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Village Eco News

A publication of Bangalow Land and Rivercare.

Welcome to Village Eco News. For more information about how you can subscribe or contribute see page 4

Christmas is Coming!

by Liz Gander

While Christmas is about the birth of Jesus for many it has become a time of getting together with family, giving gifts and having a feeding frenzy.

Sadly the practice of exchanging gifts has largely become a junk fest with people feeling pressured by expectation, mostly driven by advertising, to come up with something brightly wrapped to put under the tree. I hate to be bah-humbug but I despair at the amount of landfill created by this event.

When I was a child it was also popular to decorate the house, I'm not sure how many people go to this extreme anymore, but it occurred to me recently that decorations in those days were all made of paper and over time have all been replaced with the shiny plastic.

I'm talking about the honeycomb bells and balls that folded out and the crepe paper we would weave into colourful chains. When I recently went looking for balloon replacements for a birthday party I was happy to find lots more paper decorations are now available.

So this Christmas please think twice before purchasing plastic decorations, and remember tinsel is plastic too. Keep an eye out for paper versions or make your own which are easy and can be a great family activity.

The internet has so many ideas but please avoid the glitter, it's plastic and is terrible for our oceans. Check out these pages.

<https://au.pinterest.com/explore/natural-christmas-decorations/> and
<https://au.pinterest.com/explore/paper-christmas-ornaments/>



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Landcare Working Bee

Our team of friendly volunteers work every Saturday morning, weather permitting from 8.30am to 10.30am rotating through the various sites around Bangalow. All welcome.

How to Naturally get Rid of Ants in Your House

by Liz Gander



Here are some great tips on how to avoid or eradicate the ant invasion without using insecticides:

LEMONS: The acid in the lemon wrecks the ants' sense of tracking. Spray lemon juice around the openings to the house (doors, windowsills and cracks in the walls). This won't work to kill ants already in the kitchen, but will prevent them from getting in.

CHALK: This is another way to stop ants from getting into your house. Draw chalk outlines around the openings to the house, for example, around the windowsill. Ants won't cross a chalk line; they are repelled by the calcium carbonate in the chalk.

CORNMEAL: Cornmeal disrupts the way ants digest, eventually killing them. Sprinkle cornmeal around the perimeters of your home. Also try to locate the ants nest and sprinkle it there as well.

VINEGAR: Try mopping your floors and cleaning your kitchen with a vinegar and water solution. Also try finding the anthills and spray equal parts vinegar and water there or into the cracks around your house. Ants hate the smell of vinegar and will eventually move on to better smelling places.

CINNAMON: Try to figure out where the ants are getting in and pour a line of cinnamon there, or sprinkle it around your garden. You could even try cinnamon essential oils. It will make your house smell nice as well as prevent ants from entering it!

Plant of the Month

Illawarra Flame Tree.

Brachychiton acerifolius

Never has a plant been so aptly named when this beauty turns on it's spectacular show of flowers. Losing it's light green, large variably lobed leaves of 20cm after a dry winter, the tree bursts into flame being covered in countless scarlet bell flowers as seen below.

Native to sub-tropical regions of the east coast it has adapted to temperate climates and is now grown all over the world. Hardy in most soils and aspects if ample water is available. It can attain a height of 35m in the forest but is usually no more the 20m in cultivation.



Photo: Judy Baker



Can you form a “relationship” with a Magpie?

by Dawn Lotty

Many bird species may become tame enough to take food from your hand, but this isn't really a “relationship”. However, there is extensive evidence that, remarkably, free-living magpies can forge lasting relationships and even engaging in day to day activities with people, without depending on us for food or shelter and “yes” this can continue even when the male is guarding their young.

White settlers reported that magpies were a very shy bird preferring the open forest with the occasional tree so that they could survey their territory for predators. With urbanisation we replaced dense bush with the ideal magpie territory of an occasional tree among rows of houses. Now over 80% of all successfully breeding magpies live near human houses.

Magpies are considered one of nature's smartest birds living between 25 and 30 years and are territorial. A key reason why a relationship with your local magpie is possible is that we now know magpies are able to recognize and remember individual human faces for many years allowing a bond to extend to trusting certain people around their offspring.

They can learn which nearby humans do not constitute a risk. They will remember someone who was good to them; equally, they remember negative encounters.

Magpies that actively form relationships with people make an investment (from their point of view) for good reason. Properties suitable for magpies are hard to come by and the competition is fierce. Most magpies will not secure a territory – let alone breed – until they are at least five years old.

In fact, only about 14% of adult magpies ever succeed in breeding even if they breed successfully every single year, they may successfully raise only seven to eleven chicks to adulthood and breeding in a lifetime. There is a lot at stake with every magpie clutch.

When magpies have formed an attachment they will often show their trust, for example, by formally introducing their offspring. They may allow their chicks to play near people, not fly away when a resident human is approaching, and actually approach or roost near a human.



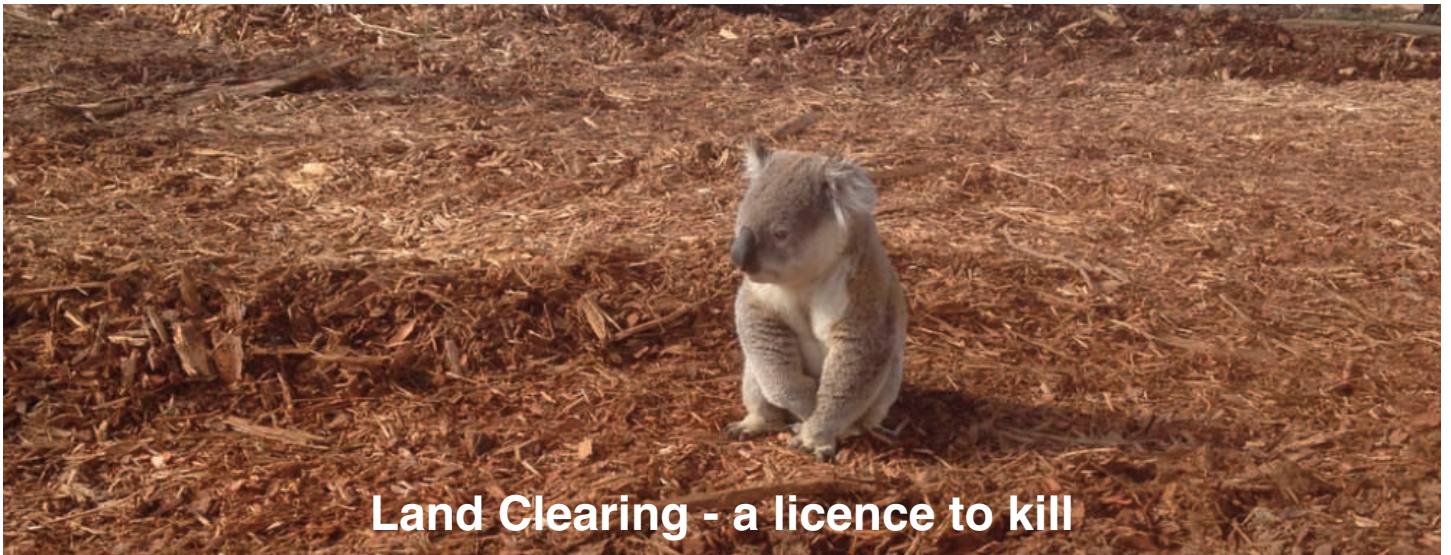
*“Please leave my daddy alone
he’s only protecting me”*

How then can one explain their swooping at people (even if it is only for a few weeks in the year)? It's worth bearing in mind that swooping magpies (invariably males on guard duty) do not act in aggression or anger but as nest defenders. The strategy they choose is based on risk assessment.

A risk is posed by someone who is unknown and was not present at the time of nest building, which unfortunately is often the case in public places and parks. That person is then classified as a territorial intruder and thus a potential risk to its brood. At this point the male guarding the brooding female is obliged to perform a warning swoop, literally asking a person to step away from the nest area.

If warnings are ignored, the adult male may try to conduct a near contact swoop aimed at the head and eyes. It is not an arbitrary attack. Slowly walking over to the other side of the road or taking a wide berth around the magpies nest may eventually convince the nervous magpie that he does not need to deter this individual anymore because she or he poses little or no risk,

A sure way of escalating conflict is to poke at them with a stick or umbrella, or to run away. This human behavior may well confirm for the magpie that the person concerned is dangerous and needs to be fought off with every available strategy.



Land Clearing - a licence to kill

Landcare and wild life organisations have constantly campaigned to prevent the clearing of native vegetation for agricultural, urban and industrial development. Unlike the obvious effects of clearing trees and other plants it is estimated that in 2015 47,000 native animals and birds, including 315 Emus, were killed in NSW alone by this process. This harm is largely invisible but should not be ignored.

Land clearing harms animals, birds and reptiles in two basic ways. They are killed or injured when native vegetation is removed, typically by earth-moving machinery, suffering traumatic injuries or smothered when vegetation is cut or soil and debris are shifted.

Those that survive will be left in an environment that is typically hostile, unfamiliar or unsuitable and are likely to find themselves in landscapes that are devoid of food and shelter but filled with predators, disease, and increased aggression from members of their own species as they struggle to survive.

Land clearing causes animals to die in ways that are physically painful and psychologically distressing. They will suffer injuries and other pathological conditions that may persist for days or months as they try to survive in cleared areas or other environments to which they are displaced.

Many mammals and birds are territorial or have small home ranges, and thus have strong associations with these areas.

Lizards and snakes rely on particular micro-habitat features such as logs, rocks, and leaf litter to provide the combination of temperature and humidity that they need to survive.

Land clearing remains a fundamental pressure on the Australian environment. While there is clear regulatory framework around any land clearing the fines are relatively small and do not act as a deterrent while the pro-land clearing lobbyists often have the ear of the decision makers and believe that 'land ownership' gives them the right to do as they please.

Ongoing vigilance is necessary to ensure that decision makers take these creatures welfare into account when issuing s121 licences for any future land clearing and to prevent the watering down of the current laws and by local residents reporting any irregular land clearing to:

The NSW Office of Environment & Heritage
(p) 131 555 or info@environment.nsw.gov.au

*Sources: The Conversation, SMH, DoE&H
edited by Dawn Lotty*

Village Eco News

Our aim is to inform, interest, amuse and educate our readers on all things environmental. We welcome you to submit your contributions or to subscribe to this free Newsletter send your name and email address to:

bangalowlandcare@gmail.com

Please pass this publication on to your family and friends. Receiving our Newsletter online will help to save the environment we work to preserve.

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