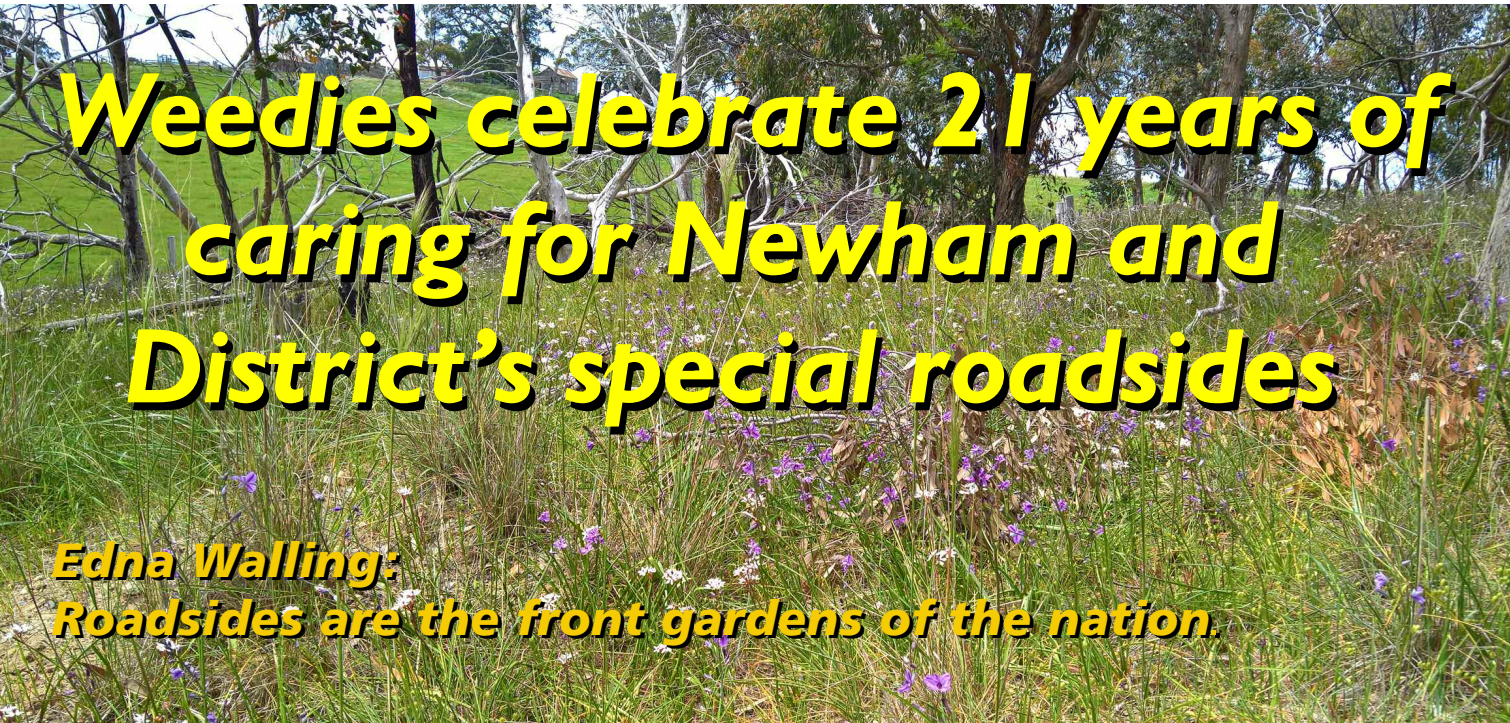




Weedies celebrate 21 years of caring for Newham and District's special roadsides

***Edna Walling:
Roadsides are the front gardens of the nation.***

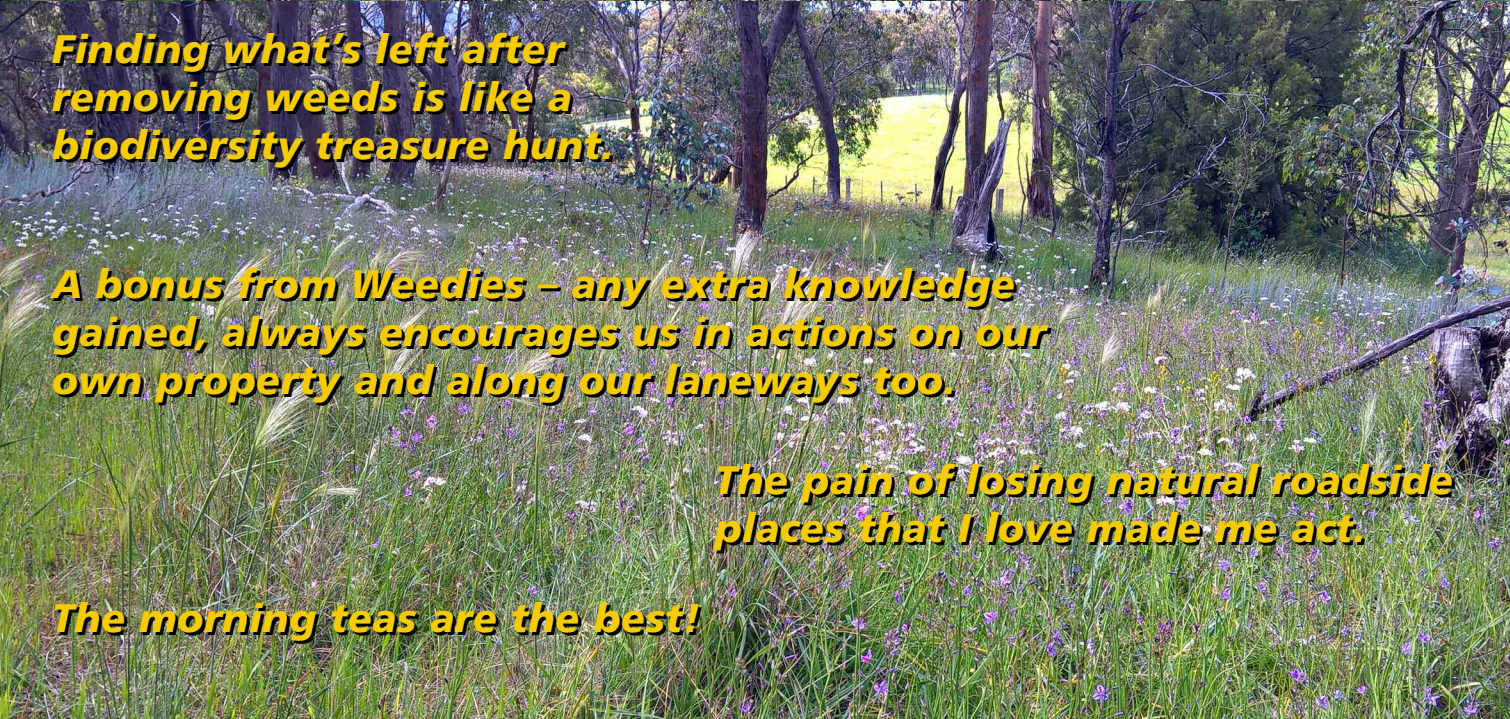


***Great way to get to know our area,
the wildflowers and weeds and enjoy
a social catch up afterwards.***

***We can all be custodians of
small wildernesses.***

***I now see rural roadsides as a landscape
web of indigenous flora and fauna.***

***Being a member of the Weedies for
a long time has meant I have
learned the names of the local
wildflowers.***



***Finding what's left after
removing weeds is like a
biodiversity treasure hunt.***

***A bonus from Weedies – any extra knowledge
gained, always encourages us in actions on our
own property and along our laneways too.***

***The pain of losing natural roadside
places that I love made me act.***

The morning teas are the best!

Very early in its life Newham and District Landcare Group (NDLG) recognised that we have some special roadsides holding precious remnants of rare plant communities and providing habitat and corridors for many animal species. Way back on 11 May 2005 at Newham Store, nine intrepid members set out as protectors and champions of these much-neglected mini wildernesses, at the inaugural NDLG Roadside Management Group meeting.

That these special habitats still existed in 2005 was somewhat miraculous, as there was nothing in place in the Macedon Ranges to prevent the neglect, damage and destruction of roadside vegetation and habitat, and it was increasing every year.

So began an active campaign with the long-term objective of improving the roadsides as habitat for local flora and fauna, and as key elements in the Cobaw Biolink. Firstly the group assessed the threats and prioritised action, always considering the varied factors that impact roadsides, including fire and provision of services.

It quickly became clear that something had to be done to reduce weeds. Working Bees many times a year to remove weeds have been the core activity of the Weedies group over their 21 years of action, supported by Council grants for equipment and chemicals. Hours worked by NDLG volunteers on roadside weed control have been diligently recorded by Convenor Sue Massie. From 10 January 2006 to 29 April 2026 862 person hours were spent destroying weeds on various Shire roadsides. This equates to \$11,347 at the LVI 2023 volunteer rate of \$41.72 per hour. What would this cost the Shire in-house or with contractors?

As well as removing weeds, members of the RMG took a multi-pronged approach.

We talked to the Macedon Ranges Shire Council's (MRSC) then Environment Officer, and nominated priority roads for weed destruction to the Council to spray (with care), starting in 2006 along Dons Rd, Egans Lane and Jim Rd. The Weedies extensively mapped weed infestations onto the MRSC database. At our suggestion, the Council in 2007 distributed a letter to all landowners on behalf of NDLG about the roadside spraying program, plus offering RMG's help and advice for their own property weed management.



Importantly, the tradition that our working bees are always capped off with tea and cake was established at the start and continues with enthusiasm.

We invited the community to join working bees and come to information and education sessions such as workshops on indigenous plant propagation and grasslands, wildflower walks and local expos, often with guest speakers. We even have a song dedicated to us – *The Weedies Lament!*

Still the biodiversity destruction on roadsides continued through the actions of landowners, MRSC staff and contractors. In 2015 NDLG commissioned ecologist Karl Just to undertake botanical surveys on the most precious and threatened local roadsides. He documented many endangered, rare and significant species, stating: *Many of these road reserves support vegetation communities and flora species that have otherwise been cleared from the adjacent private lands. They therefore act as important refuges for the conservation of native flora in the region... the (10 road reserves surveyed) all have high habitat values, supporting many large old hollow-bearing trees and acting as key habitat links across predominantly cleared landscapes.*

From 2015 some members of the RMG started serious lobbying, calling for better protection of remnant roadside vegetation. We lobbied MRSC to update an old 1990 Draft Roadside Management Plan. To back this up we presented a paper to Councillors, submitted to the Budget, organized talks and displays, produced some hard-hitting documents and handouts and ran public workshops like this one in 2015.



We had meetings with Council staff and in 2016 took the Operations Dept on a tour to demonstrate damage and threats, including verge grading and drainage works; dumping of spoils; weeds spread by machinery and people; inappropriate slashing and mowing; removal of woody habitat like understorey and ground layer; and planting of non-native large windbreak trees like cypress close too close to the roadside fence.

In 2016 we took our Federal and State Members of Parliament on a roadsides bus tour to demonstrate high-quality remnants and the damage done. With representatives from other Landcare and environmental groups we engaged the politicians in lively discussion while viewing a display of maps and posters at Newham Hall.

The decade of lobbying continued. Sometimes called road rangers, we presented to a long list of local and state government bodies and to Shire strategies, making sure that the plight of roadsides featured in all.



We took part with MRSC, the CFA and local residents in developing the 2019 Three Chain Road Fire Risk Mitigation Action Plan, a controversial topic after the 2015 Lancefield-Cobaw bushfires.

Partnering with MRSC in 2020 the Newham Roadside Biodiversity Monitoring Project spotlight surveyed native fauna species on 10 roadsides. Results showed how ecologically significant these are, finding 4 times as many fauna species as a similar program on Mount Macedon!

GOOD NEWS – we had success.

In 2017 a draft MRSC Roadside Conservation Management Plan was at last announced. We participated in focus groups, and the final Plan was adopted in 2021 – 15 years after RMG began! This Plan is a vital document to guide all works on roadsides, with the three priorities of road safety, fire risk reduction and biodiversity conservation; all needing to be well understood by all parties. The Shire has a dedicated Roadsides officer who consults with us on roadside activities.

It cannot be said often enough: having a good plan is just the beginning. Ongoing education is the key to effective roadside conservation – education of contractors, education of residents, education of new residents when they first move in, and continuing for all residents regularly.

The Weedies in 2026

Twenty-one years after we began, the Weedies are still organising educational events and working bees. The next one on 8 November is a wildflower extravaganza walk and weed identification on Sheltons road followed by lunch.

Many people have taken part in Weedies activities. A shout out to Sue Massie (Convenor), Fran Spain, Penny and Hilary Roberts, Helen Scott, Alice



The usual suspects, Whitebridge Road September 2017.

Aird, Bruce Hedge, Jane Trikojus, Julianne and Horst Tellbach, Jim Sansom, Doug Dalgleish, Howard and Janine Stirling, Kathryn Nicholson, and Wanda Moore amongst others. The late Jenny Waugh, Steve Krstic, Nick Massie and this year, Horst Tellbach, were active Weedies and are greatly missed.

We'd now love to welcome new people and new life into the custodianship of these remnant biodiverse ecosystems that fortunately still exist on our roadsides. Working bees are a great opportunity to learn how to identify invasive weeds and native trees, shrubs, grasses and wildflowers, and to learn and practice control techniques, from when to pull by hand and when and how to use herbicides.

It's not just weed removal. We need different people to be champions of these precious ecosystems: to survey them often and act when damage occurs; to set up educational events and displays; write articles and letters; work with other groups; to do whatever it takes to ensure that these biodiverse refuges are not lost for all time.

As one member said: *Our activities might even prolong the lives of the old trees that link us to pre-colonial life.* Imagine that... we can conserve history as well as habitat.

The need for vigilance is as great as ever. Only this month (September) fifteen areas of damage in half a kilometre were spotted by an RMG member in Sheltons Rd – caused by inappropriate roadside and drainage grading and dumping of spoils.

We'd love you to join us. Together we can protect these special places so that future generations of people and animals will be able to enjoy their beauty and bounty for a very long time.

You can follow the whole history of RMG with articles and pictures at <https://newhamlandcare.info/rural-roadsides/>

Helen Scott and **Alice Aird**, September 2026.