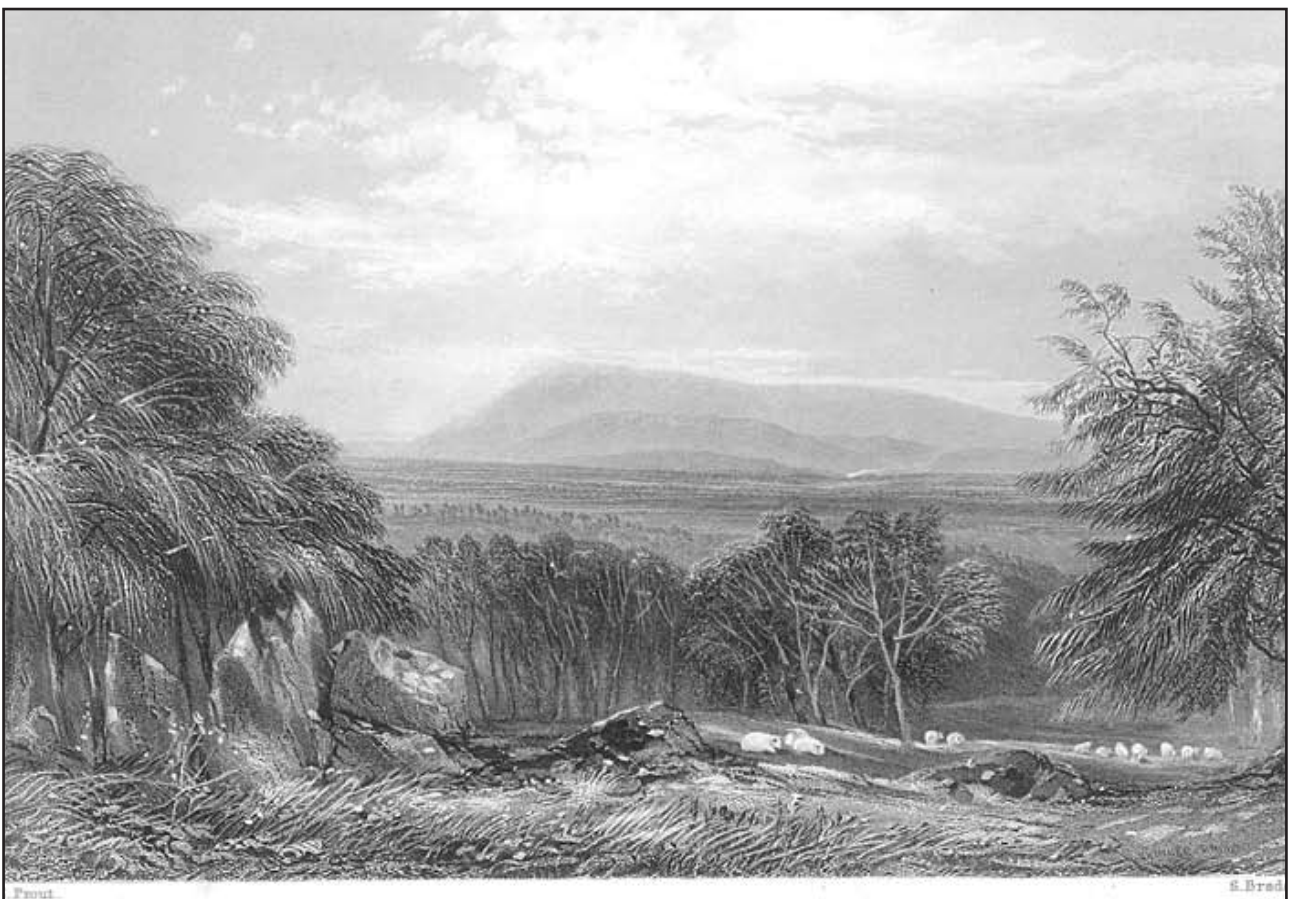


and widespread, but not any more. Gerry Gill's photo. *The last of the Mt Alexander Honeysuckles on the previous page shows a survivor*

This loss of the original plant populations has occurred largely due to clearing, grazing by domestic and feral animals, direct damage from rabbits, eradication and destruction of rabbit warrens, and wildfire. One would think there should be Banksias on roadsides if it is agriculture that has caused their demise, but this is not the case; there is speculation dryness is the reason.

The Australian Network for Plant Conservation says: "If the species is to exist in the future and be incorporated into future revegetation projects it is essential that all the known or original existing plants across these areas are located, seed collected and the appropriate genetic material pooled into seed production areas." Twelve years ago, members of the Baynton Sidonia Landcare group became worried about the fact that they knew of just two places in the district that Silver Banksia trees grew. Clare Claydon of the Baynton Sidonia Landcare group gave a talk called 'Saving the Silver Banksias of Baynton Sidonia' at a Connecting Country Landcare Forum (19 June 2014 – downloadable at <http://connectingcountry.org.au/11/missed-the-2015-landcare-forum-see-it-here/>).

She told the story about how they "discovered" six more sites where Banksias grow in the district, how they have raised and distributed several thousand seedlings using seeds from all these sites and how Baynton Banksias are now growing across an area from Sutton Grange in the west to Pipers



19th century view to Mount Macedon with Sheoaks and Banksias in the foreground (courtesy Karl Kny).

Creek in the east, thus saving local Banksia genetics from extinction. She passed around a bag of 490gms of clean seed worth \$2250 per kilo because it is so fiddly to collect (very light, and difficult to separate clean seed from packing material and hair.)

Well, now is your chance to grow this iconic plant and reintroduce it in our area.

Newham & District Landcare group will have tubestock available for members this autumn, from late April. Purchase price for members remains 50c per tube. (contact Penny).

Clare stressed that lessons learnt from their 10 year project mean landholders take responsibility for proper planting. The project provided a weed mat, guard, mulch and instructions with each tubestock plant... and then followed up to check results. When no-one took responsibility, for example on roadsides, plants died. In the first year water and a cool root run is essential, using weed mat and a tree guard with lots of mulch outside the guard, which keeps water in the soil instead of running away. Nearly all the tubestock

I sourced some years ago have survived, and I'm happy to see some are self-seeding into mulched areas, I think assisted by Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos splitting the cones.

Clare's message was: "Get going", be persistent, and search and plant as broadly as possible. She noted that funding is not hard to obtain but it is important to stress it is for trying to prevent extinction of one species, not for biodiversity.

**Helen Scott**, March 2016.



## ***Clean Up Australia Day***

On Sunday 7 March 2016 Newham and District Landcare members participated in this annual event.

Roads cleaned of recyclables and rubbish, included Jim Road and Palmer Crescent, Colwells Road, South Rock Road, Straws Lane, Coach Road and Rochford Road out of the Village towards Rochford. Ten Adults and one child participated and 14 bags were filled – 7 with recyclables and 7 with rubbish. Items found included tyres, a television, steel pipes, wire and a pillow. Generally less rubbish and more recyclables of glass and cans of drink were collected this year. It is disappointing that people still throw items from their vehicle that could be taken home and placed in their recycle bin.

Thanks go to Neil McMaster, Sue and Nick Massie, Janet Moritz, Kathryn Nicholson, Ian Colclough, Rob Lawrence, Natasha Gayfer, Miranda Gayfer-Lawrence, Jenny Waugh, and Jim Sansom who came together to clean our community for all.

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# Carbon myths – Climate truths – What to do

Jim Sansom

## **Myth 1: That fossil fuels are the cheapest form of energy.**

They're not. They are only regarded as cheap when the full cost of using them is not accounted for. Up till now humans have not costed the rubbish that is put into the atmosphere by burning them.

## **Myth 2: That substitution of gas for coal burning eliminates emissions.**

It doesn't. Gas like coal is a hydrocarbon and when burnt produces CO<sub>2</sub>. It is true that less emission results from the burning of gas for the same useful energy output when compared with coal, but it still produces emissions.

## **Myth 3: That carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is the biggest green house gas.**

It isn't. Water vapour is far more prevalent in the atmosphere but its amount varies with temperature. The warmer the atmosphere the more water vapour it can hold and this warmth depends on green house gases trapping energy around the Earth. This is known as a 'feed-back loop' and is the cause of great concern for climate scientists. A relatively small increase in a green house gas (e.g. CO<sub>2</sub>, N<sub>2</sub>O, CH<sub>4</sub>) leverages a proportionately larger atmospheric absorption of water vapour thus boosting the temperature even further and so the cycle goes on. 'Runaway' temperature increase is the result.

## **Myth 4: That Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) is a proven technology all set to make continued combustion of fossil fuels OK into the future.**

The coal lobby would like us to believe this. The truth is that CCS technology is far from being developed to provide reliable, complete and safe elimination of green house gases from the combustion of fossil fuels for electricity generation. Advocates of CCS gloss over the following facts:

- (a) Carbon capture will be about 90% efficient at best, so given the scale of coal burning world wide the remaining 10% would be a major source of green house gas.
- (b) Power generation facilities equipped with CCS use about an extra 25% of electricity simply to drive the process. This includes things like compression of the gas, transport, and running of the 'scrubbing' equipment.
- (c) Geological sites suitable for 'permanent' storage of gas underground, do not occur everywhere! In fact the 3 or 4 commercial scale CCS plants now operating are located relatively close to suitable geological sites.
- (d) There is no guarantee that leakage will not occur at some time in the future. Storage of gas in geological formations under the sea is of particular concern since leakage would increase ocean acidity with serious environmental implications.

## **Myth 5: That so called 'rich' countries whose industrial development has been based on fossil fuel energy, now owe it to 'poorer' countries to provide the same opportunities by burning coal.** *(Josh Frydenberg via video link – Hawthorn Town Hall, 27 October, 2015).*

Technologies in solar and wind generation, battery storage together with localised smaller scale distribution networks offer a far greater return on investment and are far more efficient than establishing large scale coal fired or nuclear electricity systems.

In any case, what is the sense in providing for 'development' if the cost is deterioration of a habitable global climate?

This of course highlights the moral imperative for industrially advanced countries to acknowledge their responsibility in causing the climate problem in the first place; they should be the leaders in drastically cutting emissions.

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**Myth 6: That large scale generating systems (fossil fuel, nuclear) are necessary to provide base load power.**

This is no longer the case. Alternative technologies are now available. Things like: heliostat towers with solar array combined with molten sodium storage, new types of batteries, integrated grids with sophisticated switching systems, hydro-pump storage etc. make it theoretical possible for modern societies to have adequate power without the need for large scale electricity generation.

**Myth 7: That 'coal-based' employment predicated on development of the huge Galilee/Bowen basin coal mines as well as the Great Barrier Reef coal ports (Abbot Point is only one of several planned) is the only way to ensure economic prosperity for Queensland and Australia generally.**

Here we have to look at the concept of 'investment per job'. Of the range of jobs that exist, mining and large-scale generating plants probably require the most investment per job. One worker may be needed to operate plant worth several million dollars. (And it is already projected that huge dump trucks will become driver-less in the future.) Compare this with the possible range of industries and businesses involved in creating, installing and maintaining an energy system based on renewables. Potentially there would be many more workers with more modest investment for each job. This would mean far more employment opportunities encompassing a wider range of skills leading to an active and more broadly based economy. An added bonus would of course be saving the Great Barrier Reef and all the tourism jobs that go with it.

**Myth 8:** *(As our recent Prime Minister Tony Abbott claimed...)*

**That an increase in global temperature does not necessarily mean an increase in the number of lightning strikes.**

This is clearly false. With more energy in the atmosphere there is more warmth, more wind and greater evaporation from oceans and seas. Increasing cloud mass and thunder storm activity results. Climate science predicts that a one degree Celsius rise in temperature would produce a 12% increase in lightning strikes.

**Myth 9: That the whole global problem of climate change will be solved by reducing green house emissions to zero.**

Not so. The observed, measured and recorded climate changes of today are in fact the result of atmospheric conditions about 25 years ago! (pers. comm., Prof David Karoly, climate scientist University of Melbourne.) Over that 25 year period global emissions have increased considerably. What we do today in terms of polluting the atmosphere is for future generations to suffer. What is our responsibility? Stopping all green house emissions immediately is too late. The damage is done and the strategy now is to suck out from the atmosphere excess green house gases.

At the beginning of the 'industrial revolution' CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere was about 270 parts per million (ppm). To maintain a stable, habitable climate comfortable for the life humans have become used to, it is projected that a concentration of about 350 ppm CO<sub>2</sub> is about right. Already the Earth's atmosphere is in excess of 400 ppm. Already we are in the danger zone.

**What mechanisms and strategies are there to reduce carbon in the atmosphere?**

The one sure mechanism we know about is photosynthesis – the ability of plants and seaweeds over the Earth's surface to draw carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and lock it up as 'biomass' – the total of all vegetation and other living things.

(This is of course the origin of coal deposits –the accumulation of vast quantities of vegetation during a geological age when temperatures were higher and conditions were steamier. Millions of years of this bygone biomass is now safely locked up as coal. Burning it in a matter decades simply pours CO<sub>2</sub> back into the atmosphere at a ridiculously fast rate).

So vast planting is needed – especially in tropical regions. Clearing of tropical forests for cash crops

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is madness. As a global community this is where we must start. Global wealth has to be directed to support countries in tropical regions so that they gain economic benefit from growing, enhancing and extending forests. It is in the interests of the entire global population to get the tropical vine forests working to capacity.

Any clearing of forests in other parts of the world should be matched or exceeded by programs of re-planting.

### **How could major conservation in tropical regions be achieved?**

One way would be for wealthy nations to buy up (or rent) tracts of land in tropical regions and pay local people to be rangers, stewards or managers to yield a product of value – a healthy, vibrant forest ecosystem.

### **What to do about green house gas emissions?**

First they must be branded as rubbish – stuff that we don't want in our air. (If you deposit rubbish into the local tip, you pay; if you deposit rubbish into the air, you pay.) So a price on carbon must be established. ('Tax' is the wrong word; it is a matter of paying the full price for any benefit we get from burning. There is a cost in dealing with rubbish gases.)

In theory the strategy is simple: establish a price per unit of gas-rubbish produced, start low but with an agreed and well advertised annual price increase so that industries traditionally producing much gas-rubbish can plan well ahead. There should be no exemptions for the so-called 'trade exposed' industries such as cement and aluminium. The cost of rubbish disposal would be built into the final price of the commodity in the market. Obviously things like steel, cement, travel, heating and cooling would gradually creep up in price as years passed.

### **The economy could be arranged so that poorer people do not suffer.**

James Hansen (formerly chief climate scientist with NASA) suggests that every cent collected from the price paid on polluting gases should be returned to registered tax-payers. I think the Government should keep say, 5% to cover administration costs, and possibly create a fund to help re-vegetate the tropics, but return everything else to the people. The economy itself would not suffer but it would change its shape. It would still be possible to fly from Melbourne to London but would cost approximately 50% more. Huge investment would take place into developing ways of doing things without the production of rubbish gases. Technologies would change direction; no longer would it be sensible, for example, to waste investment on things like 'carbon capture and storage'. There would be much cheaper and more efficient ways to eliminate CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere.

### **One final myth is that the recent Paris climate conference was a success.**

In the words of foremost climate scientist James Hansen:

"It's just worthless words. There is no action, just promises. As long as fossil fuels appear to be the cheapest fuels out there, they will continue to be burned." (As quoted in *New Scientist*, 19/26 December 2015, p. 8).

Many scientists have welcomed the agreement made in Paris to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, but they also point out that the actions laid out are inadequate to achieve this aim.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The science is clear, the strategies needed are clear so what is stopping us?

**Lack of knowledge. The inertia of self interest. An unwillingness to acknowledge the true nature of the problem. Vested interest in the coal industry. No sense of responsibility for the impact on future generations.**



What can we do? As normal, ordinary Australian citizens with an awareness of the enormity of what we are facing, can we do anything?

I think there are some things we can do.

1. Be informed. It's no good putting our head in the sand and hoping it will all just go away. Political intention derives from broad public sentiment so **we must talk about the problem** and do our bit to move voting power.
2. Support (join) the organizations in our community that have the expertise to influence policy at a higher level. These include: 'Environment Victoria', 'Australian Conservation Foundation', 'Get Up' and local groups such as the Macedon Ranges Sustainability Group. These organizations need your voice and your financial help.
3. Let politicians at Federal, State and Local levels know of your thoughts. A considered statement in letter or e. mail (definitely not harsh ranting!) can be effective.

I have real concerns about these issues and recognise the definite impact on the generation of my own five grandsons and beyond.

The point is that we now have a chance, slight though it may be, to do something about it! If the global community does not act it is utterly stupid – **and we share the stupidity.**

**I would be very glad to hear from anyone who shares my concerns and has good ideas about what might be done. – Jim Sansom. 100 Dons Road, NEWHAM 3442, VIC.**

**P.S:** **China** has announced that it is shutting down 1000 coal mines in its pollution fight. ("Bloomberg", 30 December, 2015)

In **India** solar is becoming just as affordable as coal. (*The Rising Sun*, "Disruption on the Horizon", KPMG, Nov. 2015)

**Costa Rica** reports that in 2015, 99% of its energy supply came from renewable sources.

## Roadsides display

Newham Landcare was part of a joint display with other Landcare and environmental groups for the Macedon Ranges Sustainability Festival on 27 February. We featured rural roadsides and flora/fauna habitat and the Cobaw biolink, with many photos illustrating examples of preserved roadside vegetation compared to damage and degradation. We also helped plan panel discussions titled Nature and Climate change. Helen and Alice had some interesting discussions with passers-by, many of whom took information handouts.



**Alice Aird/  
Helen Scott**

# WHITE-WINGED CHOUGH



## *Corcorax melanorhamphus*

Photo: courtesy Birdlife Australia

I'm fascinated by this bird as a flock lives noisily around our place and behaves like a mob of chooks/cum comedians raking through the vegetable garden or grass and ground litter for insects and seeds. They give themselves away by constant cheeping. When disturbed, the group usually flies into nearby trees, calling noisily.

White-winged Choughs are native to Australia and are one of just two surviving members of the family Corcoracidae, the Australian mud-nest builders. They are large, black birds – at about 45cm only a little smaller than Crows or Ravens (*Corvus* sp.) or a little larger than a Magpie – but have red eyes and a finer, slightly down-curved beak. In flight, the large white eye-patches in the wings are immediately obvious.

They are territorial and highly social, usually in flocks of about 4 up to 20 birds, composed of breeding adults and non-breeding helpers. At least some are young from earlier broods, and – here is Tim Low speaking – “the white-winged chough comes closer than any non-human (apart from ants) to practising slavery”, kidnapping young choughs from nearby groups to serve as extra helpers to raise a chick. A larger group assails a smaller one and “during the ensuing melee fledgling birds are lured away by wing-tail displays that command a following response”; ... “in what is dishonest society, those that remain sometimes fake helping, placing a morsel in a chick’s mouth then swallowing it themselves when the parents aren’t watching closely”.

I've been known to perform a Chough kidnap dance, but you'd be better off watching a U-tube video eg <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUORihWsQ48> or looking at Graeme Chapman's photos at <http://www.graemechapman.com.au/library/viewphotos.php?c=59>

Coughs are found throughout most of eastern and south-eastern mainland Australia, but not northern Queensland. Still common in patches where good habitat of open forest and woodland survives, Choughs are weak flyers and do not cope well with habitat fragmentation, so many surviving populations are isolated and thus vulnerable, and especially as the young don't fly, need protection from domestic pets.

They are often in association with another mud-nester, the highly gregarious and very cheeky Apostlebird. A family of these investigated every cranny of our camper trailer in Mungo Park National Park while noisily demanding titbits. I'll provide water but don't feed native birds.

Birdlife Australia has bird profiles <<http://www.birdlife.org.au/search/birds>>

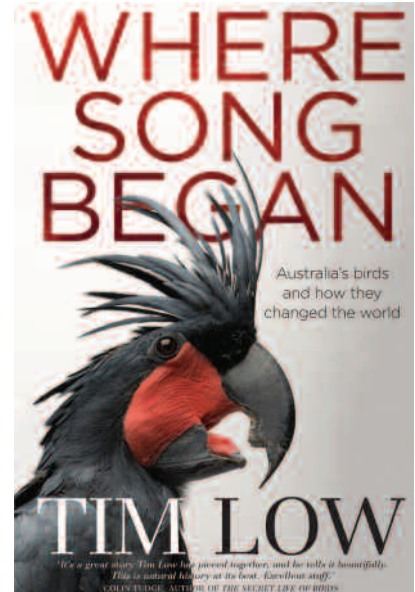
## Book Review

### ***Where Song Began: Australia's birds and how they changed the world***

Tim Low.

Viking/Penguin, 2014 and reprinted. \$32.99.

Books that overturn conventional wisdom are to be celebrated, and even better when they are fascinating to read. I have always enjoyed biologist Tim Low's writings. His books are accessible for a general audience but he is a leading expert on bush tucker, and introduced species e.g. *Feral Futures* published in 1999, and its companion *The New Nature* in 2002. This challenged conventional thinking about nature and conservation by showing that many native species are benefiting rather than suffering from human impacts, and exploring how these 'winners' sometimes go on to cause environmental problems. Examples include overabundant koalas killing eucalypt forests, and aggressive birds (e.g. Bell miners) that benefit from forest degradation. He was the first in Australia to assess the impact of climate change on weed and pest problems.



*Where Song Began* became the first nature book ever to win the Australian Book Industry award for best general non-fiction of the year in 2015. It turns ornithology on its head, presenting the latest evidence from recent DNA analysis techniques to show that the more than half the world's birds, including all songbirds, pigeons and parrots, actually evolved in Australia and New Guinea and radiated outwards in successive waves of emigration. New Guinea, biologically speaking, is included in "Australia".

Low explores the origins of our birds, how they have shaped our ecosystems, what makes them unique and why they have come to be that way.

He argues that the most revealing feature of Australian birds is the aggression between species, particularly honey-eaters, which is in part a product of the abundant nectar in Australian ecosystems. Noisy, hyper-aggressive, and bigger on average than their northern counterparts, they have evolved in an environment of abundant sunshine, and poor soils have created plants that make more sugar than they can use for growth or seed production. Birds feed on the surplus, in the form of nectar, fruit, manna and lerp. They have shaped the landscape to a strong degree.

There is so much fascinating detail about the variety of behaviours and social structures – the astonishing vocal repertoire of the lyrebirds (the sole relic of the world's first songbirds 45 million years ago), complex social play of some parrots, promiscuity of magpies and fairy-wrens, co-operative breeding... too much to detail here.

A CSIRO review in *Emu* gives a good summary chapter by chapter at [http://www.publish.csiro.au/?act=view\\_file&file\\_id=MUv115n3\\_BR.pdf](http://www.publish.csiro.au/?act=view_file&file_id=MUv115n3_BR.pdf) and Low's site at <http://www.timlow.com/books/bird-book> links to many more reviews.

The diversity of sources and astonishing depth and breadth of the research drawn upon by Low make for a lively read. Discussion skips between personal anecdotes, travel, historical accounts, quotes from Shakespeare, the fossil record, Indigenous folklore, and scientific facts and figures. Look up birds you know and love (or don't), for whole new insights.

*"That mob of magpies warbling at your back gate? They're assassins. The honeyeaters darting from bottlebrush to grevillea? Terrorists. Bellbirds ting-ing high in the misty mountain ash? Bullies. Corellas ranged along a verandah rail? Vandals. And that cassowary by the clothes line could slash you open with a single kick."* (*The Saturday Paper*, 30 June 2014).

## Great turnout from Landcarers to lobby local members about roadside conservation!



The supper room at Newham Hall was full in response to the call going out to all the Landcare groups in the region, that Mary-Anne Thomas (State MP for Macedon) and Lisa Chesters (Federal MP for Bendigo) would be there on 29 January to focus on roadside conservation. We had over 30 people attending to join in a lively discussion of roadside conservation issues and to study the very interesting and informative displays around the room. (Handouts: *Our Rural Roadsides – can we save them?* and *Roadsides protection is a state-wide issue*, plus a media report, are online at <http://www.newhamlandcare.info/events.htm> – under Jan 29.)

The discussion at the Hall was preceded by a short bus tour of several roadside sites in Newham, to give our local members the real picture of the high quality remnants that still exist on roadsides. We also inspected many examples of the types of damage significant roadsides are still sustaining every year, through the actions of Shire contractors as well as adjacent residents. We pointed out many places showing unnecessary destruction from road and drainage works, with excessive excavation, dumping of spoil on top of intact biodiverse areas, and introduction of serious weeds into disturbed soil. Carl Just, who has been hired by NDLG to survey the flora in a number of sites, accompanied the tour and with some local Landcare members, a great deal of local information and experience was shared with our local politicians. Lisa and Mary-Anne were clearly very interested and concerned. Carl has identified over 70 flora species in some of the most biodiverse roadside remnants near Newham.

After the tour, back at the Hall, Lisa and Mary-Anne both touched on their personal stories of increasing concern for roadside conservation. Lisa's experience in Landcare has been pivotal, she said: "I started in politics in Landcare".

Lisa Chesters pointed out that meetings like this are happening in fire-prone areas around the country. The question of conserving remnant vegetation in areas like Newham so that fire risk is also managed is coming up again and again. "People are meeting to come up with ideas about how to deal with this". She's keen to see what kind of program could be rolled out federally, supported by existing federal legislation relating to such things as protection of threatened species. As she said: "a big part is education, a big part is funding, and finding a way to stop the destruction, that's politics".

Education was stressed over and over. Education of contractors, education of residents, education of new residents when they first move in, and continuing for all residents regularly. Education of Shire councillors would be a good step too!

### **Post Lancefield Fires: Roadsides in the Firing Line.**

Penny Roberts raised the story of the key immediate threat to important roadside remnants - the Council motion following the Lancefield Fires. She expressed concern that fire risk is being used to justify clearing more native roadside vegetation, and that the motion passed by the Council in October 2015 will lead to even more indiscriminate clearing of native vegetation that has significant conservation value.

MAT described her view that the recent experience of loss and destruction from the fires near Lancefield that broke out when DELWP lost control of a fuel-reduction burn, have led to hot tempers, people looking for an explanation, wanting to lay blame. In this atmosphere of high emotion, reported enthusiastically by media, the notion that roadside vegetation was the culprit sprang up and was eagerly grabbed and held on to around the community. This is despite the fact that the Inquiry held in Lancefield after the fires did not find that roadside vegetation was a central risk factor.

MAT: "My personal view is that Council officers will work constructively with State government. It was a Councillor's motion, not the officers."

MAT described a conversation with Lancefield chap who stated baldly: "the problem is the roadsides". MAT replied by asking: "but why are you living here? If you cut down all the roadsides you might as well live in xxxx!" The man paused a moment, then said "oh yeah..."

Mary-Anne stressed the importance of taking a risk management approach. "We need to understand that we now live in a climate of extreme weather events. We need to plan for these events as a norm now, and be ready with appropriate responses."

She said that since the Lancefield fires, Council has asked to meet with State government representatives about roadside management. "The Shire is trying to get additional State funding for roadside vegetation work. Admittedly the MRSC has had high costs from fires in recent years. It's appropriate to talk that through."

She also informed us that Joanne Duncan, our former state MP, has been appointed by Environment Minister Lisa Neville to the Victorian Environment and Assessment Committee (VEC). She said: "Jo is passionate about biodiversity, always has been. We have really good people to help us through here."

Questions and comments followed for half an hour or so with plenty of back and forth discussion. The mood of the meeting was engaged and collaborative with the MP's present, though the Shire Council came in for a lot of criticism. The two politicians seemed to be genuinely listening to the concerns and looking for ways they could build political strategies to support the conservation work.

Lack of community consultation by Council was reported again and again.

Repeatedly Council were criticised for not heeding the results even when the community was surveyed.

Some quotes:

"Council doesn't seem to be listening to the ratepayer."

"Lip service is being paid to community surveys. Council seems to be saying: 'you can say what you want, but we've made up our minds.'"

"The survey for the curfew on cats and dogs had a huge number of submissions, over 500, but MRSC ignored them, and there's still no curfew."

Other issues raised by the group were:

- Weeds being introduced and spread (Patterson's Curse and Chilean Needle Grass for example).
- Weeds not being managed by the Shire or landholders, many that are very high fire risk.
- Failure to progress or implement existing Shire strategic environment documents – the draft Roadside Management Plan was never adopted, the Environment Strategy not heeded, the Environment Committee disbanded.

To finish, some quotable quotes from our representatives...

**Mary-Anne:** "We need to build relationships between community and Council officers. It's an election year, who's going to stand for Council?"

**Lisa:** "Our native roadsides are a vital bio link and refuge for many endangered and rare native vegetation. I would like to congratulate the hard work and commitment of the Newham Landcare members who are actively working to ensure these spaces are restored and protected... I recognize the crucial role that our local Landcare groups play in the environmental health of our Macedon Ranges roadsides and I am committed to supporting their work. I call on the Macedon Ranges Shire Council to do the same."

**Helen Scott**, March 2016.

# Launch of 'The little bit of bush'



On Thursday 18 February over 100 parents, teachers, community members and kids enjoyed a community BBQ and welcome to new parents hosted by Newham Primary School and Newham & District Landcare Group to celebrate their continued partnership and launch the newly landscaped Bush Bird Hide area next to the multipurpose court.

The project was completed with the help of Braemar volunteers and funded by a Local Landscape Enhancement Grant from DELWP. It has developed a previously underutilised section of the school into a creative and practical space for students and the community to enjoy.

Fran Spain organised plenty of kids activities and lived to tell the tale while the school ran parent information sessions.

The broader collaboration between Newham Primary School and Newham & District Landcare Group has seen various projects and funding for the school and includes the Propagation Group.

The Propagation Group meets most Thursday mornings and provides seedlings for Landcare projects across the district. It has proven an effective fundraiser generating over \$50,000 for the school in recent years. "We raise plants for Landcare and funds for the school, but importantly it's a great opportunity for parents to get together socially and have a chat. It's fun, much more fun than bake sales" says Newham Landcare Vice President Penny Roberts.

This community/welcome BBQ was a great success and we'd like to see it become a regular fixture. If you'd like further information about the Propagation group, please contact Penny: <penroberts@bigpond.com>

