



**Menai
Wildflower
Group**



Newsletter of Menai Wildflower Group August 2016

President's Report

Those fresh south westerlies have kept a chill on our faces as we venture into flowering winter wonderland. Bright warming colours of Banksia and Boronia with Epacris and every shade, shape of developing Acacia keep us glowing with anticipation of every changing moment.

There is an opportunity to join fellow members in enjoying the secret delights of Muogamarra Nature Reserve on the 27 August 2016. The reserve is only open six weeks of the year to the public. For those wishing to attend information on the event is published in this newsletter.

Greg Jackson from our MWG has once again excelled himself in presenting his topic "Mills of the Georges River Basin" at our last meeting.

Thanks to all the members who have taken time to help Lloyd with the compound garden and a special mention to East Hills Group for their continuing propagation meets.

Our next speaker will be Peter Olde on garden grevilleas, which will be our last Saturday winter meeting for 2016. This will be a wonderful opportunity to be inspired by Peter yet again and a great time to stroll around the compound gardens.

As the APS NSW get-together draws closer, we will be eagerly awaiting the event. We can't wait to be entertained by our northern group in Tamworth on 20-21 August. Hope to catch up with you there.

Jason Cockayne

Coming Local Events

(See Special Interest for others)

6 Aug Working Bee at IRFB 9am start

6 Aug Propagation at IRFS nursery 1pm

**13 Aug Menai Wildflower Group meeting
Guest speaker – Peter Olde
"Garden Grevilleas" 1pm**

3 Sep Working Bee at IRFB 9am start

3 Sep Propagation at IRFS nursery 1pm

3,4 Sep Open Day Grevillea Park, Bulli 10-4pm

10,11 Sep Open Day Grevillea Park, Bulli 10-4pm

**10 Sep Waratah walk Lucas Heights
Contact Lloyd Hedges**

**14 Sep Menai Wildflower Group meeting
Guest speaker – Chris Lloyd
"Montague Island" 7pm**

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From the Treasurer

An updated membership renewal form can be found on our website.

Sharon Pearson

If any member knows of someone who would like to do a talk for our group in 2017 please give their details to a committee member.

ATTENTION –Winter Saturday Meeting Start Time. The doors will be open from 12.30pm and the meeting will start at 1pm. Why not come along at 12.30pm for a wander around the garden or chat over a cup of tea.

Special Interest

Deadline for contributions to next newsletter will be Wednesday 28 Sept'16.

Any items suitable for inclusion in the newsletter may be sent to the Editor (Post to Secretary or e-mail fergsrus@ihug.com.au) before the deadline.

Working Bees at IRFB start at 9am and include weeding, mulching and lunching.

Propagation days are now a regular part of running the nursery at Illawong Rural Fire Station. The next two will be at 1pm on Saturdays 6 August and 3 September.

Nursery group held at the Tip Nursery. Please contact Lloyd Hedges if you wish to start attending.

The Group's Website Home Page can be easily accessed by doing a Google search using the phrase "Menai Wildflower Group" and selecting what should be the first option offered.

Visit a neighbouring group

When you joined the Menai Wildflower Group you became a member of the NSW APS and therefore are welcome at other APS group meetings, bushwalks, etc. This gives members a lot more activities to participate in.

Visit the APS NSW website www.austplant.com.au/ and check out what other districts are doing, particularly our neighbours:

Easthills <http://easthills.austplants.com.au/>
and Sutherland <http://sutherland.austplants.com.au/>.

Lloyd Hedges

APS NSW Get-Together being held in Tamworth on 19 -21 August.

The last **Tip Community Group** meeting on 9/6/16 raised the following issues for our information only:

The tip will now charge \$165 per ton to accept scrap metals to cover their costs but the Council can advise where scrap may be disposed of at no cost to residents.

The tip extension with \$100M pay back is being exhibited and closes at the end of June.

Doug Patterson

PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

MWG invites keen photographers to submit entries to this year's photographic competition. The 13 winners will have their photos included in our 2017 calendar. Entries should show elements of native plants or fungi from our local geographic region and all photos will be judged on technical skill & artistic merit.

A maximum of 5 photos per person can be submitted via email or alternatively, you can submit on a USB flash drive by post or by hand.

Email: jimariley35@hotmail.com (overall file size maximum of 3MB – if your photo is accepted for the calendar you will be asked for a high-res image)

Post USB: Menai Wildflower Group
PO Box 3104
BANGOR NSW 2234

Drop off USB: To a MWG Committee Member on the following Saturdays between 9am-3pm: 2 July, 6 August, 3 September or 1 October

at the Illawong Rural Fire Station (adjacent to the roundabout).

Deadline: by 3pm on 1st October 2016

Successful entrants will receive a native plant and a copy of the calendar at our December 14th meeting.

Terms & Conditions

Photos must be of the natural world within the Sutherland & St George areas

Local native plants or fungi

Your original work

Maximum of 5 images per person

By entering the competition you grant permission for MWG to use your image in their 2017 calendar and to promote the activities of the MWG.

Wattle Walk and Talk (Free)

Joseph Banks Native Plants Reserve, Manooka Place, Kareela.

9.45 am for 10 am start, Saturday 27 August

Enjoy a walk and talk on wattles with Rhonda Daniels from the Australian Plants Society. We'll focus on local wattles and some more unusual Acacia species which are easily seen at the reserve – just in time for Wattle Day.

Walk about 1 hour. Stay for morning tea and plant sales.

Bookings through Rhonda Daniels ph 9521 8381 or sutherland@austplants.com.au

Muogamarra Nature Reserve – 27 August

Here's your chance to walk through a spring flowering wonderland. Visit Muogamarra Nature Reserve on 27 August to experience this reserve that is only open to the public on 6 weekends during the year – this year from 13 August to 18 September 2016. Sharon & I have been before, as have other MWG members and friends, and we have all enjoyed it immensely. There are many walks, all quite easy, and it's a great photo opportunity – flora, fauna and landscapes. We will meet you there at 9am.



Muogamarra – 31 August 2013 (photo by SKB)

It costs \$10 for adults, \$5 for children, \$25 for families (2A, 3C). To get there by car from Sydney follow these directions:

Head north towards Newcastle on the F3 Freeway and take the Berowra exit

Turn right onto the Pacific Highway and follow it past Cowan.

The park entrance is on your left, approx. 3km north of Cowan.

Cowan train station 6km from the reserve.

For more information about this reserve go to www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au

Cooktown Orchid



Graeme Davies started our June meeting by showing two fine examples of cold grown, *Dendrobium biggibum*, the Cooktown orchid. This spectacular species is the State emblem of

Queensland and until now has been impossible to grow in southern climes without the use of artificial heat.

New breeding techniques using plant material from higher, colder sites have now allowed the development of these new cultivars.

June Guest Speaker

Graham Fry is the current coordinator of the Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve bird banding program.

Munghorn Gap near Mudgee was started as a bird banding/study site in 1965 and the study has continued to the current day. Consequently, we now have over 50 years of data and as such it is one of the longest wildlife studies in Australia. Graham Fry is the current co-ordinator of the study and on the 11 June he gave a presentation on what has been learnt from the study.

There have been major changes to the vegetation in that time due to change in land use from a grazing property to a nature reserve and the subsequent revegetation of open country has had some impact on bird diversity.

However, the good news is that smaller birds such as thornbills, fairywrens, eastern spinebills and scrubwrens have all increased in number since the study started. The study has also showed that larger birds are also increasing. However, there has been a marked decline in mid-sized birds, such as brown treecreepers, babblers, hooded robins and the grey shrike thrush.

It is hard to determine what is driving the decline; certainly the revegetation has favoured some species over others but as this decline is similar in other parts of Australia there would seem to be some common cause, whether it be climate change, extensive use of pesticides, declining water table leading to less surface water, etc. Long term studies such as this provide incredibly valuable information that can be used for many distinct types of research and is essential that it be continued.

Lloyd Hedges

July Guest Speaker

Was There Ever A Mill on Mill Creek?

This was the intriguing title of the talk given by Greg Jackson at our daytime meeting on 9 July 2016.

Menai Wildflower Group has always had an interest in Mill Creek. Long-time member Lloyd Hedges has led many a walk in this region, is very familiar with its natural features and has contributed descriptions of the area for official reports for various bodies. Our publication **Bardens n' Bush**, jointly published with ANSTO in 2003, outlines what was commonly known about early settlement in the region.

According to our speaker, the botanist Robert Brown referred to Mill Creek in 1803. Greg hypothesised that Matthew Flinders may also have been aware of Mill Creek from his early explorations of Botany Bay and nearby streams. Yet Mill Creek, as we know it, is often only a trickle, there is no evidence of the stone mills common elsewhere in those times and the only known mill was that of Mayman Bros that served vegetable gardens and poultry farms many years later.

So this was the dilemma facing Greg as he investigated "the mill on Mill Creek" as part of his recent academic studies. It became necessary to widen the historical search for mills in the region.

Could the Lucas mill, near The Needles causeway on Sir Thomas Mitchell's road to Five Islands, be the one? It had been referred to by Mitchell in his letter to the New South Wales governor in 1845. Nathaniel Lucas, a convict sent to Norfolk Island, had the skills to build a water mill there in 1795. He left Norfolk Island when his son, John Lucas was ten years of age. It was this lad who later settled in our region.

John Lucas was a "currency lad" who had made good in the colony, bankrolled by one Solomon Levey to develop two land grants of 150 acres in each lot. He built a mill on the first lot on Williams Creek in 1822 and another in 1825 on the Woronora River, near The Needles.

This second site is of particular interest to our group. We have explored around that area and have undertaken bush regeneration and clean-up activities there in recent years. No one could ever say that this site was accessible! Yet it seems that the 1828 census reported that several persons lived on the banks of the Woronora River just above the navigable section, with a dam, a brewery, a mill and a bakehouse listed there also.

Apparently drought affected river levels in the early nineteenth century; Lucas's ship Olivia, bringing wheat from Launceston, foundered at Twofold Bay, and Mitchell's road to the south became unpopular because it was so steep. With supplies of wheat for the mill being difficult to transport, even from Liverpool and Bottle Forest, and decreasing water flow in the river, John Lucas' mill was doomed. His flour milling venture had been viable whilst no customs duties were payable on goods unloaded via Botany Bay (as opposed to Sydney Town) but once this advantage was lost, it became a different matter. John Lucas was declared bankrupt in 1828.

Why then, has it been so difficult to establish this early history? Primary sources are few, are scattered and difficult to check, as we found when preparing **Bardens n' Bush**. The convict-made bricks and the timber construction of early colonial structures have not always withstood floods, erosion and bush fires. I also suspect that it has taken this long for someone with the right skills from an earlier career, a keen interest in local history, early retirement and the ability to clamber over rocks with a good camera in hand to pursue an interest in enough depth to develop a thesis that should withstand academic scrutiny!

Greg was able to show photographs of a rock site with the impressions of earlier structures. It is feasible to argue that these were sections of a flour mill which stood, not on Mill Creek, but on the Woronora River, as described by the Surveyor General of the colony.

We were all happy to hear that John Lucas lived to a relatively old age, in reasonable circumstances, as his wife had inherited

considerable land that we now know as Burwood and Concord.

Thanks again to Greg Jackson for his informative and entertaining talk.

Pam Pitkeathly

Whale-watching Walk

It was a cool, dull morning when we set out but, that coupled with the lack of wind, made conditions near perfect for what we were doing.

We left a vehicle at Potters Point and drove up to Cape Solander for a 9:30 start.

The bush provided heaps of interest for Banksia lovers. There were some particularly red specimens of *Banksia ericifolia* that could hold their own with the WA breed.



Stunted specimens of Banksias, Wattles, She-oaks etc testified to the harsh condition these plants had to put up with. They looked healthy nonetheless. There were Flannel flowers with hard woody stems 25mm thick suggesting they had been around for a long time - and a number of small delights in full flower.



Follow-the-leader is all the rage this year!



Don't jump, it's not worth the effort!

The whales were cooperative as well. We did not see much until we stopped for morning tea and the 10:45 pod of whales pulled into view .



Lunch time at 1pm brought a similar result with the whales passing by quite close. They were in a hurry to get to somewhere.

Lloyd Hedges

Nursery Report



Grevillea preissei

The Monday crews Marian W and Ron have been beavering away at the Tip Nursery propagating the plants for National Tree Day. There are several thousand plants ready to go.

The nursery's potting shed got a major upgrade as Suez replaced the dilapidated, termite damaged, wooden structure with a much more suitable metal edifice. They even regravelled the area.

The IRFB nursery has been producing plenty of plants as well. The East Hills group are regular attendees at our propagation days and are building up quite a stock of plants. Expansion of the facilities is needed and will hopefully be undertaken in the near future.



Two of our bee colonies have had their hives fully insulated for the winter.

The Mounds Project

We had a good roll up at our last working bee and the largest mound of woodchip was spread.

Thanks to Sharon, Jason and some of his volunteers – Merv, John, Suzi and Patricia – the rest of the woodchips were spread and further landscaping work commenced. I hope this next working bee will see it substantially completed.





Jason, Merv and John playing Dodgem-barrows



Illawong Rural Fire Station

Group Meetings

Meetings are held at the Illawong Rural Fire Brigade each month except January. Most meetings are held on the second Wednesday at 7:00pm. The three winter meetings: June, July, August are held on the second Saturday of the month at 1pm.

The venue is the Illawong Rural Fire Brigade Headquarters. New members and friends are welcome.

Please address all correspondence to the Secretary,
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Lloyd Hedges