

SPRING /
SUMMER 2016
Newsletter No.48



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Newham & District Landcare Group



Working towards a
healthier environment

Address – PO Box 314, WOODEND, 3442



Recoil in horror !

DIARY OF EVENTS

The summer period is generally quiet and 2016 – 2017 is no exception.

COMING UP IN EARLY 2017

FEBRUARY

Thursday 23rd, Welcome BBQ for new families at Newham Primary school.

N&DLG will again stock and man the BBQ for this event

Details tbc.

Autumn events still in the planning – Details tbc.

Autumn speaker events – Details tbc.

Hanging Rock Reserve Environmental Management Plan – understanding the principles

Birds and Birdsong.

Planting at Hanging Rock.

Group contacts

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

Committee members: 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!

Professor David Karoly visits N&DLG

Almost everyone accepts the fact of climate change.

There are many people however who balk at the notion that human activity is a major contributing factor to the changing world climate.

It is true that the global climate is not a static thing and the geological record shows great swings down the ages, from vast ice sheets to periods when steamy tropical jungles accommodated dinosaurs in swampy environments.

But as Professor David Karoly pointed out in his recent talk to the Newham Landcare Group, humans have been lucky that the last 8 to 10 thousand years have had a relatively stable climate. This is the period of gradual development of human civilizations.



Natural factors causing changes in climate are known as 'forcings'. Things like changes in the Earth's orbit, variations in the Sun's brightness and a slight wobble of the Earth's axis have been carefully studied and well documented by scientists and data from deep ice cores and ancient lake sediments have confirmed a certain regularity in these large scale forcings.

What is new is variation from the predicted pattern that cannot explained by the natural forcings.

Climate modelling is the technology enabling an assessment of the degree to which human activity (especially burning of fossil fuels since the early 1800s) has affected a change in climate.

Professor Karoly's academic background as a mathematician puts him in a good place to combine the huge amount of data from observed atmospheric measurements to construct a meaningful climate model.

One animated graphic in his talk showed increasing global temperature from the early 1800s as a series of concentric circles. Successive circles with larger diameters indicated where the temperature would reach an increase of 1.5 degrees and then 2 degrees.

The alarming thing about this graph was the accelerated pace at which we are rapidly getting to these bigger circles!

David Karoly then went on to remind us that humans are creating this problem and it is humans that can do something about it!

But what?

We have to move away from the burning of fossil fuels (especially coal) as the main source of energy for human activity. 90% of remaining coal must be left in the ground if humanity is to avoid dangerous warming to 2 degrees.

Lively discussion followed with many questions and valuable ideas about what could be done. Every one of the one hundred or so people attending Professor Karoly's talk was invited to fill in a card saying what they thought might be achieved in our community.

Some 78 different ideas were put forward and these are being collated to guide us to meaningful action within our community.

JIM SANSOM.

Preserving our best roadsides

HELEN SCOTT



A group of Newham & District Landcare members spent a lovely Sunday morning on 2 October along Sheltons Road, one of the most intact and lovely roadsides in terms of indigenous vegetation and habitat – ‘a jewel in the Macedon Ranges crown’. We removed weeds and studied the flowering stages and density of the many ground cover plants and wildflowers, topped off by the usual splendid morning tea (*pic. above*).

However we were dismayed by some of the destruction recently wrought by Council staff/contractors. At the request of a landholder, road edges had been scraped to remove saplings just as wildflowers were about to flower, and smothering mulch from ripped branches dumped on budding plants as well. The result is encouragement of grassy weeds which are fire-prone, unlike the native plants previously there.

These and other issues are specified further in this article.

On 10 November Penny Roberts, Helen Scott, Alice Aird and Sue Massie guided the Manager of the Shire’s Operations Group, Shane Power plus some of his team, with Michelle Wyatt – Shire Environment Coordinator, on a bus tour of some of our roadsides (Three Chain Road, Bolgers Lane, Sheltons Road, Hennebergs Lane, Whitebridge Road). The purpose was to discuss the impacts of road management and ideas for improvement. We were joined by Karl Just, an ecologist who has produced valuable flora surveys of our high value roadsides for Newham Landcare.

This tour resulted from a meeting of Alice and Helen with the Operations Department back in August, where we raised NDLG’s history of useful collaboration with MRSC, and used our extensive photo. collection to demonstrate concerns about loss of high conservation value roadside vegetation.

Some of the environmental issues raised again NDLG during the tour included:

- Damage to native grasses, orchids and other wildflowers from maintenance of drains.
- Erosion resulting from spraying drainage lines.
- Heavy duty vehicles parking on native vegetation.
- Reach mower scaping and cutting back trees to maintain clearances.
- Mulch left on roadside smothering native vegetation. (*photo right– mulch dumping Sheltons Road*)
- Illegal removal of vegetation by the public.



- Slashing or mowing roadsides by the public.
- Dumping of spoils and debris from grading works on roadsides as a part of fire access track maintenance works.
- Damage to native vegetation resulting from the creation of drains – particular examples being on Hennebergs Lane. (photo right).
- Introduction of Chilean Needle Grass through introduced soil and rock.



- Location of significant roadside vegetation signs needs to be reviewed.
- Need for improved training and briefing of Council employees, and continuing community education by both MRSC and Landcare groups.

MRSC acknowledged the negative impact of some works. They explained some of the operational issues such as statutory and safety requirements, for example spraying to clear 2 metres either side of road markers for visibility. The Shire has responsibilities for road construction and maintenance works involving 1700km of roadsides.

Alternative, more sensitive approaches are likely to require additional resources to cover the costs of additional machinery and equipment (the current grader used is a 'blunt instrument'), and time. With a new team of Councillors this is an opportune time to raise this. There is case to be made that roadside vegetation rates highly in terms of asset value and therefore is worth asset protection.

Some of the opportunities arising from our tour include:

- Our Landcare group on high value roadsides could remove saplings, by pulling or cut and paint, from the road edge to prevent the need for more invasive removal techniques once the trees mature.
- Shane to identify opportunities to rectify damage to Hennebergs Lane in consultation with Landcare.
- Operations Dept to explore alternative works methods as a part of the Roadside Management Plan.

One of the outcomes of the Shire's adopted Environment Strategy 2016 is the commitment to develop a new Roadside Management Plan, something members of NDLG have been suggesting for some time. Your committee has requested input into this at every stage, and the tour forms part of this, as do Karl Just's surveys. There is a page in progress on the website documenting our work on rural roadsides <<http://www.newhamlandcare.info/roadsides.htm>>.



Sheltons Road: wildflowers and Stipa grasses.

What's lies beneath...

On 25 November, students in grades 4-6 at Newham Primary had a kitchen garden session where we found out about different types of plant roots and how plants grow.

We found out that plants need roots to hold themselves up and to draw up moisture, especially on hot days. Mulch also helps to keep the water in so that it doesn't evaporate.

We went outside to the gardens and cut open plants like onions, beetroot and garlic. We looked at the layers inside the plants and the difference between plants. I found it interesting that there are different types of roots like the tap root and fibrous roots. I also found it interesting that the carrot is a root.

I really enjoyed cutting open the plant roots and seeing the layers inside them.

Thank you to Newham and District Landcare for funding this session.

Minna, Grade 4.



Newham rainfall report

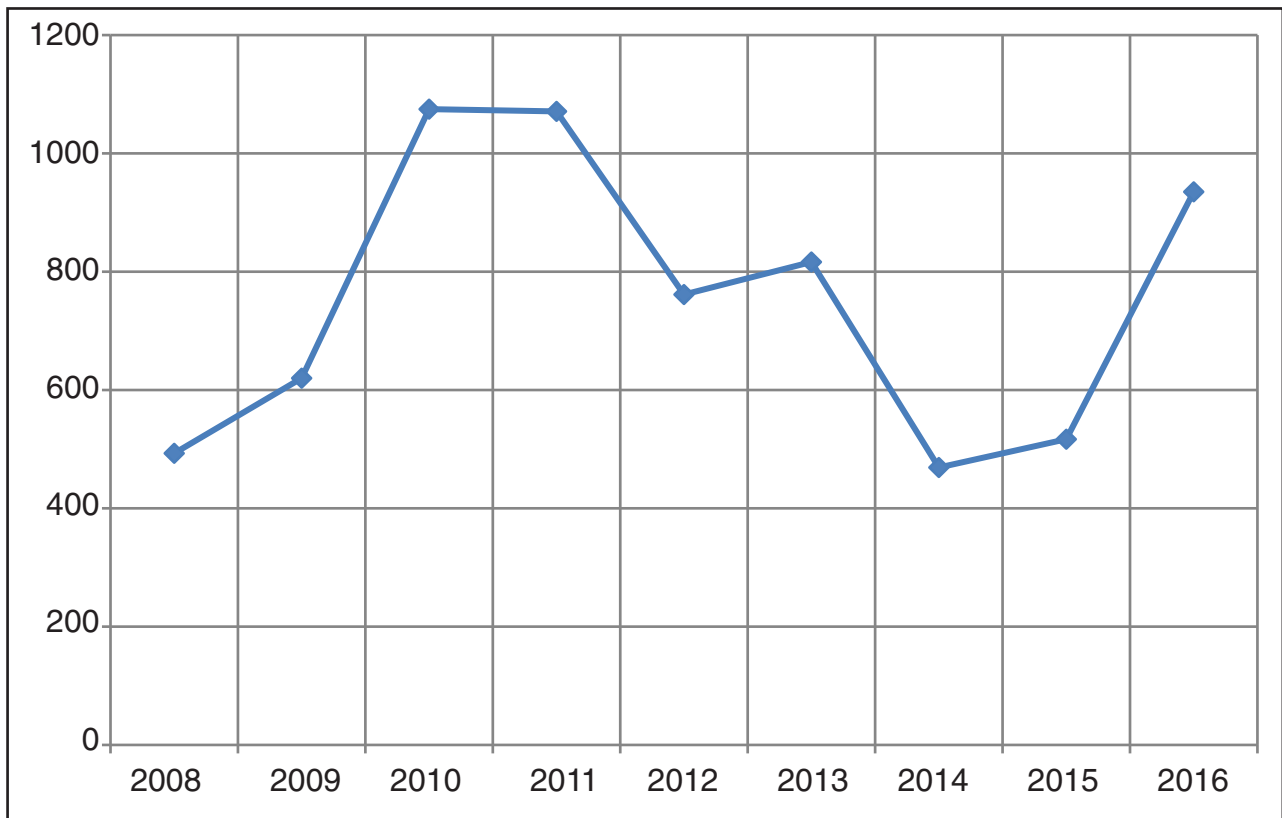
Total rainfall for the period 16 January to end of November 2016 is 935mm. This exceeds the totals from 2008 with exception of 2010 and 2011. If rainfall for December exceeds 140mm, 2016 will have been wetter than any year since 2008 (when my records begin).

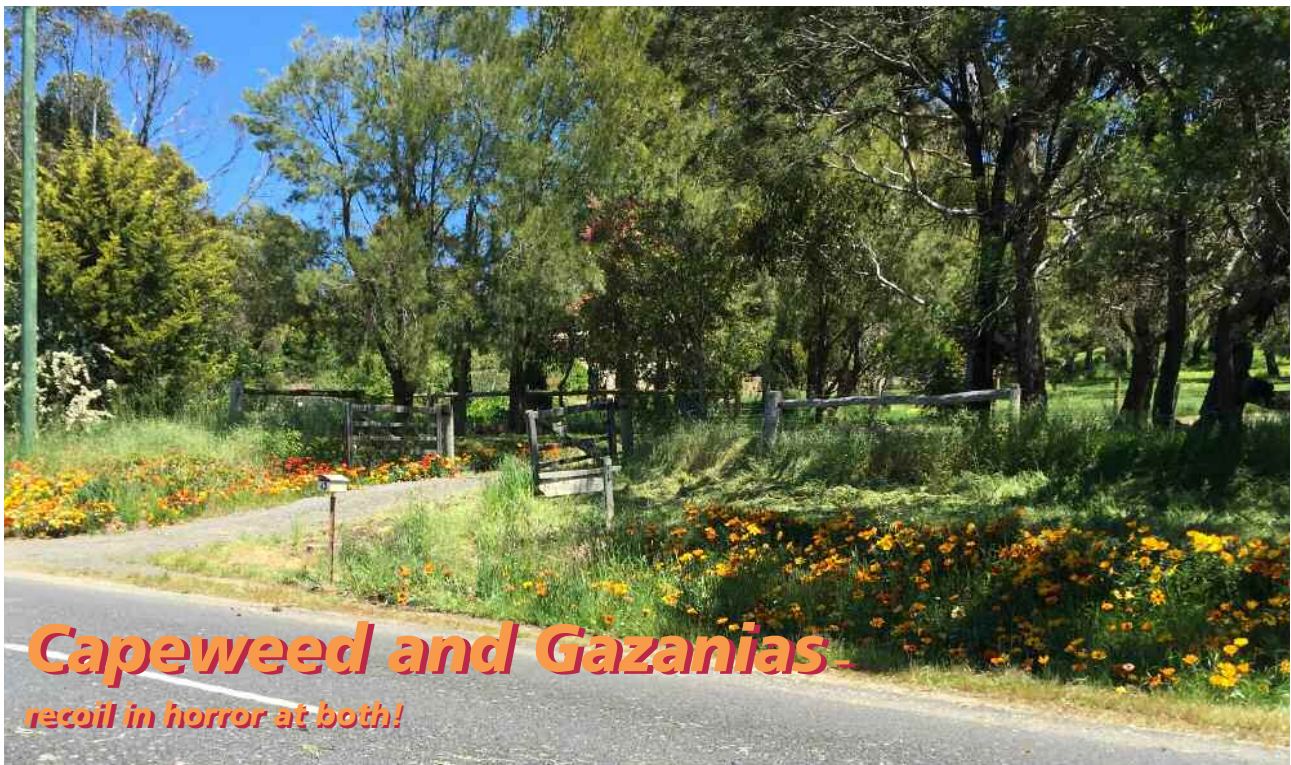
Since the dry year of 2014 (469mm), rainfall has trended upwards each year. The table below shows the monthly totals.

Nick Massie

Per month													
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
2008	25.5	12.5	30.5	18	35	103	53.5	50.5	14	6	60.5	84	493
2009	0	7	46.5	28	52	48.5	50.5	101	82.5	31	86	87	620
2010	23.5	56	85	47.5	25	93	85	162.5	63	163.9	178.4	92	1074.8
2011	243.4	142.4	21.6	65.6	64.5	58.3	82.2	50.2	102.6	66.6	77.4	96.2	1071
2012	47.6	141.8	77.6	30.6	43.8	115	104.4	90.4	42.6	21.4	21	25.2	761.4
2013	3.6	122.4	43.2	15.4	85	71	120.2	116.4	90.2	68	41.4	39.6	816.4
2014	18.2	11.2	43.6	70.2	50.6	105.6	33.8	15.6	49.8	34.8	14.6	21	469
2015	55.2	46.4	16.2	35.8	66.4	32	88.6	37.4	39.4	22.4	42.8	34.2	516.8
2016	37.6	5.2	38.8	41.4	106.6	105.6	170	92.2	186	97.4	54.2		935

The graph below shows the yearly totals. Note that 2016 does not include the December reading.





Capeweed and Gazanias -
recoil in horror at both!

Whilst Capeweed is well recognized as a scourge, Gazanias with their bright daisy-type flower are still available for sale in nurseries despite their ranking as an environmental weed.

- Both are immigrants from South Africa.
- Both are recognized as environmental weeds in Australia.
- Both have predominately yellow flowers, flowering NOW.
- Both develop a flat plat of leaves that is dense enough to smother the plants around it, whether it is pasture grass or native wildflowers.
- Both have copious seed that can be spread.



Those of you who drive along Dons Road will have noticed the extending patch of yellow flowering Gazanias on the western side of the road heading out of Newham. They have been quietly multiplying over a number of years, after being deliberately planted outside one property (not by the current owners).



What you may not realize is the potential of this plant to spread far and wide. Last spring 3 mature plants were found high up on the east face of the Jim Jim in an area protected by a Trust for Nature covenant. This is possible because they produce large quantities of light seed that is carried by the wind.

Getting rid of pest plants like these and replacing them with native species will help preserve the integrity of our local habitats, attracting and providing resources for more native birds and other animals.

Gazanias are just one of many introduced species that compete with local indigenous species when they escape from our gardens into the surrounding bush. A weed audit at Hanging Rock Reserve in 2014 turned up Ivy, Holly, Blue Periwinkle, European Elderberry and Honeysuckle – all present in the gardens of properties around the reserve and probably spread into the reserve by birds.

These very showy plants originated in South Africa and are being promoted in many plant nurseries as a tough drought resistant species. Many hybrids have been developed in cultivation between *Gazania linearis* and a closely related environmental weed species *Gazania rigens*. **These plants**

produce abundant wind-blown seeds that can be dispersed many kilometres from the source, producing ever-increasing patches of gazania that compete with locally indigenous species.

Gazanias also have the ability to re-grow from their bare roots, which enables them to spread into our bushland by the dumping of garden waste containing the tuberous root systems of these plants.

Native animals tend not to eat them as they are low in nutritional value. Native species are grazed, often so heavily that they are unable to set seed, and the balance is tipped strongly in favour of the Gazania which will germinate readily in bare or disturbed ground.

Control methods include pulling out by hand if the infestation is small (making sure the roots are removed so it doesn't re-grow) or spraying with a registered systemic herbicide into the heart of the rosette. If you have a large outbreak amongst grasses or in a lawn, a broadleaf-selective herbicide maybe a much better option. **At very least, remove and then bag the flower heads.** The 'bagging' prior to disposal is important because even when the gazania flower heads are detached, most still have the ability to develop as mature flower heads with masses of viable seed.

Many native plants could be used as substitutes – native daisy species (e.g. Sticky Everlasting which has been flowering profusely in Wesley Park), clumping species (e.g. Matted Flax Lily) or Pigface.

Photo. right: The epicentre of the Dons Road infestation – can you tell we were there? 5 pairs of hands over an hour resulted in a trailer-load of plant material which was burnt in a hot fire later the same day.

Yet again, the end-of-year gathering was a fantastic event. Perfect weather. Delicious food. Great crowd.

The seriously contested Egg Toss was won by Alex van der Kooi and Scott Henson – with Alex Watts and his grandmother Elizabeth coming in second.

Thanks to Shane of Macedon Ranges Signs who has been engraving the trophy free of charge for some years now.

The great Scott Wellie Toss was a time for us all to remember Paul Tanner, who won this event so easily for many years. We miss his friendship and regret his absence.

Lachlan Henson managed to fend off Sally Watts and David Moore to take the trophy this year.

Keep the first Saturday in December free every year!



The joys of getting to know your local frogs



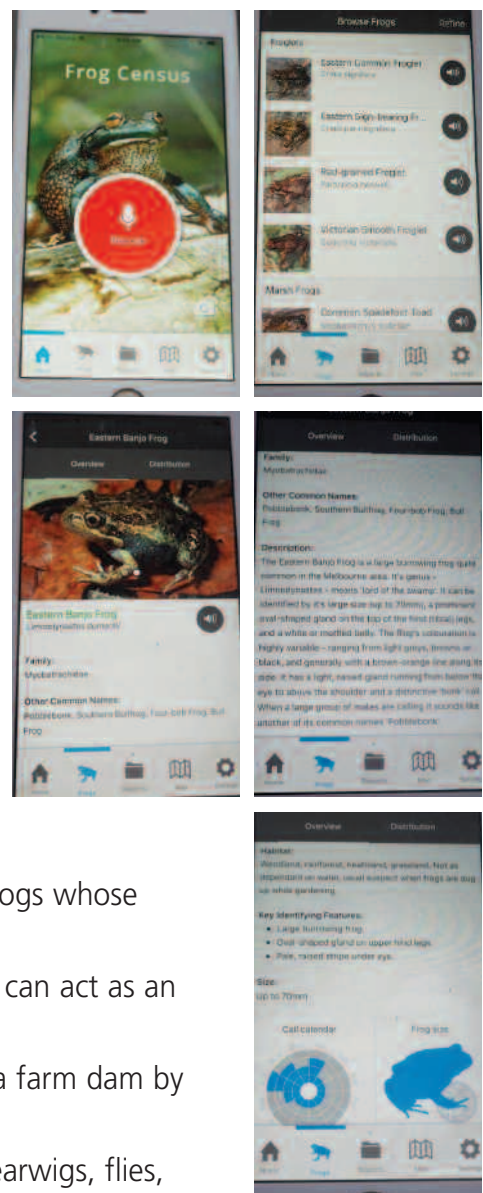
Melbourne Water have made getting to know our local frogs a breeze – check out 'Frog Census' on their web site and download the free app. to your phone (Apple or Android), and head for the nearest body of water. Males frogs do the calling and are territorial – so if you respond to their call, via your phone, with the same species call they will respond like a duelling banjo.

This wonderful app. has kept my 4 yo grandson entertained for hours – yes, hours! He listens to the calls and look at the pictures – then wants the 'story'. Tadpoles have gone home with him to Melbourne. I have enjoyed discovering which frogs are breeding in my propagating area and around the now-rather-full-for-the-first-time-in-20-years dam, to say nothing of the joy of spending time with my grandson and consolidating his interest in the natural world.

With this app. you can record frog calls and send them to Melbourne Water for identification at any time of year but there are 'specific data collection programs' in April, August, October and November. Data collected informs planning and decision making on waterway health and is added to the Victorian biodiversity Atlas.

There are images and biographical information for each frog and a recording of its calls.

- Victoria is home to 35 species of frog, some of which are threatened with extinction.
- Habitat loss is a key threat to frog populations, along with pollution, chytrid fungus.
- Cats are also a significant threat, especially to those frogs whose defence mechanism is to bloat up, becoming ball-like.
- Frogs are sensitive to changes in their habitat, so they can act as an indicator of waterway health.
- You can take action in your own backyard or around a farm dam by creating frog friendly habitat
- Frogs are a gardeners friend: they eat insects – think earwigs, flies, aphids, ants, scorpions etc.



Eastern Banjo Frog (*Limnodynastes dumerii*)

Description: Commonly known as the Banjo frog or Pobblebonk, it's genus name – *Limnodynastes* – means 'lord of the swamp'. It's warty appearance and size cause people to mistake it for a cane toad, which might have hitched a ride to Victoria.

Its colouration is highly variable – ranging from light greys, browns or black, and generally with a brown-orange line along its side.

When a large group of males are calling it sounds like another of its common names 'Pobblebonk'. This is a large, common burrowing frog, not so dependent on water as other species, so it may be dug up whilst gardening.

It can be readily identified by:

- Its large size (up to 70mm).
- A prominent oval-shaped gland on the top of the hind legs.
- A white or mottled belly.
- A pale raised stripe running from below the eye to above the shoulder.
- A distinctive 'bonk' call.



Banjo frog crossing my drive on a rainy night.

Since discovering his delight in the frog app. I have introduced this grandson to Morecombs bird app. – the introductory sampler of 45 or so birds has been similarly fascinating to him.

He stayed overnight recently and bedtime books were chosen from the Landcare library – 'Tracks and Scats', 'Field Guide to Birds of Australia', 'Spiders', 'Insects'. Breakfast reading was more of the same (*see pic. below*).

With practice I became more adept at pulling out the interesting facts from the data...*'WOW, geckoes don't have eyelids so they wash their eyeballs with their tongue'. Can you? What are eyelids for? etc*

His enthusiasm was still strong on a second visit, so a search was made for reference material more suitable for small hands... and I found lizard and frog resources with A6 plasticized pages spirally bound.

This is creative child minding based on responding to an expressed interest (even though it has been suggested I was attempting indoctrination...). I have reassured his mother that we have also covered 'why you always leave snakes alone' and 'bite first aid' in addition to the differences between a legless lizard and a snake and all about red-back spiders.

Daytime activities included frog hunting, insect discovery and tadpole catching. I could work in the garden with him by my side, happy as long as I occasionally put a new critter into the large tub we had for that purpose. Happy child, happy grandma!



Hangin Rock Reserve:

hands-on session 9 October

The Landcare group has undertaken 'hands-on' sessions along the creek in spring and autumn since 2011, supported by State Government funds (3 separate Communities for Nature grants). The long term goal is well-established habitat for small animals and birds and a pleasant walking trail that loops from one end of the creek to the other, where you can feel 'lost' in the bush.

Around 7000 indigenous native plants have gone into the ground to re-establish ground and shrubby layers that have been lost over recent decades. Most of the weed management has been done by contractors – but our volunteers have hand-pulled woody weed seedlings (Broom, Holly, Blackberry, Laurel) and hand weeded around planted natives to 'give them room to grow'.

October 9th this spring was a leisurely day from a planting point of view (only 250 tubes) but we did a lot of maintenance as well and still finished by 11.30am. Frames were removed from established plants for re-use elsewhere and hand-weeding was undertaken around smaller plants so that they will be obvious and separate from adjacent areas that are mown. As the wind picked up and the day closed in we retreated to one of the picnic shelters for lunch.

If you walk along the creek, the difference we have made is starting to show, despite the heavy pressure kangaroos and wallabies place on the plants and losses to dumped mulch and past spraying practices. If you venture there keep a lookout for foreign seedlings and pull them out as you go! ctices around the edges of the ovals.

