

“
 During Penny’s term as president the group’s membership grew from 40 to 100 families, more than 35 per cent of Newham district’s population.
 ”



From left Alice Aird, Penny Roberts and Helen Scott take a break during a working bee in 2014.

Some outstanding women of the Newham and

Before I moved to our property outside Woodend in 2004 my botanist sister advised me to join a local Landcare group and start learning. It was great advice. The Newham and District Landcare Group (NDLG) was then in its first year (I joined in 2006) with a vision to enhance biodiversity and natural ecosystems within the local environment.

I am now an addicted regenerator of land and a passionate gardener. I consider my long years of employment as practice for my retirement work in Landcare and other community activities. There are many wonderful women involved in local Landcare. Here is a snapshot of a few of them.

A force of nature

Penny Roberts has been one of our Landcare champions since the group’s inception in 2004. During Penny’s term as president the group’s membership grew from 40 to 100 families, more than 35 per cent of Newham district’s population. Penny is known fondly as a force of nature due to her commitment, energy and ability to get things done. Her leadership has helped members achieve success in our major project, the Cobaw Biolink, as well as successfully engaging Newham Primary School and the local community in many Landcare activities and events.

Penny has been responsible for securing and managing many significant grants for

the group, including our current Victorian Government Biodiversity On-ground Action Grant. Since its inception, the group has collectively secured more than \$520,000 funding from 21 different grants. This funding has enabled on-ground works at 53 private properties along the Cobaw Biolink’s axis, at Hanging Rock Reserve, and has helped protect a Federally-listed threatened species, matted flax-lily (*Dianella amoena*) on a local roadside.

Penny willingly shares her skills and knowledge of indigenous plants, seed collection, propagation, revegetation techniques, landscape-level planning, pests and project management. She trains members during planting days, working bees at Newham Primary School and roadside weeding events. A group of volunteers trained in propagation methods by Penny has supplied tens of thousands of indigenous tube stock for use within the Cobaw Biolink. Penny encourages volunteers to be independent and to take up challenges like conserving remnant roadside vegetation and habitat.

An assiduous networker, Penny hosts dinners for new members each year which lead to friendships and involvement in planting days on each other’s properties. She has instigated numerous educational events and field days for the group and the wider community.

Environmental education at Newham Primary School is a priority for Penny and the group. The group provides funding for materials and specialist teachers on school trips and camps, and activities such as a kitchen garden program and science classes. The students are encouraged to publish their reports in the NDLG newsletter.

Penny organised the school’s propagating group with parents and grandparents providing labour. The group has grown plants to order for Melbourne Water Stream Frontage Management Program participants, school landscaping projects, and has supplied low-cost indigenous plants to Landcare members, raising more than \$67,000 for the school.

Penny’s work was recognised with a commendation in the 2017 Victorian Landcare Awards Australian Government Individual Landcarer category.

The weedies

Sue Massie is the convenor and recorder of activities of the NDLG’s Roadside Management Group Sub-Committee. Known as the weedies, this group has been underway since 2005, mapping weed infestation on roadsides for the Macedon Ranges Shire Council’s (MRSC) database and organising working bees to remove noxious and woody weeds on roadsides.

The group meets bi-monthly at members’ homes. Fran Spain and Julianne Telbach are



Jenny Waugh (left) and Penny Roberts distributing tree guards along the Cobaw Biolink.

District Landcare Group

By Helen Scott

also stalwart weedies. Fran was secretary of the group for three years. She is a great organiser of events such as wildflower walks, propagation workshops and the biennial Newham Garden Club plant sale.

As a weedie myself I have been working closely with Alice Aird to persuade landowners and MRSC to improve practices on rural roadsides. In 2015 Alice and I made a budget submission to MRSC for an updated roadsides management plan. Mapping was completed in 2018 and the draft plan is due for release early in 2019. Alice, Penny and I continue to make robust submissions to various MRSC environmental strategies, and we have organised many meetings, displays and events including a tour of local roadsides with our State and Federal Members of Parliament.

Alice believes it is often feelings that ignite action.

"It was the pain of losing a more natural bit of roadside that I had been enjoying, but not actively being a custodian of, that made me become more active to conserve these irreplaceable overlooked places.

"I've discovered that I care deeply about these small patches of unmanaged ecology, grateful that my love for these places has been revealed to me. I don't have to go far away to be in nature that is unregulated, wild, still what it is and has been for a long, long time," Alice said.

The weedies goal is to encourage locals and agencies to be custodians of the small wildernesses and important biodiversity connections that remain on some of our rural roadsides. Alice is also involved in Rivers of the West.

A blogger and the Waterwatchers

Brigitte Kny is a wildlife carer who contributes her popular and humorous blog to our newsletter, featuring animal characters she has cared for. Her 2008 booklet, *Plants, Flowers, Shrubs and Fungi of Kolora* is sold to raise money for the group. Brigitte and her husband Karl work tirelessly on restoring the environmental values of their property, including hosting events and monitoring the health of the local Garden Hut Creek for Waterwatch.

Waterwatch is also one of Jenny Waugh's projects. Jenny, with her partner Jim Sansom, was one of the founding members of NDLG. A former science teacher, Jenny has been working with students from the local primary school on a monthly basis for the last 12 years to monitor water quality in Deep Creek.

These are just a few of the exceptional women in our Landcare group that work together in a spirit of great enthusiasm and cooperation.

Helen Scott is secretary of the NDLG and manages the group's website at www.newhamlandcare.info

For more information email Helen Scott at orseda@outlook.com



Morning tea time during a roadside working bee in 2017.